2007-2008 Accountability Report

Transmittal Form

Agency Name: **South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department**

Date of Submission: **September 15, 2008**

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I. Executive Summary

1. Mission, Visions and Values

The mission of the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD) is to enable eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment.

Investing in South Carolinians with disabilities offers a high-yield return. The public vocational rehabilitation program converts people reliant on government assistance into self-sufficient citizens who have jobs, purchase goods and services, save for the future, and pay taxes that quickly reimburse the funds spent on their rehabilitation.

SCVRD continues to implement customer-focused initiatives and accountability measures designed to add value to its services and to allocate its limited resources to achieve maximum impact.

The agency visions:

- All staff will be committed to the agency's mission, values and visions.
- Technology will be used to provide maximum benefits to our staff and clients.
- We will be the leader in innovative, individualized customer service that contributes to successful employment outcomes.
- Our relationships with business, industry and all levels of government will be positive and productive.
- We will provide quality service in an atmosphere of trust, sincerity and commitment.
- We will provide professional development opportunities in order to develop and retain exceptional employees.
- We will demonstrate accountability through the efficient and effective use of the resources entrusted to us.
- We will provide our customers with the tools, services and products that will prepare them to compete successfully in the modern workplace.

The agency values:

- Persons with disabilities who strive to achieve and maintain competitive employment.
- Highly qualified staff members who are technically competent, personally accountable, communicate effectively and work together in a professional manner.
- Partnerships with business and industry that provide employment and contract service opportunities for our clients.
- Relationships with other human service agencies that provide increased service opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- Accountability to taxpayers through efficient and effective use of the resources entrusted to us.

2. Major achievements from the past year:

- The department rehabilitated 8,520 people with disabilities into employment in FY2008 and served a total of 46,795 people (including all applicants, and many clients who receive services over successive years). It is estimated that these rehabilitated clients will pay back

$3.20 for every vocational rehabilitation dollar spent on them by becoming taxpayers instead of tax consumers. It will take only 5.6 years for those clients to repay the cost of their rehabilitation and over the course of the clients' work lives, taxpayers will realize a net profit of $18,143 per rehabilitation. The 17.8% annual rate of return for successfully employed clients marks a fourth consecutive year of increase. Those figures do not include any additional cost savings from reduction in government benefits received by those clients.

- The department now has 803 active cooperative agreements, continuing its steady growth in this area over the past five years. This has resulted from an increased emphasis on strengthening ties with non-profit agencies and with other state agencies to provide their clients with employment services, particularly the One-Stop centers; Department of Mental Health; Department of Disabilities and Special Needs; Department of Education; Department of Corrections; Department of Juvenile Justice; Probation, Parole and Pardon Services; Department of Social Services; and Workers Compensation.

- The department gained $1,002,252 in reimbursements from the Social Security Administration, a significant increase from the previous year. This reimbursement is a direct reflection of savings realized by Social Security because the department's clients became competitively employed and no longer rely on SSI/SSDI benefits.

- There were major steps forward in the department's initiatives to address the critical needs of high school age students with disabilities in transition to the workforce:

    - A new transition unit was created to provide guidance, direction and technical assistance to field staff. Under this new unit's guidance, the department served more than 9,500 young people with disabilities (ages 16-21), an increase of more than 800 from the previous year.

    - The High School/High Tech program was expanded to include a site in Berkeley County, bringing the statewide site total to 11. More than 550 students participated in high-interest, high-energy activities including internships, job shadowing, and tours of colleges and businesses.

    - SCVRD received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to establish the Youth Employment Services (YES) program, a special demonstration program to improve post-secondary and employment outcomes of youths with disabilities. The program has been established in two sites (Edgefield and Lancaster counties) where staff has been hired and trained and student recruitment begun.

    - The department expanded its Transition Employability Specialist program by signing memoranda of agreement with Georgetown, Darlington and Orangeburg school districts for co-funded positions to serve students with disabilities on campus.

- SCVRD's WorkKeys® Career Readiness Program reached new levels. In collaboration with the Department of Education's Office of Adult Education and the Department of Commerce, clients at local VR sites utilize a job skills assessment system that identifies skills gaps, improves job fitness, enables efficient teaching/training and matches suitable job candidates with positions that have been profiled. They receive a certificate recognized

by many employers as an advantage in the hiring process. In FY2008 1,553 WorkKeys certificates were earned by VR clients (193 gold, 773 silver, 587 bronze).

- The department partnered with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) on the Co-Occurring State Incentive Grant (COSIG). The grant's objectives are to train and cross-train agency staff in both mental health and substance abuse disciplines, to formalize collaboration among mental health, substance abuse and VR agencies to ensure appropriate treatment for co-occurring disorders, to develop management and information systems to track outcomes, and to exchange administrative and clinical information.

- SCVRD's Skilled Workforce Apprentice Training (SWAT) program, launched in 2007, continued to grow, offering training and employment opportunities in careers with good wages and benefits, such as industrial electricians, lube technicians and pharmacy technicians. SWAT began in the Midlands and in its next phase is expanding into the Greenville, Rock Hill and Marlboro areas.

- A new telework initiative was launched to provide career opportunities to people with physical disabilities who are unable to work in a traditional employment setting. Using its existing barrier-free model home, the department created a realistic home office environment to train clients in specific skills identified by businesses for telework opportunities. The first business to participate was Time Warner Cable, which identified a need for a customer verification representative. A candidate was approved by Time Warner, was trained by SCVRD staff, and now works successfully from her home as a Time Warner employee. Additional trainees are scheduled in this program for FY2009.

- A significant technological undertaking, the department's electronic case management system continued to be developed in FY2008. It is being rolled out in phases, with complete implementation targeted for December 2009. In the fall of 2008 a major step tied to the CMS will be activated—centralized compliance. This initiative will enhance quality control by enabling real-time monitoring of compliance with case service policies and regulations, which will lead to better employment outcomes for clients and increased efficiencies in operations.

- The department was able to strengthen area operations by installing area supervisors in three offices that had previously been part of other area offices. The Camden, Greenwood and Walterboro satellite locations became area offices.

- To enhance the department's environmental efforts a project was begun in Greenville to investigate opportunities for VR facilities to be more "green." A work group was established to provide cost analyses and recommendations. This project arose from the agency's Professional Development and Leadership Program.

- The Social Security Disability Determination Services program continued to strengthen the department's range of services by providing effective and efficient evaluation of claims for disability benefits. During 2007-2008, the division's documentation net accuracy levels exceeded the regional and national averages. The program was able to increase the overall initial allowance rate, which will result in fewer cases for appeal and greatly assist the Office of Adjudication and Review in reducing backlogs.

3. Key strategic goals:

- **Nine Standards of Excellence**, a measurable set of standards used by SCVRD to maintain an organizational focus on performance and to guide systematic evaluation and improvement of key processes. The nine standards are measurable at the local and statewide levels and encompass all key facets of the agency's operations, including client service delivery, Program Integrity, balance in the training centers, maintenance of facilities, relationships with partners, and the predominant goal of placement of clients into competitive employment.

- **Partnerships** to enhance agency outreach and service provision, including partnerships with other agencies to coordinate services, increase successful closures, and enhance job training opportunities for clients.

- **Centralization** of targeted roles and **redirection of personnel** from those roles into positions that promote a higher level of direct client service at the local level, especially for individuals with brain injury, spinal cord injury, severe and persistent mental illness, those who are deaf and hard of hearing, and students transitioning from school to work—the most significant disabilities or underserved disability populations.

- **Professional Development and Leadership Program (PDLP)** to transfer organizational knowledge and develop future leaders in light of significant retirements. The PDLP creates an environment that fosters excellence by aligning agency needs with individual career goals.

- **Development and implementation of an enhanced case management system (CMS)** to follow the natural progression of the rehabilitation process and support integrated service system in an intuitive and user-friendly format.

- **Return on investment,** based on a set of measures that reflect the economic impact of competitive employment on clients through their own gain in financial achievement and through the return on the taxpayer investment.

4. Key strategic challenges

- **Maximizing financial and human resources to achieve Nine Standards goals, including Program Integrity**, a balance among compliance assurance, productivity and customer service, by using limited financial resources in the most efficient and effective manner. This year the agency's recurring state funding has dropped by more than $700,000 from a year ago and state funding remains below 2001 levels. To address funding limitations, the agency continues to examine its staffing patterns and roles. Some administrative roles are being centralized to effect cost savings and make the best use of local staff in service delivery areas.

  The public vocational rehabilitation program's federal funding has received only the mandated Consumer Price Index increase of between two and three percent for the past several years with no additional funding dedicated to serve nationally recognized critical needs areas such as school-to-work transition and disabilities incurred by military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

- **Maintenance of facilities and equipment**. Many of the agency's owned and operated facilities are more than 20 years old and in need of repairs to continue to serve agency clients and business partners. There are also long-term needs to construct new facilities where disability populations are unserved or underserved.

- **Enhance stability in the management and daily operations of VR service delivery.** Due to the high number of retirements among agency supervisors and other staff, it has been necessary to make widespread changes in a short period of time. The department must utilize its Professional Development and Leadership Program and other initiatives to meet agency needs and foster an environment of opportunity for staff, including innovative and technologically advanced approaches to training (learning management system, competency-based online modules).

- **Serving individuals with significant disabilities.** Positions saved through centralization are being redirected into direct client service delivery roles focused on identifying and meeting the employment needs of individuals with brain injury, spinal cord injury, severe and persistent mental illness, clients who are deaf and hard of hearing, and students transitioning from school to work.

- **Maximizing partnerships.** The agency places great emphasis on partnerships with other agencies to coordinate services, partnerships with business and industry, and partnerships with past clients to enhance services and promote the agency's accomplishments. The number of interagency partnerships continues to grow, as does the agency's Business Partnership Network.

- **Training Center balance.** The agency's 24 work training centers provide a valuable source of revenue to support the provision of client training leading to employment. In step with the Program Integrity model, the centers seek to balance their financial impact with the need to provide the variety of rehabilitation services that would be of the most benefit to clients, including service delivery to clients with the most significant disabilities.

- **Social Security disability challenges.** The application filing rate for initial disability benefits has increased by 5.5%. Meanwhile, the Social Security Disability Determination Services program has been asked to assist the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) to reduce its backlogs in handling cases appealed to administrative law judges, which leads to deployment of staff away from initial, reconsideration and continuing disability workloads. Also, 40 percent of the program's adjudicators have less than three years experience.

5. Use of accountability report

The department uses the annual accountability report as documentation of its continuous improvement efforts and performance measures. The department's Key Result Areas (KRAs) are structured according to Baldrige criteria categories. Strategic plans are developed and deployed with measurable results designed to accomplish the agency mission. The accountability report is a valuable tool in monitoring progress and identifying gaps in performance. An extension of the use of the accountability report is the agency's application for the Governor's Quality Award, the state-level Baldrige award administered by the South Carolina Quality Forum and state chamber of commerce. FY 2008 marked the third time this decade the agency has applied for the award, and the agency director and Committee on Rehabilitation Excellence (CORE) use the resulting

extensive feedback reports to drive continuous improvement efforts, such as the development of the Nine Standards of Excellence.

II. Organizational Profile

The public vocational rehabilitation program is the oldest and most successful federal/state human service program in the nation. South Carolina's vocational rehabilitation program began in 1927 and for a considerable number of years has enjoyed top performance rankings nationally for providing effective service to clients. The department enables eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment, converting dependent tax consumers with disabilities into independent, working taxpayers.

1. Main products, services and delivery methods

- Eligible applicants with disabilities have a program of services coordinated by their counselors at one of 19 area offices and 24 work training centers throughout the state. Together the client and VR staff develop an individualized plan for employment. Career options are explored and the client receives extensive counseling and guidance, and may receive restoration services, take classes to enhance employability, receive job readiness training at the department's work training center, or other services leading to job placement. Employment is the outcome measure.

- Many clients with significant physical disabilities benefit from the department's Center for Comprehensive Programs in West Columbia, which includes an evaluation center to determine vocational potential; pain management program; muscular development program; rehabilitation technology program which uses an engineering approach to overcome employment barriers; and information technology training program which provides clients with top-level training for technology jobs.

- The department has specialized services such as cardiac rehabilitation; deaf and hard of hearing services; job retention services for employees of businesses throughout the state whose jobs are jeopardized by disabling conditions; supported employment (worksite job coaching); and substance abuse treatment at two SCVRD treatment centers.

- The department's 24 work training centers provide vital job training for clients and a cost-effective outsource option for more than 450 business and industry partners.

- The Social Security Disability Determination Services program processes Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance claims for the Social Security Administration.

- The department also operates Pathways Toward Employment, helping disability benefits recipients who want to work but are concerned about losing benefits and health care coverage; and the Ticket to Work program, in which Social Security disability beneficiaries use a "ticket" to access employment services from the department.

2. Key customer segments and their requirements/expectations

- *Primary customers (clients):* The department is essentially an employment agency for people with disabilities. It provides individualized services that are devoted to the employment of South Carolinians with disabilities. It does not provide lifelong or disability-specific services.

To be eligible, an applicant must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially interferes with his or her ability to work. The person must also require and be able to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services that would lead to permanent, competitive employment. The department is unique in that its primary customers are people with more than 135 different physically and mentally disabling conditions. The client's expectation is to receive appropriate services that will result in competitive employment. In 2007-2008, SCVRD placed 8,520 people with disabilities into employment. Twenty-eight percent of these successfully rehabilitated clients work in service positions, about 17 percent work in clerical/sales, 14 percent in professional/managerial/technical jobs, 13 percent in manufacturing, 11 percent in construction, 3 percent in agriculture and the remaining 14 percent in fields classified as "miscellaneous."

- *Business and industry partners*: This includes employers who expect the agency to provide well-qualified, reliable employees; companies that provide outsource work for clients in job readiness training and require high quality, timely, and cost-effective production; companies that utilize job retention services, which help people whose jobs are jeopardized by disabling conditions; and businesses taking part in SCVRD work assessment, training, mentoring and job shadowing services.

3. Other key stakeholders

- *State and local agencies and private, non-profit organizations:* SCVRD has 803 cooperative agreements with organizations throughout the state. These agency partners expect SCVRD to provide the employment outcome component that their clients 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.

4. Key suppliers and partners

- *Referral sources:* SCVRD needs strong ties with referral sources to generate client applications for services. These sources include other state, federal and local agencies, non-profit organizations, the medical community, school systems, colleges and universities, alcohol and drug programs, correctional facilities, the military, and employers.

- *VR Partners:* This group of successfully rehabilitated "alumni" clients provides support, including advocacy for the program, advice and mentoring.

- *Vendors:* This includes training institutions, physicians, hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, orthotic/prosthetic and hearing aid dealers, and miscellaneous retailers. These customers help the department provide appropriate services to its clients and in return they expect the department to carry out efficient and timely transactions.

- *Social Security Administration:* SCVRD's Social Security Disability Determination Services program adjudicates SSI and SSDI claims for the Social Security Administration.

5. Operation locations

- The department's administrative headquarters and Center for Comprehensive Programs are located in West Columbia. The department has alcohol and drug abuse treatment facilities in Florence and Greenville.

- Area Office/Work Training Center combinations (primary entry points) are located in:

Aiken	Conway	Rock Hill/Lancaster*
Anderson/Seneca*	Florence/Kingstree*	Spartanburg/Gaffney*
Bennettsville/Hartsville*	Greenville	Sumter
Beaufort	Greenwood	Walterboro
Camden	Laurens	West Columbia
Charleston	Moncks Corner	
Columbia	Orangeburg	

area offices with two work training centers

Satellite offices operated by the area offices listed above are in: Dillon, Georgetown, Greer, and Newberry.

The department also fully participates in 18 comprehensive One-Stop centers operated by Workforce Investment boards, and has a presence in 36 satellite One-Stop centers.

The Social Security Disability Determination Services program has a central office in West Columbia, regional offices in Charleston, Greenville and West Columbia, and a specialized unit for Medicaid claims in Lexington.

6. Staff size

- At the end of FY2008, the department had 1,060 employees in full-time equivalent positions and 341 employees in temporary positions. Two of the full-time positions are unclassified (commissioner and assistant commissioner for administrative services).
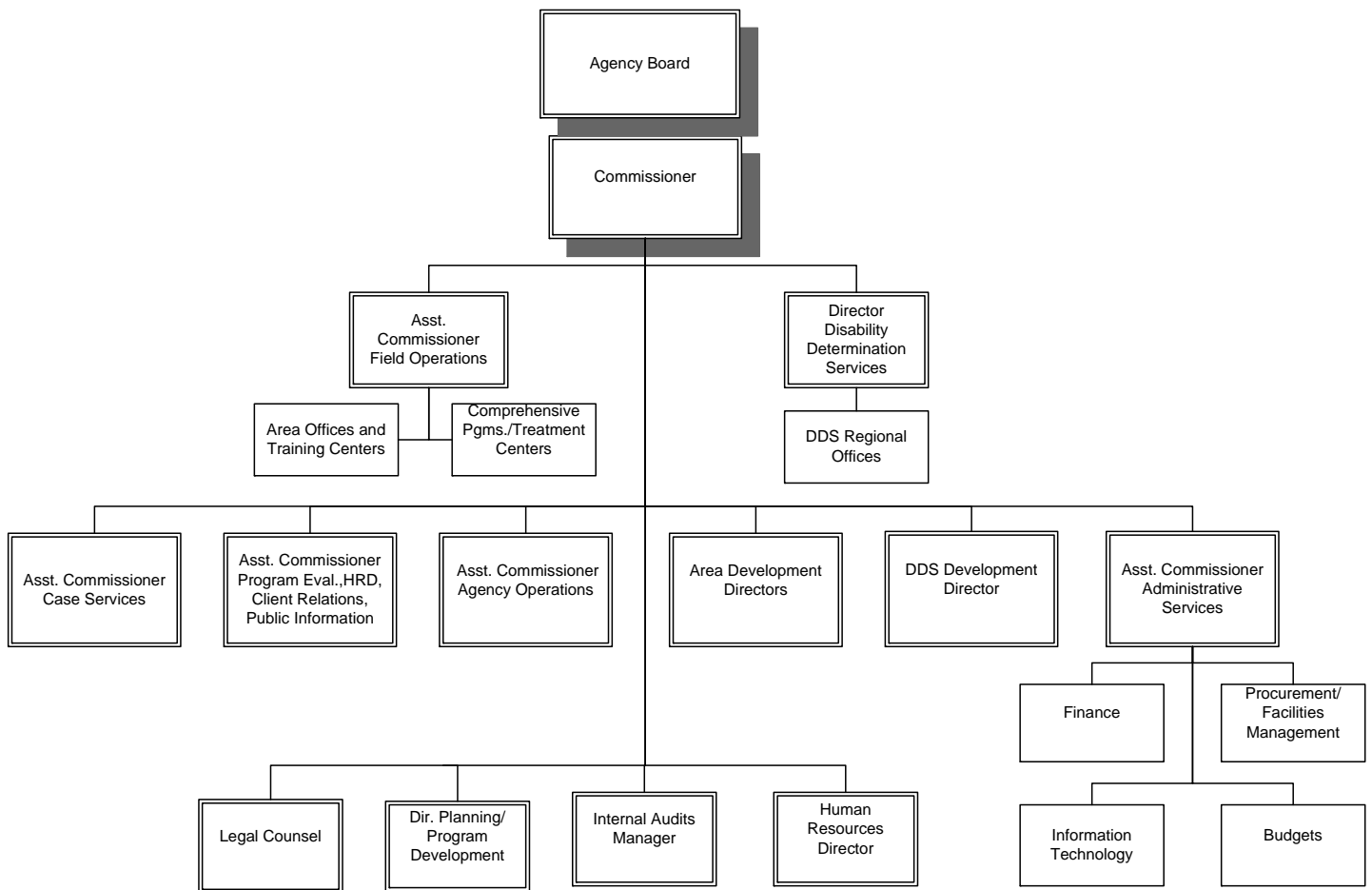
7. Regulatory environment

- The department operates under the regulations of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. This is part of the Workforce Investment Act, which has additional regulations on the department's participation in One-Stop employment centers throughout the state. The vocational rehabilitation program is administered nationally by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), in Washington, D.C.

- While RSA provides regulatory oversight, the department is a state agency, designated by the state as the vocational rehabilitation agency for citizens with disabilities, with the exception of people who are blind (served by the S.C. Commission for the Blind). The department is therefore governed by the state's executive and legislative branches and the South Carolina Code of Laws.

- In addition to RSA and state government regulations, the department adheres to OSHA safety standards and Department of Labor standards in all facilities, and DHEC and National Institute for the Severely Handicapped (NISH) regulations in some facilities.

8. Performance improvement system(s)

- The department uses its Nine Standards of Excellence, including the Program Integrity model, to maintain an organizational focus on performance improvement and to guide a systematic evaluation and improvement of key processes. The Program Integrity model features a defined set of balanced standards to be achieved in the pursuit and attainment of the department's mission. Its components are compliance assurance, quality customer service, and productivity. Each of those components has measurable results and can be used to

evaluate the agency at levels ranging from specific caseload or work unit up to an agencywide level. The Program Integrity results drive continuous improvement efforts and strategic planning. Customer feedback is an inherent part of this process. The department also uses state and federally mandated processes to examine and report on its success. The Committee on Rehabilitation Excellence (CORE) is a group of senior leaders charged with analyzing, formulating and assessing action plans and evaluating the agency's key performance measures. CORE communicates at regular intervals with field supervisors through individualized interviews, videoconferences and site visits to foster two-way communication.

9. Organizational structure

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                          │  Agency Board   │
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                          ┌─────────────────┐
                          │  Commissioner   │
                          └─────────────────┘
              ┌──────────────────────┴──────────────────────┐
     ┌─────────────────┐                          ┌─────────────────┐
     │ Asst.           │                          │ Director        │
     │ Commissioner    │                          │ Disability      │
     │ Field Operations│                          │ Determination   │
     └─────────────────┘                          │ Services        │
                                                  └─────────────────┘
   ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐               ┌─────────────┐
   │ Area Offices │  │ Comprehensive│               │ DDS Regional│
   │ and Training │  │ Pgms./       │               │ Offices     │
   │ Centers      │  │ Treatment    │               └─────────────┘
   └──────────────┘  │ Centers      │
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Asst. Commissioner Case Services | Asst. Commissioner Program Eval.,HRD, Client Relations, Public Information | Asst. Commissioner Agency Operations | Area Development Directors | DDS Development Director | Asst. Commissioner Administrative Services

Legal Counsel | Dir. Planning/ Program Development | Internal Audits Manager | Human Resources Director

Finance | Procurement/ Facilities Management

Information Technology | Budgets

10. Base Budget Expenditures and Appropriations

Accountability Report Appropriations/Expenditures Chart

Base Budget Expenditures and Appropriations

Major Budget Categories	FY 06-07 Actual Expenditures		FY 07-08 Actual Expenditures		FY 08-09 Appropriations Act	
	Total Funds	General Funds	Total Funds	General Funds	Total Funds	General Funds
Personal Service	$ 46,560,670	$ 7,794,505	$ 50,088,937	$ 8,565,067	$ 54,033,913	$ 8,837,727
Other Operating	$ 28,403,128	$ 1,526,299	$ 32,113,630	$ 2,131,688	$ 33,603,982	$ 1,658,821
Special Items			$ 758,100	$ 758,100		
Permanent Improvements	$ 1,892,552		$ 2,128,566			
Case Services	$ 14,879,216	$ 1,459,395	$ 16,958,969	$ 1,175,146	$ 21,988,973	$ 1,088,973
Distributions to Subdivisions						
Fringe Benefits	$ 12,867,332	$ 2,350,150	$ 14,365,548	$ 2,655,188	$ 15,644,655	$ 2,718,383
Non-recurring						
Total	$ 104,602,898	$ 13,130,349	$ 116,413,750	$ 15,285,189	$ 125,271,523	$ 14,303,904

Other Expenditures

Sources of Funds	FY 06-07 Actual Expenditures	FY 07-08 Actual Expenditures
Supplemental Bills		
Capital Reserve Funds	$ 2,693	$ 123,397
Bonds		

11. Major Program Areas

Major Program Areas

Program Number and Title	Major Program Area Purpose (Brief)	FY 06-07 Budget Expenditures		FY 07-08 Budget Expenditures		Key Cross References for Financial Results*
01000000 Administration	General operation and support of all agency programs.	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	1,198,800.00 3,580,903.00 95,603.00 4,875,306.00 4.66%	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	1,300,580.00 3,713,978.00 105,757.00 5,120,315.00 4.40%	7.3-1 thru 7.3-8
05100000 Basic Services	Delivery of services to people with disabilities enabling them to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment.	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	9,516,941.00 29,482,992.00 357,687.00 39,357,620.00 37.63%	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	10,504,534.00 36,573,113.00 190,213.00 47,267,860.00 40.60%	7.1-1 thru 7.1-13
05250000 Special Projects	Grant programs, extended rehabilitation services, in-service training, Independent Living.	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	64,458.00 3,272,587.00 753,179.00 4,090,224.00 3.91%	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	66,786.00 2,979,081.00 496,169.00 3,542,036.00 3.04%	7.3-10 7.4-3 7.2-3
05300000 Workshop Production	Program income from work training centers.	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	14,315,769.00 14,315,769.00 13.69%	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	15,411,020.00 15,411,020.00 13.24%	7.3-8 7.5-2
25000000 Disability Determination Services	Adjudicate SSI/SSDI claims for the Social Security Administration.	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	25,599,003.00 1,605,092.00 27,204,095.00 26.00%	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	25,476,172.00 2,344,133.00 27,820,305.00 23.90%	7.1-14

Below: List any programs not included above and show the remainder of expenditures by source of funds.
95000000 Employer Contributions and 99000000 Capital Projects

Remainder of Expenditures:	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	2,350,150.00 10,838,614.00 1,571,120.00 14,759,884.00 14.11%	State: Federal: Other: Total: % of Total Budget:	3,413,288.00 12,776,471.00 1,062,455.00 17,252,214.00 14.82%

* Key Cross-References are a link to the Category 7 - Business Results. These References provide a Chart number that is included in the 7th section of this document.

III. Elements of Malcolm Baldrige Award Criteria

1. Leadership

The department's continuous improvement efforts require extremely strong leadership. Senior leaders continue to examine and evaluate all practices and procedures throughout the VR program to address the impact of internal and external factors. This is accomplished through constant attention to formal and informal feedback and to the most obvious indicator—successful employment outcomes for our state's citizens with disabilities.

1.1 Senior leadership direction and communication

Under the direct leadership of the commissioner, senior leaders set, deploy and communicate short and long-term direction through a variety of mechanisms. The visions and values of the agency are put into "real world" terms through the implementation of the Nine Standards of

Excellence, which permeate day-to-day operations and are communicated to all staff through specific measures. The standards are tied to executive staff employee performance measurement system (EPMS) documents and in turn are tied to area supervisor EPMS documents.

An executive committee, under the commissioner's direction, reviews policy and other major department functions regularly. At senior manager meetings, held at least monthly by the commissioner, a larger group of department leaders shares information on agency initiatives, progress, and causes for concern. These meetings allow for leaders with varying responsibilities to work together to achieve goals and promote interdepartmental cooperation. Senior managers also coordinate quarterly meetings of supervisors from throughout the state. The Committee on Rehabilitation Excellence (CORE) is a group of senior leaders charged with analyzing, formulating and assessing action plans and evaluating the agency's key performance measures. CORE communicates at regular intervals with field supervisors through individualized interviews, conference calls, monthly videoconference meetings, and site visits to foster two-way communication.

Nine Standards of Excellence

1. **Program Integrity**—a balance among quality customer service, productivity, and compliance assurance
2. **Integrated Service Delivery**—teamwork and adherence to core duties
3. **Balance in work training centers**—lots of clients, lots of work, and clients leave for jobs.
4. **Professional appearance of staff, buildings and grounds**
5. **Ongoing, positive relationships with local agency/entity directors**
6. **Ongoing, positive relationships and education of local legislators on VR programs and benefits**
7. **20 percent of closures will be direct placements**
8. **Annual "26" closure goals will be achieved**
9. **Staff members understand and embrace the standards and are held accountable**

There is a four-part process in CORE's assessment of area operations:

- Area development directors (ADDs) meet with all area supervisors individually at the beginning of the year. Discussions involve strengths and needs. The commissioner has established a series of nine Standards of Excellence for area performance, and each supervisor has a "scorecard" of their degree of success in meeting these standards. At these preliminary meetings the status of progress toward these standards is reviewed. Each supervisor then submits to CORE an action plan (Steps for Excellence) for addressing their area needs; this plan is reviewed and updated quarterly.

- Area supervisors, in conjunction with ADDs, update the Steps for Excellence form on a quarterly basis, noting progress to date and additional needs and plans. They also receive a scorecard from the director of area operations summarizing their achievement relating to the Nine Standards of Excellence.

- ADDs visit offices on a regular basis to coach and mentor the supervisors on techniques to improve office performance.

- CORE conducts a formal evaluation of area scorecards and composite scores at the end of the year and reviews the successes and opportunities for improvement.

Throughout the process, one of the department's three ADDs works with each office to provide a liaison to the State Office and provides guidance in day-to-day operations. Area supervisors communicate the Nine Standards to the staff through specific measures, goals and initiatives. All staff receive training in the standards as well as a printed guide to the standards. The standards comprise the desktop background on all agency computers.

Senior leaders are committed to a code of ethics drawn up and adopted by SCVRD staff members. All employees are provided this code and asked to commit themselves to upholding its tenets.

Ethical standards are established both internally and externally. Senior leaders have developed very specific policies on appropriate behavior and activities. All policies are now available on the agency's computer network and are also covered in training sessions. Federal vocational rehabilitation regulations mandate compliance with ethical standards in the program's operation. The internal client relations specialist's office and the Client Assistance Program (CAP) in the Office of the Governor act on behalf of any clients who contend that unethical practices occur.

The agency's legal counsel and senior staff are directly involved in responding to any allegations of legal or ethical wrongdoing made by clients or other entities.

1.2 Focus on customers

Senior leaders establish and promote a focus on customers through emphasis on a central and common theme—the core mission of enabling eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment, and the accomplishment of that mission while maintaining a balanced scorecard of measurable compliance assurance, quality customer service and productivity measures. Senior managers examine customer survey and focus group results as a regular component of the management process *(see Sec. 1.1).* All staff are trained in customer service.

The mission statement is displayed in all offices, on business cards and stationery, and in training environments. The "core duties" of every staff member relate to the agency mission. The Nine Standards of Excellence appear on all networked computer screens. All training information is geared toward helping staff better understand the mission and strategies to achieve it. The agency's Integrated Service Delivery System is client-centered, with client involvement at all stages. Senior managers seek ways to empower staff to provide more timely service delivery for customers through a team approach to service delivery.

The Nine Standards of Excellence emphasize a focus on all key customer groups.

1.3 Impact on public

In the agency's area offices the local leadership stays in close contact with clients, business and industry partners, employers and referral sources to ensure program effectiveness. Formal surveys were developed for each of those groups as part of the Program Integrity measurement system to pinpoint areas of concern.

The department has numerous built-in mechanisms for ensuring ethical business practices. Vocational rehabilitation law contains very strict compliance measures that are monitored closely at different levels within the organization and through outside audits. The department's administrative and case service policies outline agency standards for conduct and adherence to

the law. SCVRD also employs a full-time staff attorney for guidance in compliance issues and legal interpretations.

The agency's risk management department promotes safety awareness to reduce workplace injuries and illnesses, provide a hazard-free work environment and lower Workers' Compensation premiums. The agency's 24 work training facilities include industrial-type settings for both staff and clients, so high standards for safety are imperative. The risk management department processes all Workers' Compensation cases for staff and clients. The department's goal is to show a decrease in the number of Workers' Compensation claims and therefore reduce the annual premiums. *(see 7.4-5)*

1.4 Maintaining fiscal, legal and regulatory accountability

Management accountability is accomplished through the commissioner's communication with the agency board regarding any significant initiative or change to solicit the board's support, guidance and approval. Policies, procedures, and state and federal regulations also guide the direction of the department. CORE assumes the role of ensuring that field operations are held accountable for carrying out policies and procedures consistently statewide. Compliance with case service policy is measured through the program evaluation unit, which is objective and consistent with all caseloads.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (SCVRD's federal regulatory agency) conducts an annual review to assess compliance with federal regulations.

Fiscal accountability is accomplished by adherence to state and federal laws and measured through annual state and federal audits. Federal audits break down expenditures into significant categories of service provision and administration. The state budget office, state legislature and governor's office also provide oversight as the agency budget is developed for each year.

Federal and state auditors conduct annual financial, procurement and client services audits. They are by nature independent, reporting to external regulatory groups. The department seeks independence of its internal audit unit by having that unit report directly to the highest level in the organization—the commissioner.

Protection of clients' interests is accomplished through the Client Assistance Program as well as the internal client relations office. Procedures are in place for any issues or grievances that clients may have with services or the staff providing services. There are also state and federal confidentiality laws outlined in agency policy and monitored by supervisors and the internal legal counsel.

1.5 Key performance measures

Senior leaders create a focus on the organization's objectives through the Steps for Excellence, a tool utilized quarterly through area development directors to ensure that the Nine Standards are being addressed consistently statewide. Area scorecards and composite scores reflect performance of the standards, which encompass Program Integrity and other measures tied into the agency mission, vision and values, RSA State Plan and Strategic Plan. Program Integrity is by definition an emphasis on balance for all stakeholders in the areas of quality customer service, compliance assurance and productivity. The work training centers must also maintain an appropriate balance, as measured through productivity rates that keep a focus on effective client service in addition to the quality and financial demands of business partnerships. A key factor in Program Integrity is a set of national standards and indicators, required by the department's

Program Integrity

A balance among…

Train, Trust, Verify

enabling federal law, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The seven standards and indicators provide program effectiveness comparisons with VR agencies from all other states as well as regional comparisons.

Senior managers regularly review local and state goals and performance for the number of customers served, number of rehabilitations, number of individualized plans for employment written, customer satisfaction data, income reports from the department's work training centers, costs of services, and other measures.

1.6 Performance review/feedback

Organizational performance and capabilities are reviewed through the Nine Standards of Excellence measures mentioned above. Results of measures are used to establish short-term and long-term goals to improve performance. Senior leaders serve as team leaders for key result area (KRA) committees, which assess agency effectiveness and identify strategic planning initiatives. KRA subcommittees/work groups are developed to address needs as identified.

Individual and team performance is directly tied to annual performance appraisals which include areas that need improvement and specific steps for improvement.

Surveys and reviews drive initiatives to meet changing organizational needs. By listening and reviewing feedback from staff and customers, senior leaders make adjustments in training and develop agendas based on needs expressed by staff. Leadership directs its attention to areas of need identified by performance in local office and statewide efficiency and effectiveness measures. The team concept that the department has emphasized for several years has built-in mechanisms for effectively responding to concerns generated by team discussions. The team concept applies to the State Office as well as to local area offices.

The commissioner conducts focus groups, both internal and external, for feedback to be used in continuous improvement efforts. Action plans were put into place to address issues brought forth in these focus groups. State and federal audits also reflect SCVRD performance and provide a basis for establishing goals.

1.7 Succession planning and leadership development

Senior managers promote and personally participate in succession planning and the development of future organizational leaders through a formal Professional Development and Leadership Program (PDLP) and through identification of potential leaders and managers through individual performance measures, team performance measures and leadership opportunities made available by staff participation in senior manager-led special projects, initiatives, and best practice sharing. Senior managers also provide mentoring opportunities.

1.8 Creating environment of performance improvement

Organizational review findings are translated into priorities for continuous improvement and opportunities for innovation through several means. The Committee on Rehabilitation Excellence (CORE) ensures progress toward the standards for compliance assurance, productivity and quality customer service. CORE collects and analyzes data, formulates, receives and assesses plans for corrective action and follows up to ensure implementation. The priorities for improvement arise from the Nine Standards, including Program Integrity index measures. These priorities are communicated through face-to-face discussions with managers and other staff, through written guidelines and policies, EPMS goals, and development of effective training modules.

1.9 Creating an environment for learning

Senior leaders create an environment for organizational and workforce learning through extended learning needs assessments that include getting feedback from employees themselves. Resulting action plans include but are not limited to: face to face learning opportunities, videoconferencing, offsite training, electronic training modules, the Professional Development and Leadership Program, specialized "rehabilitation institutes" tied to skills related to the Nine Standards of Excellence, orientation, coaching and mentoring programs.

1.10 Engagement, motivation and reward/recognition of workforce

Senior leaders engage the workforce through a systematic communications approach. Senior managers stay abreast of ongoing actions through monthly meetings that enable them to interact with each other and to present a consistent message to others inside and outside the organization. Area development directors hold monthly videoconferences with area office supervisors, which allow for frank discussions of issues. In turn, area supervisors meet with their local area councils for two-way communication. Each quarter area supervisors are brought together for a one- or two-day meeting with senior managers, much of which is devoted to a review of Nine Standards issues. Local area feedback and best practices are shared. The communication cycle is further enhanced by ADD visits to field offices, where feedback is gathered and shared with CORE.

Two way communication is also achieved through internal customer service surveys. Senior managers and other State Office personnel are rated for their internal customer service with survey results that include open-ended comments about management communication.

The commissioner is also directly involved in workforce feedback through focus groups that he personally conducts with cross sections of staff. These sessions always have follow-up actions, which are communicated in writing and through quarterly supervisor meetings.

Senior leaders motivate and provide reward and recognition opportunities through a bonus program tied into Nine Standards and Program Integrity results and pay increases for promotions, reclassifications, good performance and additional knowledge and duties. The Celebration of Success program includes individual recognition for outstanding customer service, productivity and program excellence and includes awarding of prizes from an agency catalog. The commissioner honors high-achieving staff publicly at the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Association conference each year, and that association's subdivisions also present awards for performance excellence.

1.11 Strengthening the community

One of the Nine Standards requires strong relationships with partners from other agencies and organizations. The Commissioner and senior managers meet with other state agency directors and managers to strengthen these interdepartmental relationships, as do area supervisors and other staff at the local level.

Key communities for SCVRD are disability organizations, such as the Spinal Cord Injury Association, Brain Injury Alliance, Epilepsy Foundation, and National Alliance on Mental Illness, among others. Staff are assigned to maintain relationships with these organizations, to attend their meetings, offer support and to be involved with their initiatives. In turn, SCVRD invites members of these organizations to provide training on disability-specific topics, helping VR staff work more effectively with those populations. The department also offers monetary mini-grants and in-kind donations to these associations for conferences and other initiatives they may conduct when employment is a topic.

The agency coordinates community-based activities for Disability Mentoring Day, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and the Youth Leadership Forum for youths with disabilities.

SCVRD also obtained a grant to provide low interest loans for qualified people with disabilities needing assistive technology assistance or help setting up telework operations, regardless of whether they are agency clients. Another grant enables the department to employ benefits specialists to provide guidance to people with disabilities who are uncertain how employment will impact their Social Security or other disability benefits.

Other key communities are business partners, employers who hire SCVRD clients and/or provide contract work for training centers. SCVRD maintains a growing, statewide Business Partnership Network to educate employers on disability issues and to promote the hiring of clients.

The agency's leadership firmly supports citizenship activities nationally, statewide and locally. Members of the senior leadership team are involved in civic organizations, disability advocacy organizations, task forces on disability and other community groups that can benefit from their expertise.

SCVRD participates in the state's emergency preparedness plan by providing personnel and equipment in the event of a major emergency. Crisis counseling and accessible transportation for people with disabilities are two key areas of contribution.

The department coordinates activities of the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, which reaches out to the business community and the public on the advantages

of hiring people with disabilities. The Governor's Committee spawns local mayor's committees, which are spread throughout the state**.**

Agency employees are also quite active in community assistance projects *(See Section 7.6).*

2. Strategic Planning

2.1 Strategic planning process

Strategic planning addresses strengths and weaknesses through a systematic approach to analyzing operations throughout the agency—specifically through the Nine Standards measures.

With the commissioner's leadership and direction, areas identified as opportunities for beneficial new strategic initiatives or areas in need of corrective strategies are assigned to appropriate senior leaders or CORE to develop and deploy plans of action. Performance review data and internal and external customer feedback help determine the need for strategic planning initiatives to address programmatic and fiscal challenges.

This may be carried out through work groups, a statewide committee where a demonstration program may be developed, or at the local level as part of the action plan that each area office is required to develop and use. Planning incorporates new opportunities in technology to enhance service delivery and addresses the challenges identified by CORE and other management reviews.

There is a KRA for each of the Baldrige criteria categories, and the KRA teams document and monitor strategic objectives and identify potential new initiatives for action. Each KRA features strategic objectives and established time frames for implementation and review of each phase of the plan. The teams represent diverse perspectives in an effort to identify and eliminate potential blind spots in planning.

SCVRD's strategic planning addresses strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats through consistent and systematic communication with customers; formal customer surveys that are part of Program Integrity; partnership relationships with other agencies and the business community; focus group activities; federally required and regulated initiatives aimed at a high level of employment outcomes for clients; research into alternative funding resources tied to improved services for underserved client groups; state and federal budget implications or other issues stemming from legislative/political environments.

Technology has played a key role in the evolution of the SCVRD program. Advancements in data availability and Information Technology (IT)-powered improvements in customer service have been at the forefront of strategic planning.

Redirection of resources sometimes results from new initiatives that address program concerns, new mandates, budget cuts, or changes in staffing patterns brought about by role revision and/or population shifts in the geographic areas served.

Planning includes risk management needs for all facilities to ensure safety. Financial, societal and ethical risks are all encompassed in the department's efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities in a financially accountable, ethical and customer-centered way. The human element of SCVRD's core mission drives decision making that protects client interests and offers the maximum opportunity for them to compete in society's workplace.

Fig. 2.1	SCVRD Key Strategic Objectives		
Program Number and Title	Supported Agency Strategic Planning Goal/Objective	Related FY 07-08 Key Agency Action Plan/Initiative(s)	Key Cross Ref. for Performance Measures
All	**Nine Standards of Excellence**: a set of standards used by SCVRD to maintain an organizational focus on performance and to guide systematic evaluation improvement of key processes, including the following two subsets:	Area scorecards track performance by all area offices in each of the Nine Standards; Steps for Excellence developed for each area. *Short term goal: meeting state averages. Long term: all offices meet state target.*	7.1-13 7.1-1
	Program Integrity: a balanced set of measurable standards which are essential to the department's success relative to compliance assurance, productivity and customer service.	Compilation of an index of measurable results to evaluate performance at all levels of the organization, for internal/external benchmarking and continuous improvement. Redirection of staff resources is a related strategic objective. *Short term goal: each office meets state average. Long-term: every office reaches state goal.*	7.5-1 7.2-1 7.6-3 7.1-6 thru 7.1-12
	Work Training Center Balance: centers seek to balance financial impact with the need to provide the variety of rehabilitation services of greatest benefit to clients.	Development of productivity rate that balances programmatic indicators of client training participation and client wages with business indicators of sales and contribution. *Short term goal: meet state average. Long-term: every office meets state goal.*	7.3-8 7.5-2
All	**Return on Investment:** set of measures that reflect the economic impact of competitive employment of clients through their own gain in financial achievement and through the return on the taxpayer investment.	Service provision that maximizes employment potential of client as well as the agency's resources. Measured through application of a formula that incorporates key economic indicators in projecting long-term benefit of client services. *Goal: annual improvement in ROI.*	7.3-1 thru 7.3-7
All	**CORE** (Committee on Rehabilitation Excellence)	System to assure achievement of Program Integrity standards by collecting and analyzing data,maximizing HR effectiveness, formulating and assessing plans for corrective action, and assuring implementation and follow-up. *Goal: annual improvement of Nine Standards performance*	7.1-13 7.4-1 7.4-3
All	**Professional Development and Leadership Program (PDLP)** to transfer organizational knowledge and develop future leaders in light of significant retirements.	Formal program creating an environment that fosters excellence by aligning agency needs with individual career goals. Tracks include management/supervision, pursuit of specialty areas and general professional development. Expanded to include DDS staff. *Short term: skills attainment. Long-term: leadership position attainment.*	7.4-2 thru 7.4-4
All	**Partnerships** to enhance agency outreach and service provision.	Emphasis on partnerships with other agencies to coordinate services, increase successful closures and provide direct job placements; with employers, with business and industry and with former clients to promote the agency. *Short term: increase in partnerships. Long-term: increase in co-funded position and increase in referrals.*	7.2-2 thru 7.2-5 7.3-9 thru 7.3-10 7.6-2
All	**Redirection of Staff Resources** to provide the highest level of client service possible.	Centralization of roles and redirection of personnel from those positions into roles that promote more direct client service, especially clients with significant disabilities such as students needing school to work transition services. *Short term: procurement, accounting, psychological roles. Long-term: compliance and possibly other roles.*	7.5-3 7.2-6
All	**Case Management System (CMS) Enhancement** to follow the natural progression of the rehabilitation process and support integrated service delivery system in an intuitive and user-friendly format.	Phases of development: (1) new interface, (2) survey, (3) phasing out Local Office Information System, (4) Individualized Plan for Employment; (5) closures. *Short-term: phased rollout. Long term: full implementation by December 2009.*	7.1-13
25000000 Disability Determination Services	**Electronic File** whereby all evidence material for the disability decision is either submitted electronically or scanned into the file electronically.	Integrate system enhancements into the electronic case processing workflow to include electronic processive of all levels of claims and expanded capabilities for quality assurance management and electronic submission of medical evidence.	7.1-14

The agency has the ability to execute the strategic plan and the agility to adapt when conditions change because of its consistency in reviewing data and results and taking follow-up actions. Objectives are carried out with regularly scheduled reviews and adjustments or corrective actions.

2.2 Addressing strategic challenges

The strategic challenges identified in Section I, Item 4 are addressed directly by the agency's strategic objectives *(Fig.2.1).* They correlate through action plans and the objectives/plans have measurable indicators of their success.

2.3 Developing and tracking action plans

CORE oversees the development of action plans in each of the area offices. These action plans, known as Steps for Excellence, address the Nine Standards of Excellence for area operations. These plans are monitored for compliance and achievement of the targeted goals. In turn, they are used as tools for training and the setting of new goals at the beginning of each year.

The management team helps establish local office goals for successful rehabilitations by taking into account staffing, client bases, referral sources, local demographics and economic conditions, previous accomplishments and other factors. These local goals add up to a statewide goal for successful rehabilitations, and allocation of resources is based on goals.

For action plans at the statewide level, thorough study of the validity and potential effectiveness of the plan precedes deployment. Many major action plans have demonstration projects to test their effectiveness and logistical requirements and to offer opportunity for feedback from staff and customers.

The area director, assistant commissioner for case services, and budget director conduct quarterly reviews of area expenditures for consistency and efficiency, make recommendations for reallocation of resources when necessary, and provide intervention when an area is not in alignment with expectations.

A key component in addressing strategic objectives is the design of customized technology upgrades. The Information Technology department works closely with State Office and local case service personnel to provide data needed to deploy strategic planning initiatives, such as identifying areas that need strengthening or setting appropriate goals.

2.4 Communication and deployment

Communication of strategic objectives, action plans and performance measures generally occur through verbal discussions and presentations complemented by supporting written communication. Quarterly supervisor meetings hosted by the commissioner often provide the setting for communicating objectives, plans and measures. Senior management provides follow-up throughout the year to ensure that communication cascades throughout the organization and that deployment is in place.

During deployment of any major initiative there is ample opportunity for questions or comments from supervisory or other affected staff. Area development directors, part of the senior management team, work with local offices to maintain an open communication link. Local area councils provide an important source of perspectives and suggestions concerning strategic initiatives and service provision. The department's intranet provides topical bulletin board options for all employees to express themselves. Training is developed to enhance staff

understanding and "comfort levels" with new objectives or measures. The strategic plan is circulated to staff in all locations.

2.5 Measuring progress on action plans

The Committee on Rehabilitation Excellence (CORE) is directly linked with program operations and is charged with analyzing, formulating and assessing action plans and evaluating the agency's key performance measures.

The Nine Standards of Excellence have key performance measures and area scorecards for tracking progress on action plans, including the Program Integrity measures. Quarterly reports allow for progress updates and projections. All area offices operate from the same set of measures, so there is alignment throughout the organization in Program Integrity.

Support processes by nature have different measures, but those measures are still aligned by the same three Program Integrity categories of compliance assurance, quality customer service and productivity.

Other key measures for the department involve comparative data on cost per rehabilitation and client served, number of persons rehabilitated per 100,000 population, and the rate of return on the taxpayer investment that successfully rehabilitated clients provide by becoming taxpayers themselves.

2.6 Evaluating and improving strategic planning process

The Strategic Planning KRA committee reviews plans and makes recommendations through consultation with the commissioner, CORE and other senior staff serving as KRA team leaders.

2.7 Strategic plan availability

The agency's strategic plan is available to the public by e-mailing info@scvrd.state.sc.us.

3. Customer Focus

3.1 Key customers and stakeholders

The department determines its customers and customer requirements through a combination of listening/learning methods, both formal and informal, including continuous program assessment and evaluation by analyzing statistical trends and with input from constituency groups. The assessment used a variety of strategies and data sources, including analysis of Social Security Administration data; U.S. Census Bureau population data; RSA 911 national comparative data; SCVRD 911 client data; survey data analysis of individuals with disabilities residing within the state of South Carolina; and a questionnaire distributed to 55 collaborating state agencies, disability-focused private non-profit partners, and underserved disability and minority populations.

All individuals with impairments who intend to achieve an employment outcome are potential primary customers of SCVRD. They can be referred from any source in their communities. Client requirements are determined based on individual needs regarding services and employment goals. At every major stage in the rehabilitation process, the client is at the center of the planning process. Identification of the requirements for a client's successful rehabilitation results from a combination of professional assessment and client input.

Other customers include anyone who interacts with SCVRD, including business partners, other state agencies, vendors, taxpayers and legislators and referral sources. Their key requirements are determined by the nature of their relationship with the agency.

3.2 Keeping current with changing needs

The department enhanced its listening and learning methods by implementing targeted customer satisfaction surveys as part of the Program Integrity measurement. It also developed an enhanced system of tracking and reacting to client complaints.

The commissioner meets with the leaders of key agencies and conducts employer focus groups. The SCVRD state office also has consultants specializing in business and industry relations and has a rapidly growing Business Partnership Network. Business partners provide feedback about their needs in today's marketplace, about contract services SCVRD performs for them, and about the clients they hire. Local work training center advisory board members provide ideas, feedback and advice on meeting the needs of their communities.

The department has established a network of successfully rehabilitated former clients who offer assistance in continuous improvement efforts. Agency leaders at the state and local levels stay in touch with members of the General Assembly and Congressional delegation to answer questions and provide information.

3.3 Customer access mechanisms

Personal relationships form the centerpiece for all customer access mechanisms, while other resources serve as support of those relationships. For clients already in the program, strong relationships with their VR counselors and other staff are vital to keep their employment goals and services on track. Regular contact to coordinate appointments and service delivery and keeping the client informed are required and critical to giving the client the access he or she needs to seek information or make complaints. Prospective clients are frequently referred by third parties to call or visit their local SCVRD offices for information, or those referral sources will initiate the calls and make appointments on behalf of those customers. Referring agencies maintain access through contact persons assigned by SCVRD for that purpose.

SCVRD's website targets all major customer groups, each with their own section. Site visitors can contact the department or file complaints through an e-mail link or by using a directory of local office information.

Employers and business partners at the local level access information through their relationships with counselors, CPE specialists, work training center staff, business development specialists, and other contacts, which are required to nurture these relationships. The BPN provides access to SCVRD for business and industry. Most training centers have advisory boards that provide feedback, support, and contract opportunities.

The department systematically follows up on client complaints beginning at the local office level. If the concerns can't be resolved there, SCVRD's full-time client relations specialist addresses the issue. The client also has the option, at any time, to take a matter to the Client Assistance Program in the Governor's Office. Disputes are solved in an orderly and rational way through this system.

3.4 Measuring satisfaction

Through the department's Program Integrity measurement system, the client customer service satisfaction rate is calculated quarterly at the area and state levels. Comparisons are made among

organizational units and with previous years' performance. Quarterly statewide customer service surveys are conducted focusing on a specific customer population (by impairment, by service, by referral source, employer, etc.). The survey results, compiled and issued to CORE, then distributed to area supervisors, become the subject of policy/procedure revision, staff training, consultation, management action or other continuous improvement application.

CORE and the department's legal department review complaints received through the client relations office on a quarterly basis to formulate recommendations on policy/procedure revision, staff training or other action.

Each year the department conducts follow-up studies based on surveys of a random sample of successfully rehabilitated clients. This survey monitors satisfaction levels and rates of job retention. The department's program evaluation staff regularly conducts area reviews that include clients who were not successfully rehabilitated to learn why they have not reached an employment outcome and to determine if dissatisfaction played a part.

The department has a "mystery shopper" program in which selected clients call VR offices inquiring about services. The callers score the offices on telephone customer service issues and helpfulness.

Satisfaction from employers is measured in the success level of clients placed into employment, in the amount of outsource work contracted to SCVRD training centers, or through customer service surveys and focus groups.

3.5 Using feedback information

It is required that the client is offered the opportunity for formal input at various stages of the rehabilitation process.

Attention to changing client needs is vital. SCVRD's career planning and employment (CPE) services reflect that approach. Through community-based evaluations, a client with a particular job interest can try out that job in an actual work setting, "shadow" a person in the community who actually performs a certain job, or work under a mentor.

Referral sources are contacted on a frequent basis to assure continuation of collaborative relationships. Cooperative agreements are developed to assure mutually beneficial partnerships. Liaisons are assigned to specific service providers and to disability-based private non-profit organizations. Members of the Business Partnership Network are consulted as to their needs for hiring or outsourcing work.

Focus groups are conducted to determine specific target area needs and to understand the nuances of particular audience needs. Individuals living with impairments, collaborating agencies, and private non-profit organizations are often included in staff development and training activities.

3.6 Building positive relationships

The department's focus on "informed choice" is the cornerstone for successfully building positive relationships with its clients, who are its primary customers. At every stage of the rehabilitation process, the client is involved in planning and signs off on his or her Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Staff promotes client choice in the selection of vocational objectives, services and service providers. The client must be satisfied with services and vocational rehabilitation outcome before the department claims a successful rehabilitation.

The department also builds positive relationships through cooperative agreements with other state and local agencies through community outreach to solicit business and industry involvement with the program as employers, contractors, or advisors; cultivation of ongoing relationships with successfully rehabilitated clients who are now firmly established in their communities and offer a great source of feedback and advocacy; contact with community organizations and legislators; and with marketing tools (print, web, video).

SCVRD enhances the services of other agencies by providing clients of those agencies with the employment services they need to gain independence. There are more than 800 cooperative agreements with other organizations. These relationships are strengthened by SCVRD's attention to providing prompt and thorough feedback to its referral sources as to progress and outcomes for clients they refer.

Each year, Social Security Disability Determination Services (DDS) managers develop outreach objectives and plans based on identified and/or projected needs. The administration coordinates attendance at conferences and meetings and provides individual visits with professionals, advocacy groups or claimants to disseminate information about the program. DDS staff members make more than 200 presentations each year to medical professionals, community organizations, state and federal agencies, and the general public. Responses to 10,000 to 12,000 inquiries from public officials, legal representatives and claimants are provided by DDS personnel.

The DDS has established partnering initiatives with Social Security Administration (SSA) field office personnel and the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) in an effort to strengthen communication, collaboration and cooperation. DDS and SSA hold quarterly meetings to address common goals and issues. Exchange programs for DDS examiner trainees and SSA claims representatives, and DDS examiners and SCVRD counselors, foster better understanding of the role of each component in the disability claims adjudication process.

The DDS professional relations officers (PRO) and medical relations coordinator are heavily involved in recruiting hospitals, clinics and other vendors to provide medical information electronically which serves to expedite both the adjudication process and payment to sources that the DDS contacts for evidence.

4. Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management

4.1 Determination of measures

The department uses many performance measures, all tied into the accomplishment of the most important performance measure of all—its mission to enable eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment.

Information to analyze the department's success comes from a variety of internal and external sources. Each component of the service delivery system and support systems has performance measures that factor into the "big picture" of agency mission accomplishment. Through analysis of the department's enabling legislation as well as other federal and state guidelines and through feedback from internal and external customers, the agency's leadership has developed key performance measures, incorporated into the Nine Standards of Excellence, including Program Integrity.

National standards and indicators are used to compare SCVRD with other state VR programs at the national and regional levels. These indicators are designed to illustrate the overall effectiveness of VR programs and RSA requires achievement of standard levels.

Internal benchmarking incorporates the elements of Program Integrity and the other eight Standards of Excellence. Procedures, instruments and empirical methods have been developed to review caseloads, collect customer satisfaction information and expand the means of tracking and quantifying productivity.

State Office Program Integrity criteria changed in 2008 to reflect area scorecard results and its impact on field offices and other departments in achieving agency missions. This provides a direct link for operational divisions of the department such as human resources, finance, information technology, and others.

4.2 Using data/information in decision making

Caseload information is available and accessed through the network to track daily operations and performance. Real-time caseload information is accessible in all offices. In addition, this data is reviewed and broken down into categories of performance and goals to identify areas of strength and weakness. Area councils and area supervisors analyze the information to develop the Steps for Excellence. CORE meets on a regular basis to coordinate the review and access the information gathered and to serve as a mechanism for feedback, decision-making and updating of information for the strategic planning process. Area Scorecard results can be calculated by area and the state, so that data collected can be used to foster improvement at any of those levels.

The department uses reports to spot trends, project future needs and address federal key indicators. For example, Program Integrity measures reveal productivity, compliance assurance and customer service gaps that are used in decision making processes. Customer satisfaction surveys are carefully evaluated and used in the consideration of improvements or new services. Training center services and revenue data are used to ensure the balance required by the agency's strategic objectives.

The Social Security Disability Determination Services maintains an extensive array of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual reports through comprehensive division, agency and Social Security computer reporting systems. Statistical reports are aimed at providing performance tracking information related to established goals and objectives. Data allows comparisons at the individual, unit, office, state, and national levels in areas such as productivity, processing time, documentation and decision quality, cost effectiveness and staff attrition.

4.3 Key measures

The Nine Standards of Excellence are all measurable and result in Area Scorecards used to drive continuous improvement at the local and state level. Program Integrity measures, including national standards and indicators, are considered extremely important because they reflect performance in the key areas of compliance assurance, customer service and productivity. All measures related to the successful employment of people with disabilities are key measures, including number of people rehabilitated, referrals, individual plans for employment written, direct job placements and cost effectiveness.

Disability Determination Services key measures include productivity, processing time, documentation and decision quality, and cost effectiveness.

All key measures are reviewed through CORE in alignment with business needs established through regulatory and customer feedback/results.

4.4 Comparative data use

Selection and use of comparative data is based on national standards and indicators, which reveal how the department ranks in federally mandated measures. These figures are used by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the department's regulatory agency, to assess effectiveness of state VR programs. The department, in turn, uses them as a basis to consider improvements to service delivery when necessary.

The Program Integrity Index is an internal comparative data mechanism that enables the leadership to compare key performance measures at all levels of the service delivery system and foster continuous improvement. The internal Area Scorecard, based on the Nine Standards, provides comparisons of organizational units, which factor into decision making.

Efficiency and effectiveness comparative data enables the agency to monitor and address trends in national, regional and internal benchmarking.

4.5 Data integrity, timeliness, accuracy, security, availability

Real time on-demand reports are available for the majority of the reporting needs of the agency. These reports are accessed through the application menu system based on the user's access level and menu assignment. Some of the reporting is automated and sends email reminders and reports to the individual users.

Built-in edits in applications check for accuracy and flag questionable entries prior to commitment to the database. An automated user ID/menu assignment system was created to ensure that new employees and existing employee changes in computer access were completed accurately and on time. This change reduces the manual emails that needed to be completed for employee network access. It also decreased the errors in menu assignment and email groupings by assigning access based on job title.

Network servers are backed up nightly to encrypted tape. The operating system is backed up weekly and the off-site storage of data and the operating system is carried out weekly. Confidentiality is crucial to the agency in light of its very strict regulations on client information. Client files are all kept on the computer network instead of the local computer and strong safeguards protecting that information from external access are in place. A strong firewall and virus protection system has been very successful in minimizing virus attacks on the network. Remote access to the network is limited to an encrypted VPN connection.

Accuracy of federal case service compliance data is enhanced by a built-in edit program that notifies users of errors and anomalies so corrections can be made prior to submission. Performance audits verify the accuracy and integrity of files. Obsolete computer hard drives are erased and formatted to ensure that no confidential data remains on the device.

4.6. Translating performance review findings into continuous improvement priorities

The Committee on Rehabilitation Excellence (CORE) collects and analyzes data, formulates, receives and assesses plans for corrective action and follows up to ensure implementation. The priorities for improvement arise from the Nine Standards of Excellence, including Program Integrity index measures. These priorities are communicated through face-to-face discussions with managers and other staff, written guidelines and policies, EPMS links to program performance standards, and development of effective training modules, and strategic planning cycles.

4.7 Organizational knowledge/best practices

Succession planning is a key management tool for collecting and transferring organizational knowledge. The Professional Development and Leadership Program (PDLP) facilitates this process by exposing candidates to a well-rounded study of the entire organization and a more focused study on their areas of greatest interest. Organizational veterans provide the knowledge base for this instruction.

Coaching and mentoring is provided to all new supervisors. Senior managers who are nearing retirement also provide a great deal of informal transfer of knowledge to their associates. Online training is available for CMS and other applications. Camtasia is software used to create online training for agency developed computer programs and is deployed prior to each new CMS module rollout.

Policies are on the network along with personnel, procurement, inventory and other resources. Agency policies are large documents, but user-friendliness is enhanced by a search feature that takes the user straight to the topic of choice.

Best practices are routinely shared at all levels of training and supervisory meetings. CORE's members are at various stages of their careers, and knowledge is transferred within that group. Relevant knowledge is transferred to customers (clients, agency partners, business partners) through CMS required steps, formal and informal meetings, strategies developed through staff training, marketing resources, Business Partnership Network agendas, and other practices tied into achievement of the Nine Standards. Knowledge gained from customers is in the form of formal and informal feedback, including customer service survey results/comments that are shared throughout the agency and help drive strategic planning initiatives.

5. Workforce Focus

5.1 Organization and measurement of work

The agency mission drives the development of work systems and processes. SCVRD's authorizing legislation mandates consistency of services for all clients, and the department's work system structure is designed to monitor and ensure that consistency. The current organizational structure and service delivery system is the result of assessment, demonstration projects, analysis and planned change.

Feedback is solicited from internal and external customers to assist the department in the design of work systems and processes. Feedback comes from focus groups, surveys, and individual suggestions from employees, clients, employers and vendors.

In area offices, this effort resulted in development of work teams. Team members have specialized roles and cross training is used to ensure the continuity of services. Team meetings allow staff input from members of various disciplines as the team partners with the client and assists him/her in developing and following a plan designed to help the client achieve competitive employment.

Organizational units, teams, and individuals are empowered to meet the mission of the agency and its accompanying strategic objectives using the Program Integrity model and its philosophy to "train, trust and verify." Accordingly, they are assessed on the Nine Standards of Excellence, including the Program Integrity measures of quality customer service, productivity, and compliance assurance.

5.2 Effective communication/knowledge sharing

Team members have specialized roles and cross training is used to ensure the continuity of services. Team meetings allow staff input from members of various disciplines (counselors, CPE specialists, employment coaches, case services coordinators, production staff, and others) as the team partners with the client. They help the client to develop and follow a plan to achieve competitive employment. In addition, area councils, made up of front line staff, provide feedback to area supervisors and CORE on programmatic issues.

Innovation is fostered through encouragement of staff feedback on ways to improve systems. An example is the demonstration project process, in which workgroups that include direct service providers contribute expertise as new approaches are developed and tested. This has been crucial in development of the electronic CMS.

The commissioner meets almost daily with members of the executive staff and the senior management team to share information, discuss performance, and plan for process improvement. CORE allows key senior managers to share and analyze information, discuss and implement strategies, provide direction to and mentor field supervisors, and assess programmatic results. CORE ensures the consistent implementation and assessment the Nine Standards. Throughout the process, one of the department's three ADDs works with each office to provide a liaison to the State Office and provide guidance in day-to-day programmatic operations, through regional meetings by videoconference or in person and visits to individual offices. Quarterly supervisor meetings engage local supervisors with senior managers. The commissioner also visits local sites for front line feedback.

5.3 Recruiting, hiring, placing and retaining employees

The Integrated Service Delivery System (ISDS) team concept led to the development of the various positions (team roles) currently in use. Core job duties were developed for team roles and became the basis for the position description for each role. In interviews, applicants are assessed considering their projected ability to successfully perform these core duties in the team environment. In addition, selected qualified applicants are given trait/characteristics tests. The test is based on the five-factor model of personality and the applicant's results are compared to composite test scores for high performers in the various position types to help judge suitability for the job.

Employees are recruited using networking, local advertising, and a college recruiting campaign. The department utilizes individual and team interviews, testing, internships, and reference checks to determine suitability for employment. Salary offers are coordinated by the State Office with input from the local supervisor. Every attempt is made to provide consideration for the applicant's knowledge, skills, and abilities in developing the salary offer.

The department seeks to retain employees by providing a safe, healthy, and high performance work environment that sets high individual and organizational standards. The commissioner has promoted the twin themes of "fairness" and "accountability" in managing human resources.

5.4 Assessing workforce capability and capacity needs

SCVRD's workforce capacity is a balance between the agency's commitment to use taxpayer dollars wisely with the needs of various internal and external customers. While ensuring that clients receive excellent customer service, the agency constantly seeks ways to centralize administrative functions, reallocate positions from support positions to direct client service delivery, simplify processes, cut costs, all with due consideration for the needs of our staff. Workforce capability is assessed by constant monitoring of the agency's performance measures

and by seeking input from a variety of internal and external customers to determine whether our services are meeting and exceeding customers' expectations.

5.5 Support of high performance

The department's Employee Performance Management System process supports two-way communication between the supervisor and employee. It is designed to be a cyclical process beginning with clear communication of job duties (from position description), success criteria, and performance characteristics. It continues with on-going performance communication, and culminates in an evaluation of the employee's progress towards the achievement of the goals documented at the beginning of the cycle.

Core job duties have been developed for most position types within the agency and are consistent statewide. The EPMS allows for supervisors to add additional job duties to the core duties in order to meet local needs. The core job duties were designed around the work team roles required in the field offices. The success criteria developed for use with the EPMS are the measurable and or observable results which should be achieved to indicate successful performance. Many success criteria relate directly to Nine Standards measures. In addition, successful results, as documented on employees' EPMS evaluations, are directly linked to upward reclassification actions and associated salary increases.

5.6 Development and learning system for leaders

All new area supervisors receive supervisory training through the state Office of Human Resources, the New Supervisors Institute at Georgia State University, and internal supervisor training.

In the PDLP curriculum each participant has his or her own development plan.

Organizational knowledge is developed in senior and executive staff meetings, quarterly supervisor trainings, mentoring, coaching, on-site trainings, focus groups, PDLP, training modules, job shadowing, and at state and national conferences that provide learning opportunities directly related to the job.

Ethical practices are emphasized through quarterly supervisor meetings, a PDLP program on ethics and OHR supervisory training. An online ethics program is nearing completion. Topical reviews, which can be precipitated by findings from the program evaluation unit, are teaching tools for supervisors to recognize ethical issues in service or business. All staff are asked to sign the agency's code of ethics.

Leadership attributes in each of the Nine Standards are developed through supervisory meetings and best practices sharing. The Steps for Excellence provide structure for the accomplishment of action plans for area supervisors with guidance from area development directors. These steps lead to the accomplishments of goals tied into the Nine Standards, reflected in area scorecards. Supervisory training/meetings, CORE-identified training, and PDLP all contribute to development of core competencies.

5.7 Key developmental and training needs identification

A formal needs assessment is conducted for training. Training needs and the subsequent effectiveness of training are identified through, management reviews (CORE), program reviews, customer service surveys, EPMS documents, training requests, staff input, and basic job competency requirements. From this information, development plans and training sessions can be established to enhance the employees' ability to support the agency's mission. Training needs are also established through external means such as federal regulations.

5.8 Encouraging on-the-job use of knowledge/skills

The department promotes on-the-job use of knowledge and skills through PDLP projects, through opportunities for staff to use their expertise by helping to develop training modules, and by seeking out opportunities to match employees who have personal experience or specialized knowledge in specific disability areas with positions that maximize their knowledge.

5.9 Employee training linkage to action plans

CORE's involvement in reviews of training needs and effectiveness ensures that training is aligned with action plans. Area case services managers are responsible for training all new staff in case services policies and procedures and provide in-service training correcting deficiencies identified by Program Integrity and other reviews.

5.10 Evaluating effectiveness of workforce/leader training

The effectiveness of education and training is evaluated through formal evaluations immediately following each training session; formal "impact on performance" survey feedback from participants and their supervisors, which is gathered after a period suitable for impact to be determined; program reviews, customer service surveys and EPMS documents.

CORE may also make training recommendations based on information it gathers concerning impact on performance, especially as related to the Nine Standards and the area scorecards.

5.11 Motivating the workforce

The agency seeks to create an environment where employees understand how their positions support the agency mission and feel valued for their efforts. Career ladders have been established and continue to be refined for most major job categories to encourage employees in their development. The agency has developed matrices to help employees understand how promotions may occur and provide supervisors with a guide to employee development.

The Professional Development and Leadership Program (PDLP) provides staff with opportunities to expand their career prospects, broaden their knowledge and understanding of the agency, and develop professional and leadership skills that will serve them well in any job within the agency.

State regulations and policies govern employee compensation and benefits. While benefits are standardized across state agencies, the department exercises flexibility allowed by the regulations to provide pay increases for promotions, reclassifications, good performance, and additional knowledge and duties as well as bonuses. Such salary increases are tied directly to the accomplishment of the department's mission and are approved only after the employee satisfies the published criteria for the attainment of each increase.

The department's "flex time" policy allows most employees to adjust their work schedules to accommodate outside commitments and to provide better internal and external customer service.

The "Celebration of Success" program is an innovative reward and recognition system that allows employees to recognize their peers for significant accomplishments. The Disability Determination Services' PRIDE (People Responsibly Influencing Decisional Excellence) awards recognize superior job performance and provide awards for creative achievement, humanitarian service and special acts of service.

5.12 Assessment of workforce well-being and satisfaction

Results of job satisfaction surveys pinpoint areas or position types where employee satisfaction is low and these areas and/or positions are targeted for follow-up. Focus groups are created as a

result of position types where well-being survey results indicate a low level of job satisfaction. High turnover or low well-being survey results in a specific location are used as indicators that additional attention needs to be directed at an office to see if there are problems with the work environment and what steps can be taken for improvement.

5.13 Managing career progression and succession planning

Career ladders have been established for most major job categories to encourage employees in their development. Matrices help employees understand how promotions may occur and provide supervisors with a guide to employee development. These matrices are factored into planning for employee learning opportunities and in addressing EPMS objectives and career goals. The matrices are posted on the intranet. In addition, as a first option, the department is committed to promotion from within for leadership positions and ensures that vacant positions are posted throughout the agency to encourage interest from employees.

Succession planning and career progression are addressed through the PDLP, which was spawned from the concerns raised by an inordinately large number of expected retirements. Especially hard hit were management positions, beginning in early 2006. The PDLP has surpassed that original intent by creating an environment that fosters excellence by aligning agency needs with individual career goals. Participants design and complete relevant projects for the agency based on demonstrated needs. Employees are also encouraged and in some cases assisted financially to continue their education.

Management acquires and reviews annual lists of employees eligible for retirement or those nearing completion of the Teacher and Employee Retirement Incentive (TERI) to ensure the agency is planning accordingly.

5.14 Maintaining a safe, secure, healthy work environment

Safety assessments are conducted on each facility by State Office personnel every year. Safety concerns are documented after each safety assessment and a report is sent to the supervisor, who has 30 days to address and correct each concern.

New employees receive safety training at orientation, and new center managers and area supervisors receive safety training. Each work training center has a safety coordinator, whose job description requires that 40% of their duties are related to safety; their training includes OSHA 10 Hour certification in addition to semi-annual training on local issues. In addition, the National Safety Council offers annual training in selected topics under the Susan B. Harwood grants.

Safety committees meet quarterly in every facility. They implement the safety program with a goal of providing a safe work environment; enhance safety awareness among employees; identify hazards and suggest actions to eliminate them; identify employee and client trainee safety training needs; and develop and implement accident investigation procedures.

Each facility is required to prepare and follow safety plans that include: general safety plan; blood borne pathogens exposure control plan; hazard assessment plan; lock-out/tag-out plan; emergency action plan (tornado, fire, bomb threat); and hazard communication plan.

Regularly scheduled training includes: fire suppression for all staff annually; blood borne pathogens annually for all at-risk staff; CPR training annually for all first aid responders; first aid every three years for all first-aid responders; forklift training every three years or after an accident or near miss for all operators; and driver safety training within 90 days of employment for all staff whose primary task is driving.

Plans are being finalized to renovate building entrances and lobbies to permit controlled entry to enhance employee and client safety. Additionally, a demonstration project is under development to enable workers to send out alerts over our computer network; this will replace the current panic alarm system.

Accident reports and trends are used to make recommendations for engineering controls, training, or personal protective equipment to prevent similar accidents from recurring.

6.0 Process Management

6.1 Core Competencies

SCVRD's mission and core competencies grow from its legal mandates of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended—to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and inclusion and integration into society.

Competencies are determined by customer needs. For clients in the rehabilitation process current market and economic trends combine with client input to give a picture of competencies needed by staff. Since the agency must have willing employers and other business partners to bring client services to fruition, an ongoing assessment of business community needs is vital. The RSA state plan and agency strategic plan also determine competencies.

Staff must stay up to date on medical improvement knowledge (i.e., speech and hearing devices, assistive technology, insulin pumps, new treatments and surgical advancements) to provide the best guidance and services. Use of technological accelerators such as the CMS and wireless devices require employee competence.

The Nine Standards, including the Program Integrity balance among exceptional customer service, compliance assurance and productivity are the framework for competencies. Core competencies include:

- marketing to referral sources and business partners
- counseling skills
- expertise in medical terminology and knowledge of a wide range of disabilities
- ability to understand and synthesize disability-related information to determine eligibility and impact on employability
- career planning assessments to determine vocational objectives and service needs
- knowledge of local employment markets and availability of jobs
- comprehensive evaluations of physical disabilities to include physical therapy and occupational therapy
- case development, management and coordination of services both internally and externally (with partner agencies that are providing treatment)
- rehabilitation engineering to include knowledge of technological advancements available for persons with disabilities
- job readiness and training services such as those provided in work training centers, which are unique to SCVRD in their structure and impact
- job preparation skills such as completing applications and interviewing skills
- job search and direct job placement into competitive employment based on clients strengths and abilities and employer needs

Although the agency doesn't have direct competition within state government, its services are more comprehensive and specialized than any single private rehabilitation entity, and its breadth of services is greater than other states' VR agencies, which typically purchase many of the services that SCVRD provides internally.

6.2 Key work processes

Work processes all tie into the mission and contribute to Nine Standards achievement and to ensuring statewide consistency of service delivery. The electronic case management system provides a means for direct service delivery staff to plan, deliver, and document services in a logical, intuitive, user friendly manner which follows the natural progression of a case. Processes are based on a team concept to include both local and statewide resources. An Integrated Service Delivery model *(Fig. 6.1)* based on client-centered staffings is used to accomplish the key processes including:

- Completion of the application process in a timely, customer oriented manner
- Determination of eligibility and services based on customer needs and federal mandates
- Coordination of service delivery based on an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)
- Case documentation to ensure information sharing and coordinated service delivery
- Marketing to employers for outsource work and for client placement into competitive employment
- Education of partners and taxpayers/legislators
- Administrative support services from the State Office, such as centralized procurement functions and psychological services; facilities management; human resources management and training; and information technology are managed via electronic systems which include tracking capabilities to ensure timely, consistent, and appropriate services as well as the ability to identify trends.
- Continuous implementation of demonstration projects to identify innovative approaches to improving service delivery.

Every service is oriented toward work or addressing disabilities. Compliance teams have also been established and each service is monitored and measured for quality and effectiveness in enabling clients to gain competitive employment.

6.3 Incorporation of efficiency and effectiveness measures into processes
Processes are designed to meet the requirements of federal regulations and individualized client needs. Those regulations and associated policies are reviewed regularly and the work flow is assessed to determine effectiveness of the process in the meeting the needs of the department's primary customers. Flowcharts and training contribute to the understanding and consistency requirements of work processes. KRA committees and work groups utilize Nine Standards data as well as internal and external customer feedback to provide recommendations for changes to the work processes. These recommendations are channeled through CORE and demonstration projects typically are implemented to identify best practices before statewide implementation. Advances in technology are continuously monitored to determine more efficient processes. For example, the electronic case management system now features the ability to assign and track tasks and make appointments much more efficiently than in the past. This system also reveals gaps in the work process by highlighting cases that are out of compliance with established policies/protocol.   In addition, real-time caseload productivity reports are available on demand for both front-line staff and managers.

Fig. 6.1

Integrated Service Delivery System
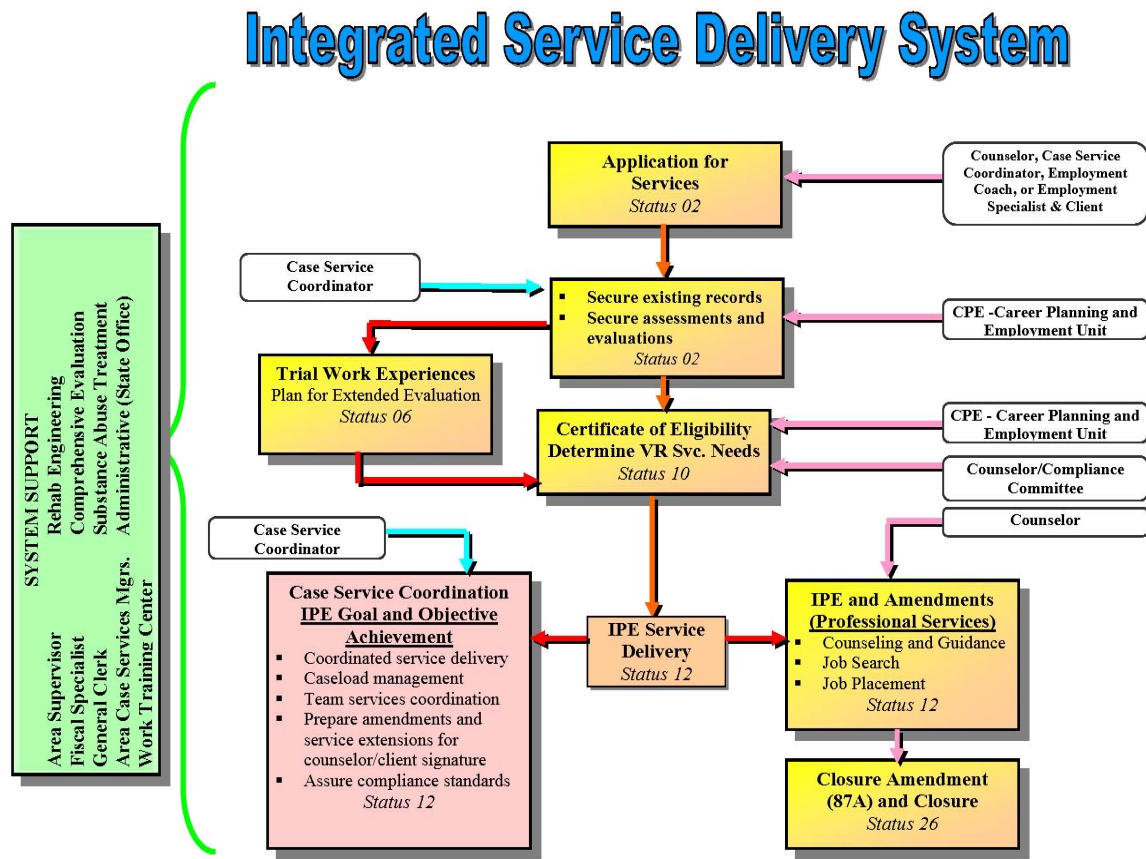
6.4 Daily operation/meeting key performance requirements

The department uses its Nine Standards of Excellence, including the Program Integrity model, to maintain an organizational focus on performance improvement and to guide a systematic evaluation and improvement of work processes. The Program Integrity model features a defined set of balanced standards to be achieved in the pursuit and attainment of the department's mission. Its components are compliance assurance, quality customer service, and productivity. Each of those components has measurable results and can be used to evaluate the agency at levels ranging from specific caseload or work unit up to an agency wide level. Client-centered staffings and compliance committees are charged with ensuring that customer needs are met and that cases proceed in accordance with compliance standards. Real-time caseload activity reports and features built into the case management system also are utilized to monitor the effectiveness of work processes. The Program Integrity results drive continuous improvement efforts and strategic planning. Feedback from all key customer groups is an inherent part of this process. The department also uses state and federally mandated processes to examine and report on its success. CORE is charged with analyzing, formulating and assessing action plans and evaluating the agency's key performance measures. CORE communicates at regular intervals with field supervisors through individualized interviews, conference calls and site visits to foster two-way communication. Local supervisors have also completed training in the 5S system.

These efforts are enhanced through technological means such as customized computer programs developed with field input, the RSA reporting software developed by SCVRD and used nationally, and laptops in the field for mobility

In addition to the Nine Standards, key results include a review of cycle time including time in status and frequency of client contact and of financial measures such as rate of return on taxpayer investment and cost per served and rehabilitated.

6.5 Evaluation and improvement of processes

The department's Program Integrity measures are ingrained in daily operations, both at the direct client service level and administrative/support levels. Compliance assurance, quality customer service and productivity are monitored regularly through reviews of Program Integrity reports. CORE coordinates reviews of all aspects of daily operations and makes recommendations for action plans to address opportunities for improvement and to ensure statewide consistency in the department's processes.

Regular sharing of lessons learned occurs through quarterly supervisor meetings with senior managers, which includes time designated for best practices sharing, other supervisor meetings held on their own to share Nine Standards strategies, monthly area development meetings and area councils/advisory boards. Each executive staff member is responsible for monitoring and facilitating improved performance in one or two of the Nine Standards.

6.5 Key support processes

Critical agency work processes are outlined in detail through role definitions and charts showing the flow of the rehabilitation process. Employees understand their roles in the process through formal training and team building on the job.

Personnel such as area supervisors, fiscal specialist, general clerks, and area case services managers provide administrative support in SCVRD area offices.

Some of the key State Office and other support processes include:

Administrative Services	Information Technology
Area Office Development	Internal Audits
Area Office Operations	Inventory and Supply Services
Budgets	Office of the Commissioner
Buildings and Grounds	Planning & Program Development
Case Services	Procurement Services
Center for Comprehensive Services	Professional Development
Client Relations	Program Evaluation
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services	Public Information
Facility Management	Safety and Risk Management
Finance	Staff Attorney
Human Resources	Substance Abuse Treatment Facilities (2)
Human Resources Development & Training	Training Center Services

These support components are improved and updated in response to internal and external Program Integrity surveys and focus groups or through technological upgrades, through development of mission-focused training modules, through the Employee Performance Management System process and through Key Result Area teamwork.

7. Results

7.1 Mission Accomplishment/Product and Service Outcomes

Fig. 7.1-1
SUCCESSFUL CLOSURES

A key performance effectiveness result is the number of successful closures SCVRD produces. This is the measurement of the number of people with disabilities that have employment outcomes after receiving SCVRD services. This is the performance measure that is most directly tied into the mission of the agency. It is also one of the Nine Standards of Excellence measures.
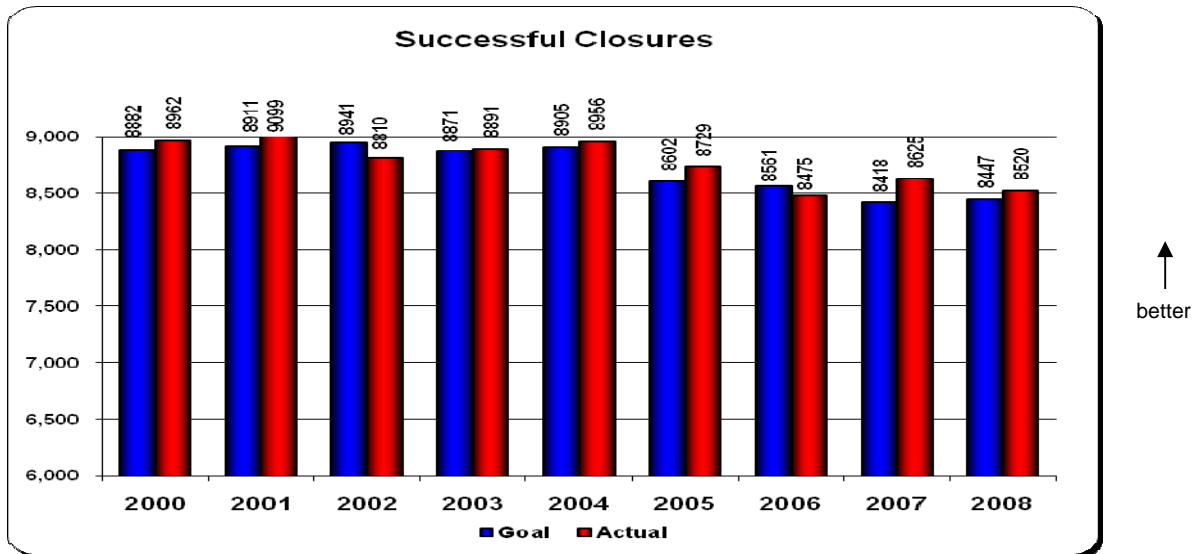

Fig. 7.1-2
REHABILITATIONS PER 100,000 POPULATION

For many years SCVRD has consistently ranked at or near the top among the nation's public vocational rehabilitation programs in the number of people rehabilitated per 100,000 population. The latest national figures from federal FY2007 show SCVRD at **199** people rehabilitated per 100,000, second only to Vermont, which had 234. SCVRD was first in the Southeast region; Alabama was second at 169. The Southeast average was 87 and the national average was 65.
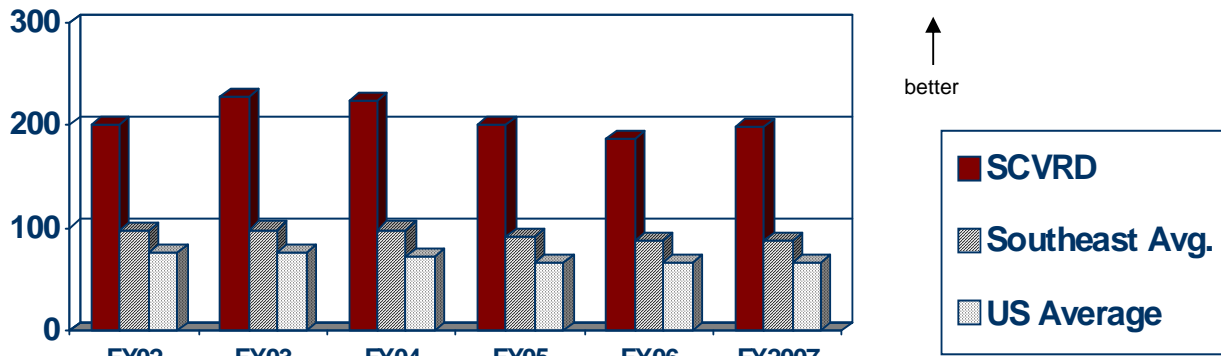
Fig. 7.1-3
NUMBER OF APPLICANTS ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

Clients who met eligibility criteria and began receiving services.

Total Eligible During Fiscal Year

Year	Value
2002	16,288
2003	17,335
2004	16,250
2005	15,324
2006	14,934
2007	15,839
2008	17,893
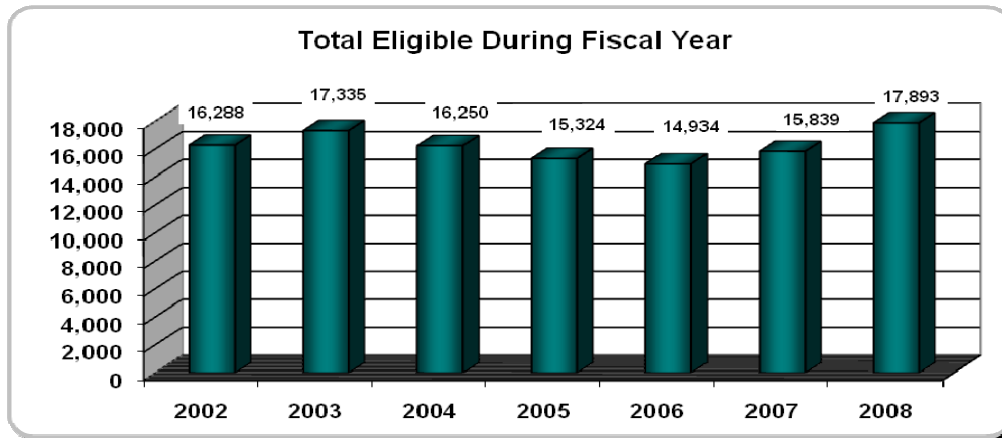
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Fig. 7.1-4
NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT (IPEs) WRITTEN

IPEs are written with client to coordinate a plan of services tailored to reach client's job goals.

Total IPEs During Fiscal Year

Year	Value
2002	13,876
2003	15,639
2004	14,430
2005	13,615
2006	13,038
2007	13,373
2008	14,674
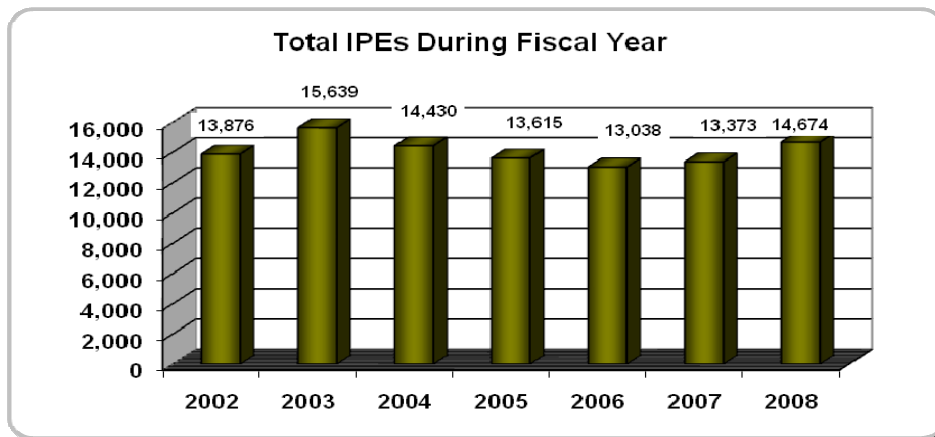
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Fig. 7.1-5
DIRECT JOB PLACEMENTS

Some clients need more assistance than others in landing a job as they complete their VR services. The chart shows the percentage of successfully rehabilitated clients who received direct job placement services.

Direct Placements as a Percentage of Successful Closures

Year	Value
2001	8.94%
2002	10.24%
2003	13.73%
2004	14.60%
2005	17.77%
2006	17.85%
2007	16.30%
2008	17.69%

↑ better

SCVRD FY08 · 38
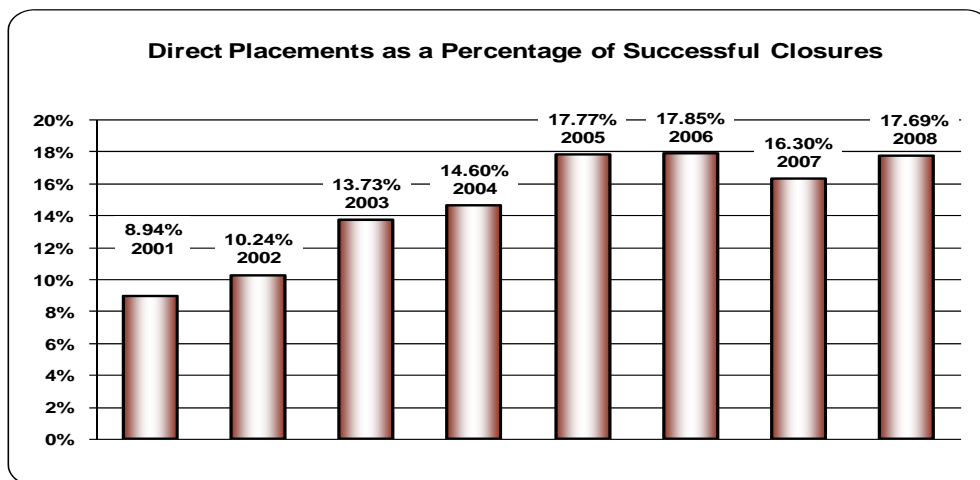
NATIONAL STANDARDS AND INDICATORS established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education, for **federal FY2007** (most recently available). SCVRD met the required levels in all seven measures:

(Note: comparative data for 2007 not yet available)

Fig. 7.1-6

Change in number of closures from previous year—standard is to increase closures by at least one from previous year. National trend has been for this to go down in recent years.
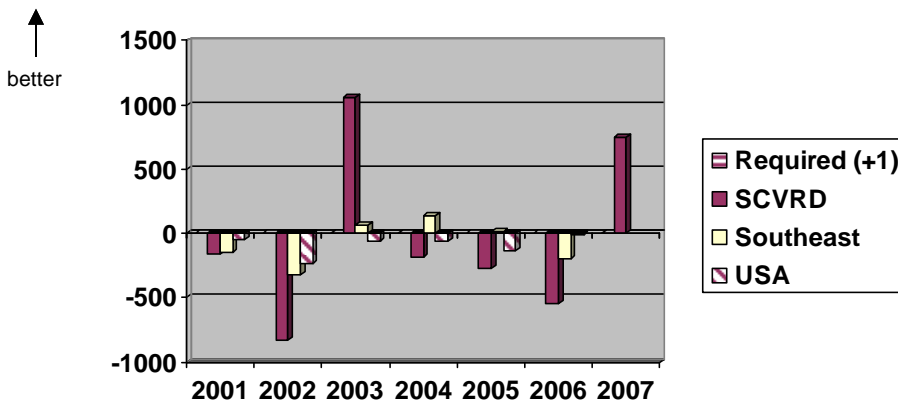
Fig. 7.1-7

Percentage of clients with employment outcomes
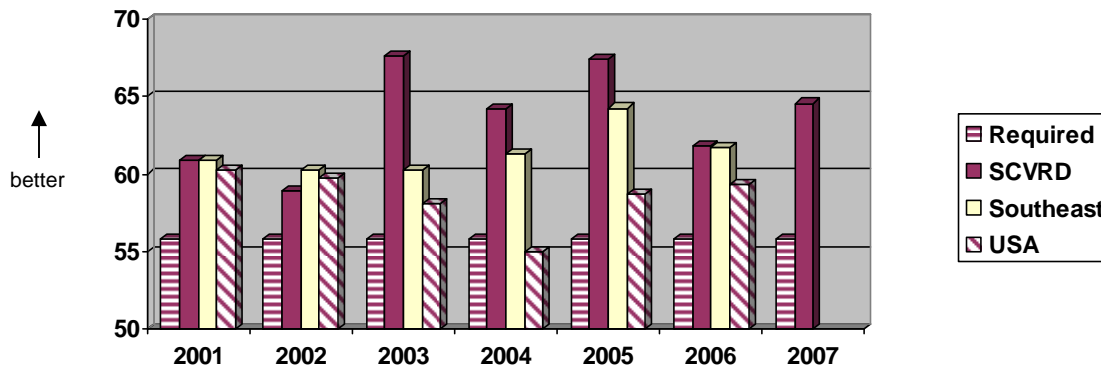
Fig. 7.1-8

Percentage of clients with employment outcomes who were competitively employed
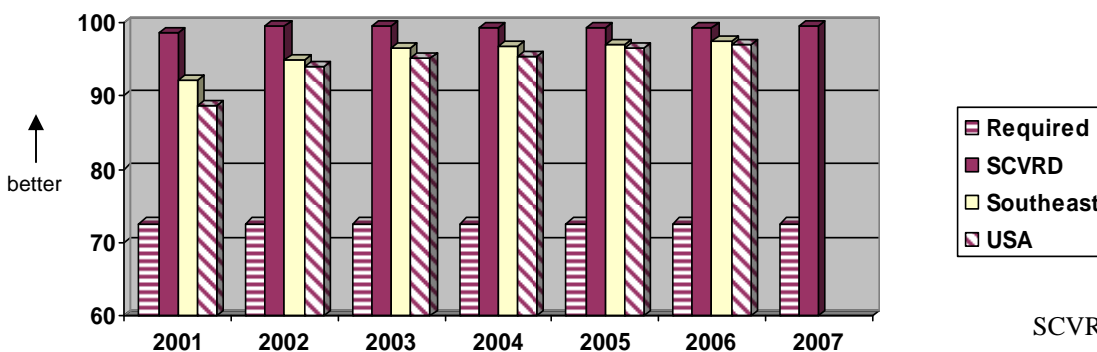
Percentage of competitively employed clients having "significant" disabilities
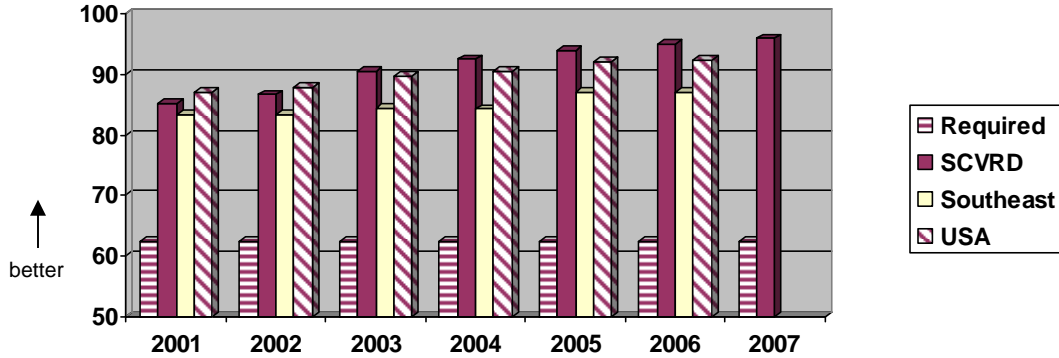
Ratio of rehabilitated client wages compared to state average wage
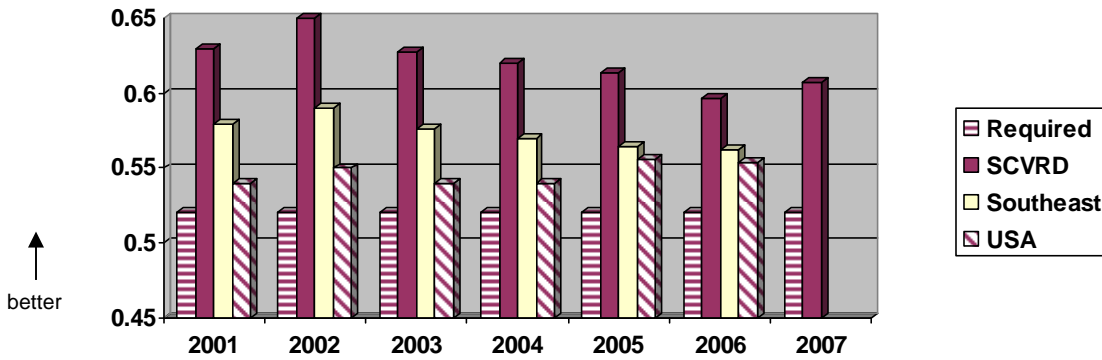
Difference in percentage of clients self-supporting after services compared with before services
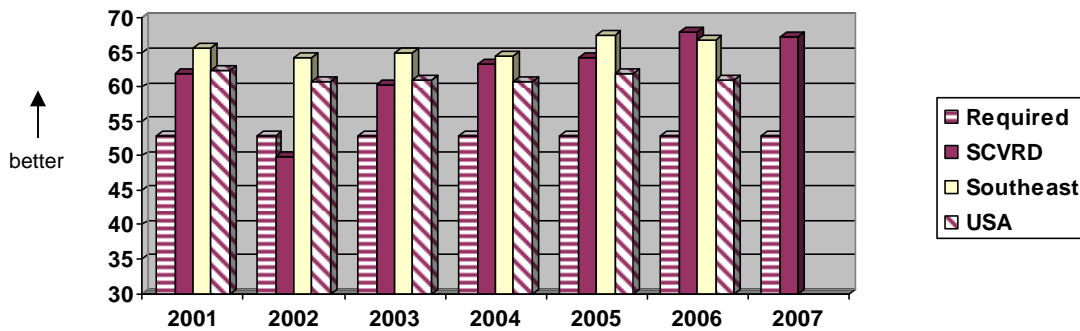
Fig. 7.1-12

Service rate for minority clients as ratio to non-minority
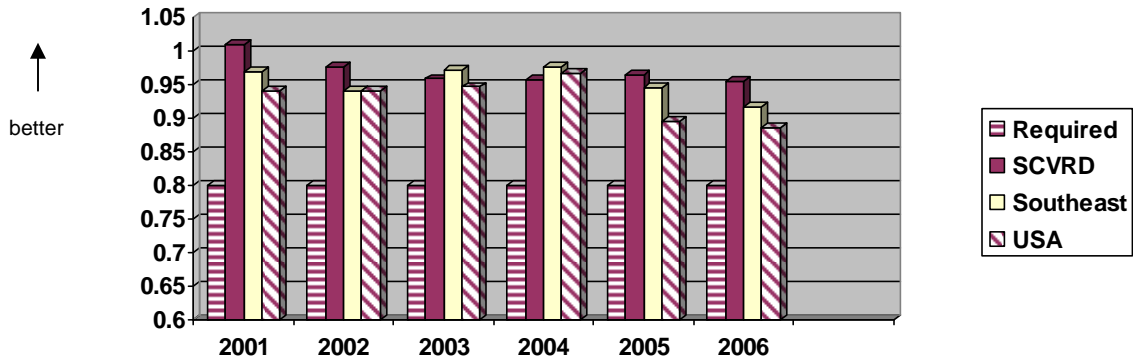
2007 not yet available for this measure.

Fig. 7.1-13

ACCOMPLISHMENT OF NINE STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

The Nine Standards of Excellence provide the framework for accomplishment of agency strategies and action plans, which lead to successful employment of clients.

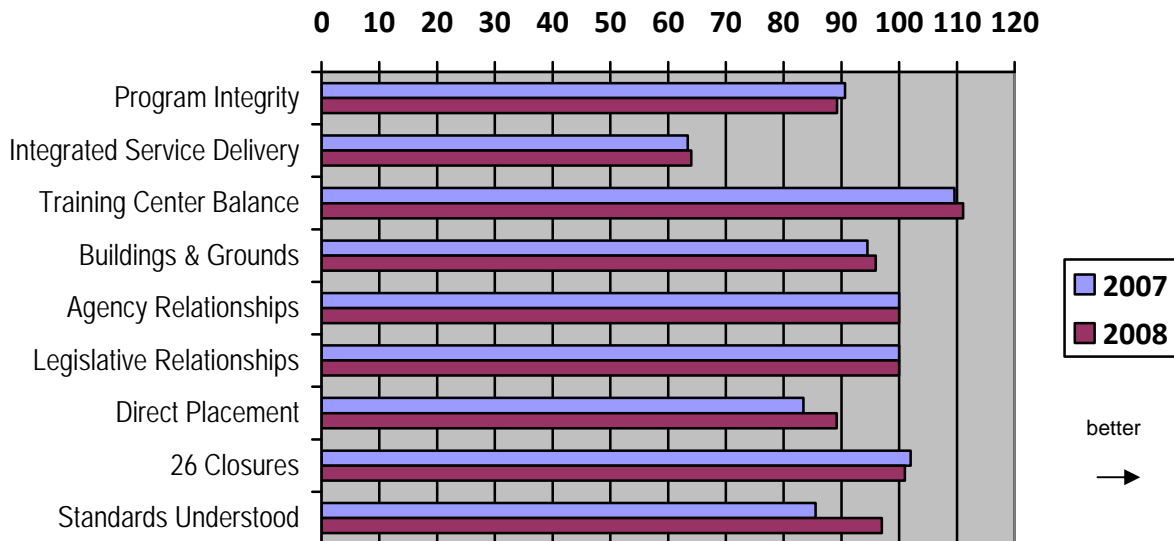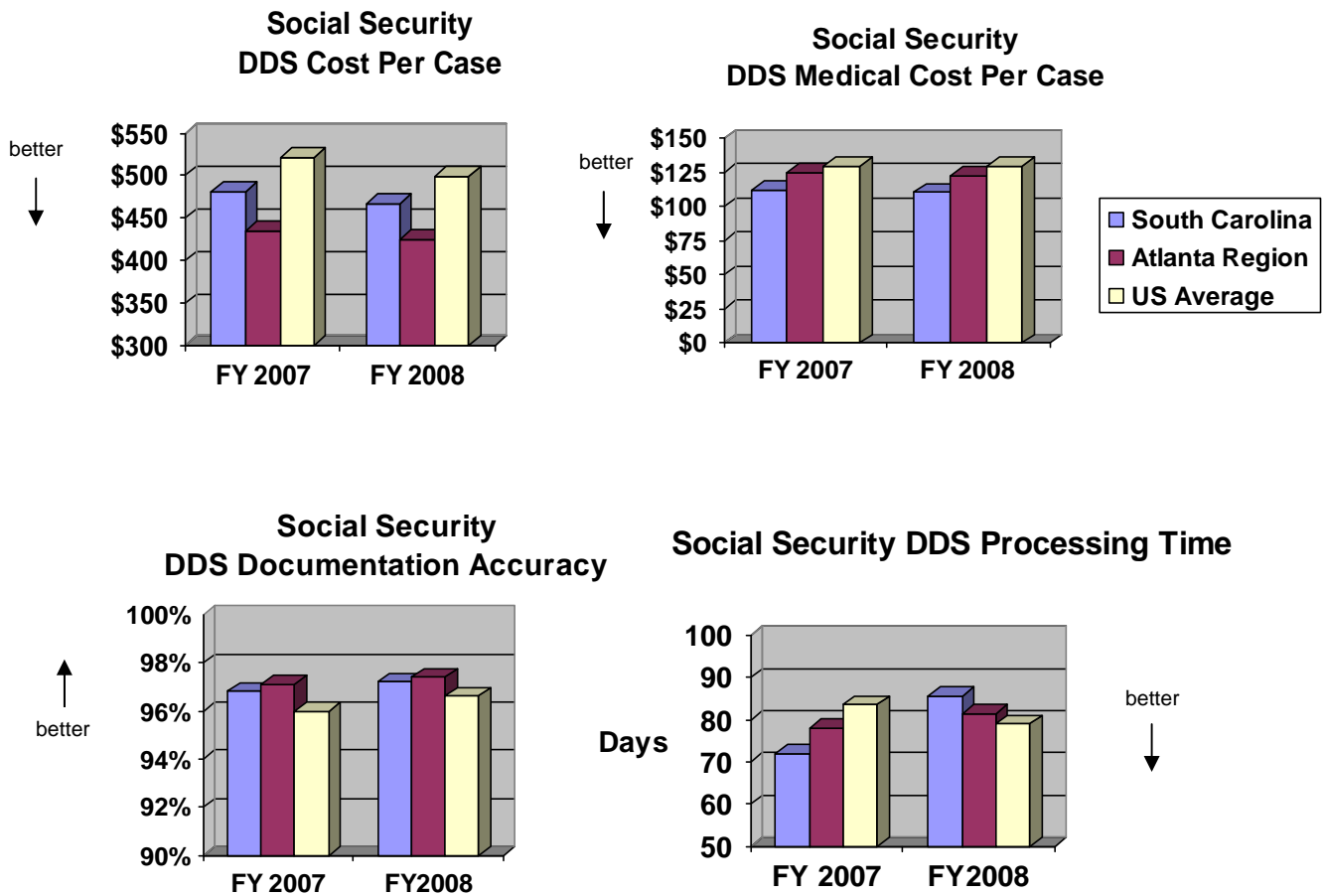***Statewide composite, shows percentage of goal reached.***

Fig. 7.1-14

SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES (DDS)

The Disability Determination Services (DDS) unit adjudicates disability claims for the Social Security Administration, the South Carolina Retirement Systems, the County Auditors Offices and the Department of Health and Human Services. DDS strives to achieve performance levels that are equal to or greater than the national average in the areas of productivity (number of claims produced for each FTE); cost per case; medical cost per case; processing time; and documentation accuracy.

During federal fiscal year 2007-2008 the Social Security Disability Determination Services will receive, develop and adjudicate more than 66,000 claims on more than 60,000 individual applicants for Social Security or SSI benefits. (Some individuals will apply for both programs at the same time.) In addition, approximately 2,000 claims for disability benefits under the South Carolina Retirement Systems; 10,000 claims for Medicaid Disability under the Department of Health and Human Services and approximately 100 applications under the disability provisions of the Homestead Exemption Act will be processed. This will result in more than 1,300 determinations per week with decisions reached in an average of 85 days or less. Through innovative approaches to case development and continued efforts to improve operational efficiency DDS expects to maintain or improve performance in key measurement areas.

The following measures show success rates for DDS's Social Security adjudications in 2008.

Social Security DDS Cost Per Case

Social Security DDS Medical Cost Per Case

Legend: South Carolina, Atlanta Region, US Average

Social Security DDS Documentation Accuracy

Social Security DDS Processing Time

7.2 Customer-Focused Outcomes

Fig. 7.2-1

PROGRAM INTEGRITY CUSTOMER SURVEYS

As part of the Program Integrity balanced scorecard, a variety of customer groups are surveyed each quarter to measure their satisfaction with the agency's services, staff and effectiveness in meeting their needs. Customers were randomly selected from case files in all SCVRD area offices.
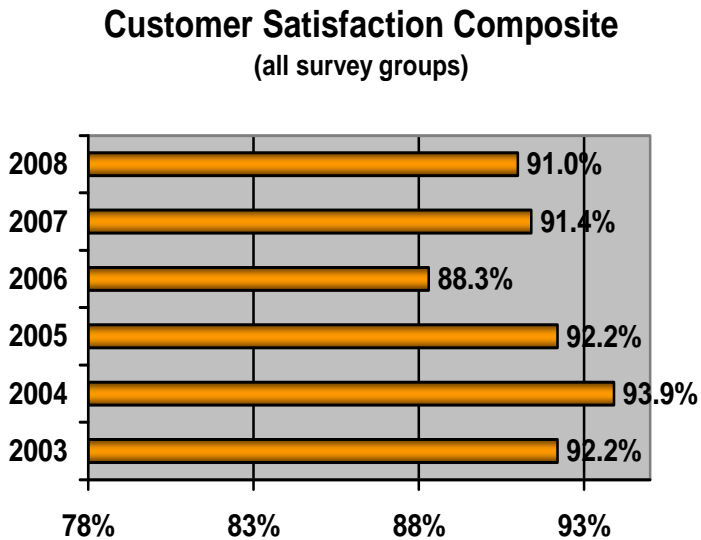
Customer Satisfaction Composite
(all survey groups)

Year	Value
2008	91.0%
2007	91.4%
2006	88.3%
2005	92.2%
2004	93.9%
2003	92.2%

Fig. 7.2-2

FOLLOW UP SURVEYS OF REHABILITATED CLIENTS show a highly favorable assessment of SCVRD services. The department surveys a random sample of clients one year after their cases are closed *(therefore most recent data is from FY2007 closures).*

Year in which cases were closed:	FY2003	FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007
Employed one year after closure	71%	76%	76%	78 %	70%
Counselor willingness to listen to client's ideas and suggestions in developing service plan	98%	99%	99%	97%	99%
Satisfied with adequacy of information about their disabilities	98%	98%	98%	96%	97%
Satisfied with promptness of service delivery	97%	99%	99%	96%	98%
Satisfied with kind of training received	93%	92%	92%	90%	94%
Satisfied with benefits of training received	92%	90%	95%	89%	92%
Satisfied with assistance in seeking job and finding employment	94%	96%	96%	92%	94%
Satisfied with results of physical restoration services	98%	96%	95%	91%	98%
Would recommend SCVRD to others	**99%**	**99%**	**99%**	**98%**	**99%**

Fig. 7.2-3

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS

One of the Nine Standards is the formation of close ties with community resources of all types. These formal agreements lead to repeat business and positive referrals. The department's number of active formal cooperative agreements grew from **619** to **803** during FY2008.
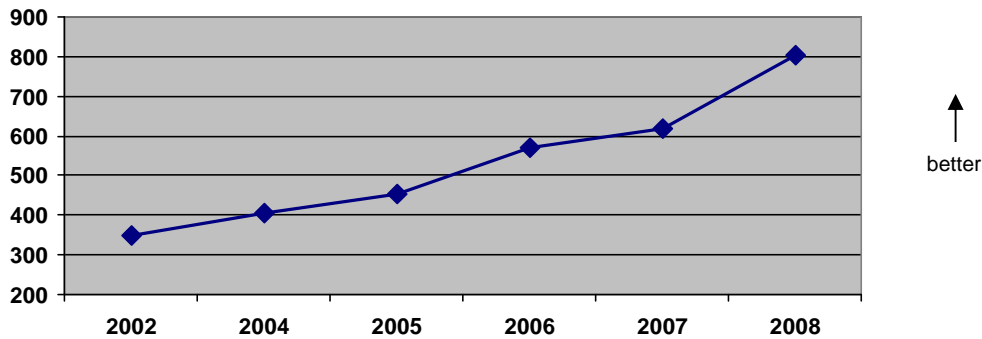

Fig. 7.2-4

NUMBER OF REFERRALS

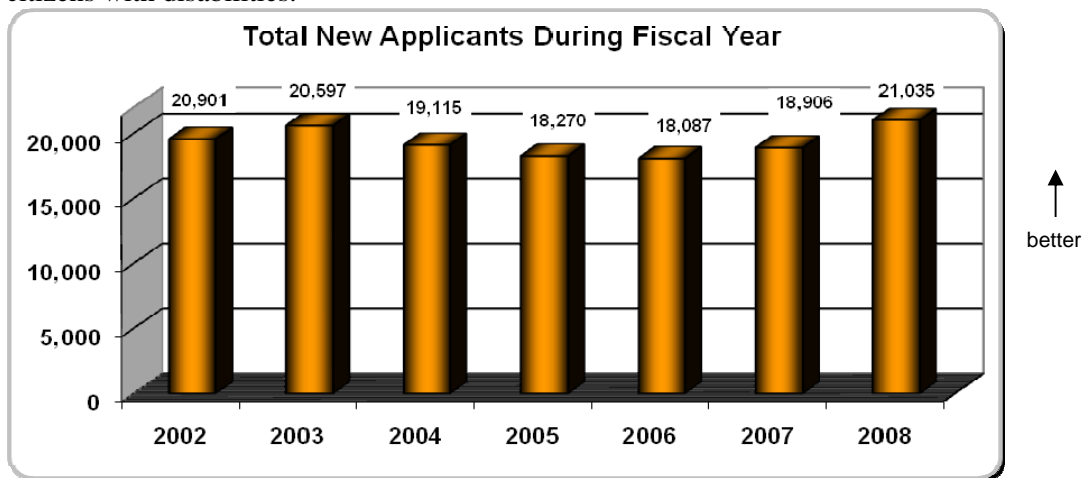Client referrals (new applicants) are vital as the department seeks to increase its impact on employment of citizens with disabilities.

Total New Applicants During Fiscal Year

Fig. 7.2-5

GROWTH OF VR BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP NETWORK

Training and employment opportunities for VR clients are greatly enhanced by strong partnership between the agency and the state's business community. Members of this network go beyond outsource partnerships—they commit to furthering the cause of disability awareness and exemplary employment practices.
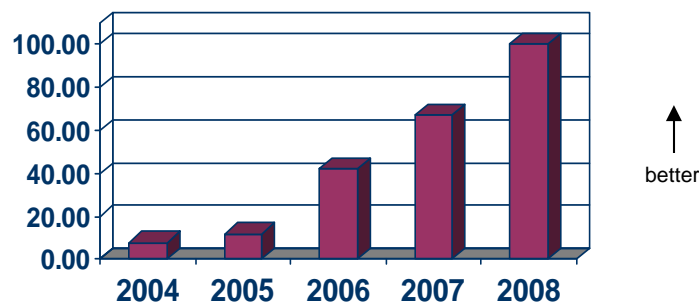
Fig. 7.2-6
SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION SERVICES

Enhancement of school-to-work transition services is one of the agency's key strategic objectives addressed by senior leadership. People with disabilities who are ages 16 to 21 are underserved and at a critical point in their lives; if there is no transition into the workforce there typically begins a cycle of poverty and reliance on government benefits. SCVRD leadership has been successful in increasing staff resources for these services, through state legislative funding *($500,000 recurring for FY08)* and grants *(see Fig. 7.3-11)*. The agency's increased presence in assisting this population has led to greater numbers served the past two years.

Number served in School-to-Work population
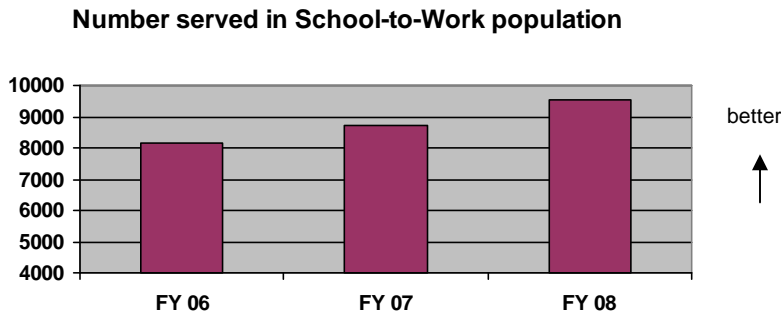
7.3 Financial and Market Outcomes

Fig. 7.3-1
AVERAGE COST PER CLIENT SERVED

SCVRD has consistently ranked among the nation's best programs in the average cost per client served. In federal FY 2007 (most recent data available), the department had the 11th lowest cost per client served *($1,662)* among state VR programs in the U.S. SCVRD also had the third-lowest average cost among the eight Southeastern regional states (Kentucky led at $1,454).
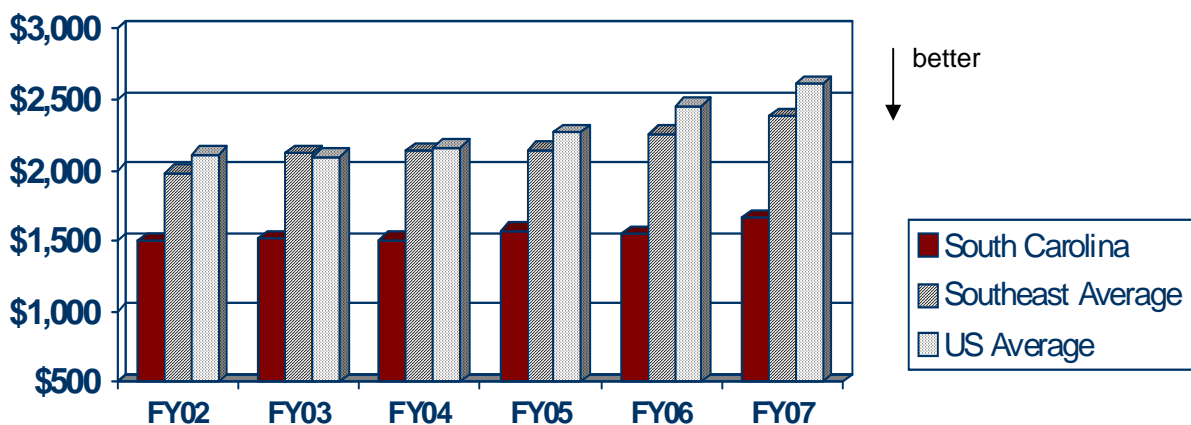
Fig. 7.3-2
AVERAGE COST PER CLIENT REHABILITATED

The department's efficiency and effectiveness is reflected in its national prominence among VR agencies in cost per rehabilitation. For each successfully employed client in federal FY2007, the department's average cost was **$8,643, the second lowest in the entire nation**. Idaho was the lowest at $7,895. The department consistently leads the eight Southeastern region states in this measure. Alabama was second in the region at $10,123.
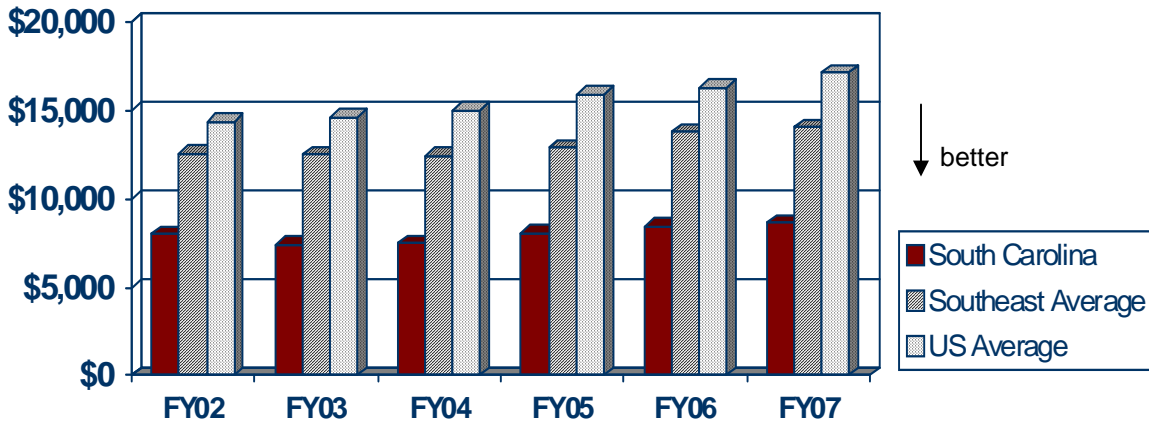
RETURN ON TAXPAYER INVESTMENT

SCVRD provides an excellent rate of return on resources invested in its clients. By becoming competitively employed, clients lessen their dependence on public assistance such as Social Security disability benefits, Medicaid, welfare, etc. Clients who become employed realize an increase in their earnings by **$12.78** for every dollar of Vocational Rehabilitation Department funds invested in their rehabilitation. They return an estimated **$3.20** in taxes for every dollar spent on their vocational rehabilitation. By paying taxes, they repay the cost of their rehabilitation in an average of **5.63 years**. The following chart shows the annual rate of return for each successfully employed client. Those figures do not include any additional cost savings from reduction in government benefits received by those clients.

Fig. 7.3-3

Client Income/Benefit Ratio
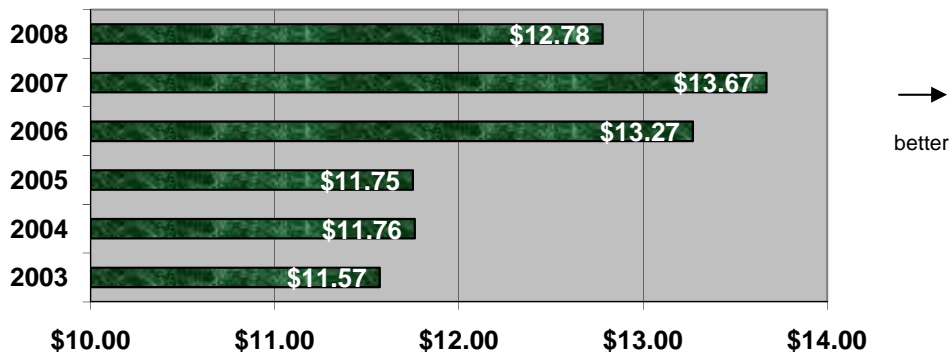**(How much each rehabilitated client will increase his/her earnings for every $1 spent on his/her rehabilitation)**
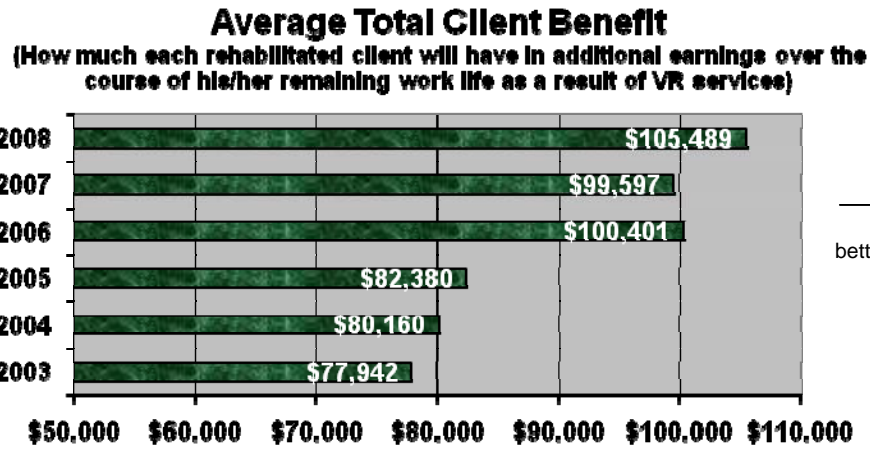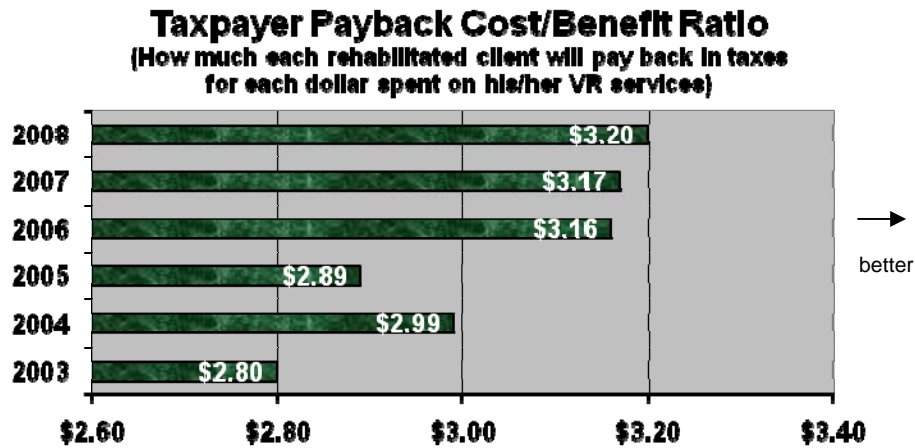
Fig. 7.3-4

Average Total Client Benefit
(How much each rehabilitated client will have in additional earnings over the course of his/her remaining work life as a result of VR services)

Year	Value
2008	$105,489
2007	$99,597
2006	$100,401
2005	$82,380
2004	$80,160
2003	$77,942

→ better

Fig. 7.3-5

Taxpayer Payback Cost/Benefit Ratio
(How much each rehabilitated client will pay back in taxes for each dollar spent on his/her VR services)

Year	Value
2008	$3.20
2007	$3.17
2006	$3.16
2005	$2.89
2004	$2.99
2003	$2.80

→ better

Fig. 7.3-6

Number of Years Required to Repay Cost
(The average number of years for a rehabilitated client to repay through taxes the cost of his or her VR services)

Year	Value
2008	5.63
2007	4.98
2006	5.37
2005	5.44
2004	5.54
2003	5.65

← better

Fig. 7.3-7

Annual Rate of Return
(The percentage rate of return by dividing the annual return per client by the average cost per rehabilitation)

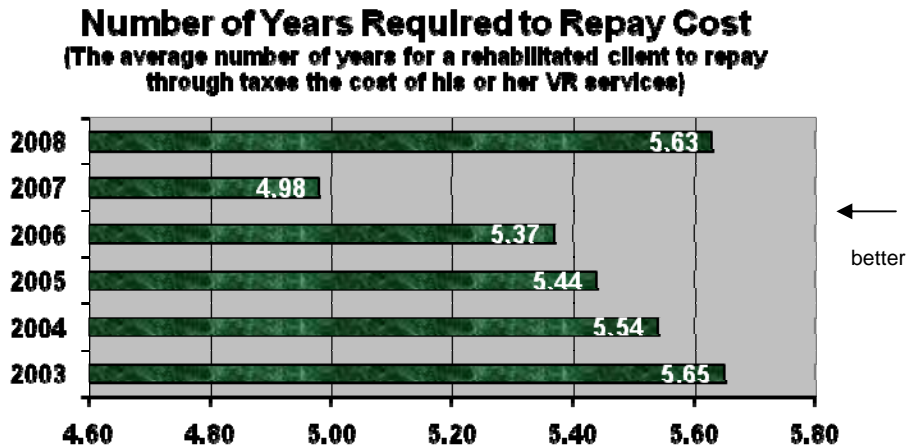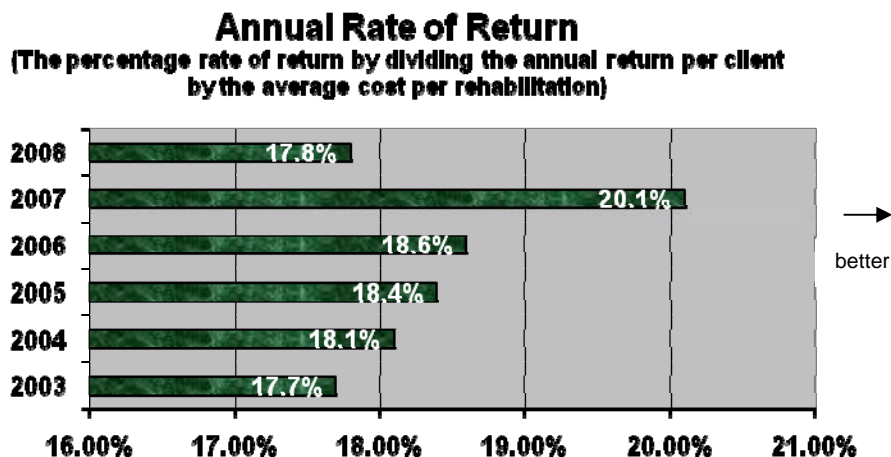| Year	Value
2008	17.8%
2007	20.1%
2006	18.6%
2005	18.4%
2004	18.1%
2003	17.7%

→ better

Fig. 7.3-8
WORK TRAINING CENTER REVENUES

Partnerships with South Carolina's businesses and industries through more than 450 outsource agreements provide job readiness training opportunities for clients. The agreements generate revenues for SCVRD's 24 work training centers. Some of the revenues are used as stipends for the clients who work on the contracts. The remainder is used for raw materials, supplies and other operating expenses. With the assistance of additional business development specialists who market the centers to industries, revenues have increased each of the past *five* years *($18.2 million in FY2008)*.
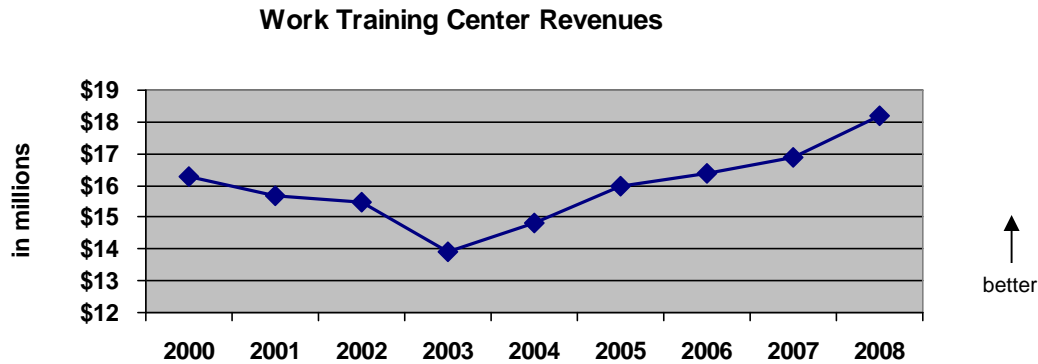
Work Training Center Revenues

Fig. 7.3-9
NUMBER OF SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY RECIPIENTS REHABILITATED

SCVRD has placed an emphasis on returning Social Security disability benefits recipients (SSI and SSDI) to the workplace to enhance their ability to become independent of benefits and gain financial self-sufficiency. The agency has set goals for closing these recipients as successfully rehabilitated.
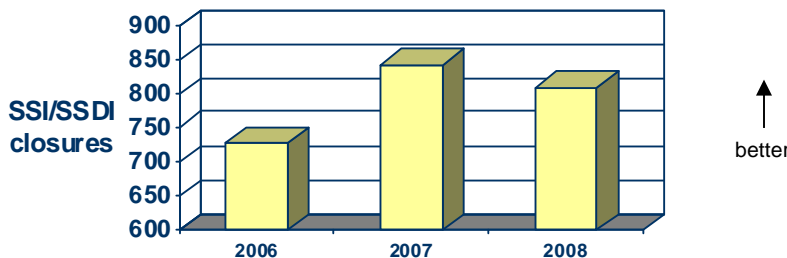

Fig. 7.3-10
ALTERNATIVE FUNDING

A strategic objective is identification and acquisition of alternative funding sources. Current sources include:

YES Program (school-to-work transition)	**U.S. Dept. of Education/OSERS**	**$1.8 million**
Literacy and Employment Outcome	**U.S. Dept. of Education/OSERS**	**$949,750**
South Carolina Telework Program	**U.S. Dept. of Education/RSA**	**$957,860**
SSI/SSDI Reimbursements for Job Placements	**Social Security Administration**	**$1,002,252***
Work Incentive Planning & Assistance Project	**Social Security Administration**	**$600,000**
S.C. Assistive Technology Loan Program	**U.S. Dept. of Education/RSA**	**$542,285**
High School/High Tech	**S.C. Dept. of Commerce**	**$400,000**
Pendleton Workforce Grant	**S.C. Dept. of Commerce**	**$200,000**
Upper Savannah Grant	**S.C. Dept. of Commerce**	**$200,000**

this reimbursement changes from year to year based on SSI/SSDI closures. Figure shown is FY2008.

7.4 Workforce-Focused Outcomes

EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING SURVEY

SCVRD has implemented a well-being survey that tracks employee job satisfaction rates. The survey includes 16 questions and is tracked by location and by position type. Satisfaction rates statewide (scale of 1 to 5):
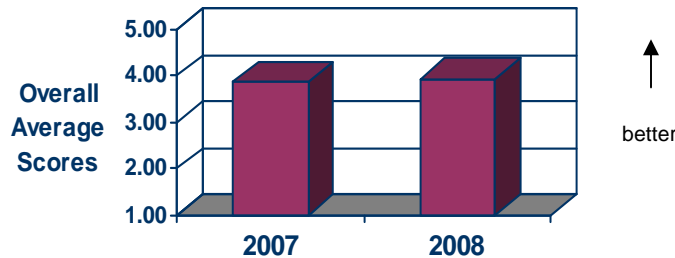
STAFF RETENTION

SCVRD has consistently retained employees at a better rate than other S.C. state agencies and national average for state and local governments. The one exception was 2006 when SCVRD had an unusually high number of retirements due to the TERI program (which had been anticipated and prepared for through PDLP).
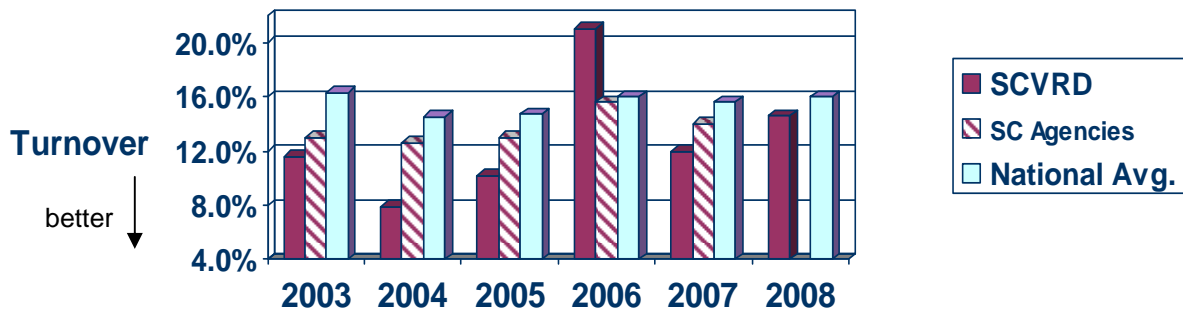
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

The department provides its staff with a variety of training opportunities to address disability-specific issues as well as work strategies and skills, ethics, customer service, diversity, technology and other areas of professional development. In recent years the department has utilized videoconferencing to efficiently make training available to more staff members.

SCVRD Training Events

Total Training Participants*
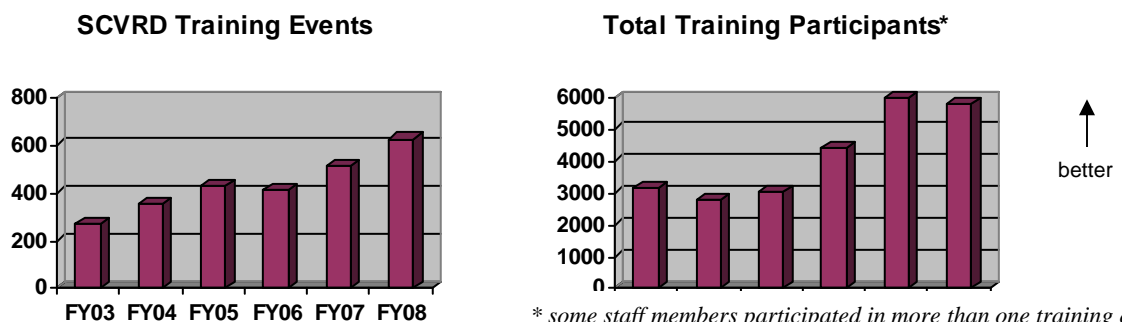
* some staff members participated in more than one training event.

Fig. 7.4-4

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (PDLP)

The Professional Development and Leadership Program (PDLP) continues to develop staff for future opportunities within the department. This program is designed to prepare staff for future agency needs while providing them with opportunities for professional growth, development, and career enhancement. These employees participate in this program voluntarily while still maintaining their current job responsibilities. Participants are managing work projects as part of the program which serve as on-the-job leadership opportunities for the participants while at the same time assisting the department with some aspect of organizational performance enhancement or process improvement.

Of the 20 graduates in April 2007, 19 have now received promotions.

PDLP

► **20 employees graduated in April 2007 from** *Supervision, Management, Leadership* **level**

► **62 completed basic level** *Professional Development*

► **56 now in intermediate level** *Professional Development*

► **71 participants have received promotions**

Fig. 7.4-5

EXPERIENCE MODIFIER

A key business result for safety and risk management is the Experience Modifier (EMOD) measurement. SCVRD seeks to enhance the environment for its employees and clients by reducing accidents in its facilities, which in turn accomplishes a cost savings in workers' compensation premiums.

SCVRD's recent safety performance has resulted in a significantly reduced average EMOD (1.29) for FY2008. ***This will result in a reduction of $210,000 in the agency's workers' compensation premiums.*** This decrease in premium is in spite of continued increases in medical costs nationwide.
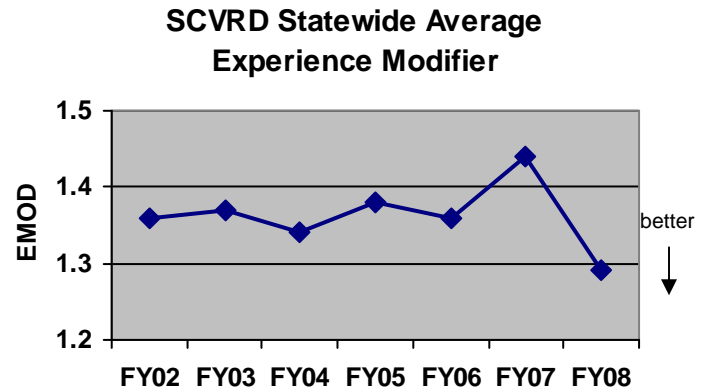
SCVRD Statewide Average Experience Modifier

Fig. 7.4-6

WORKFORCE INJURY RATES

The agency's safety and risk management specialist conducts safety audits at least biennially at all locations. Safety teams throughout the state also monitor conditions and make suggestions to improve safety for clients and staff. In FY2007 the department's staff and paid training center clients experienced a lower rate of injuries than the national industry rates.

Client Trainee Injury Rate

Employee Injury Rate
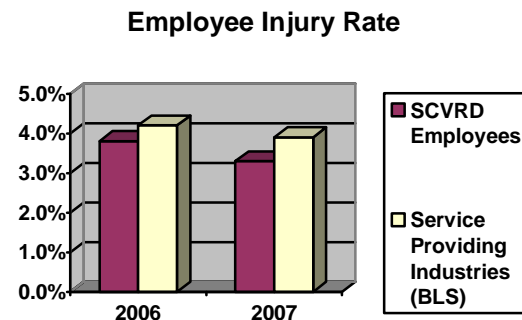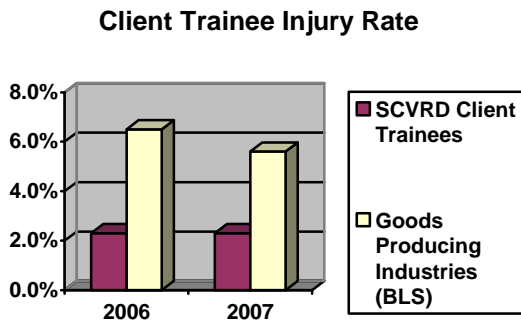
7.5 Organizational Effectiveness/Operational Efficiency Results

Fig. 7.5-1
PROGRAM INTEGRITY RESULTS

Program Integrity, a model developed by SCVRD, is a key strategic objective which measures the balance in performance among three areas vital to the agency's success—compliance with federal regulations and agency policy, customer service and satisfaction measures, and productivity based on federally mandated standards and indicators. This index is a key indicator of the success of operational processes and is used to drive continuous improvement. The electronic case management system flags gaps in service provision process and can identify them by caseload or location. These rankings can be as specific as one caseload or area office and as broad as the statewide performance shown here.
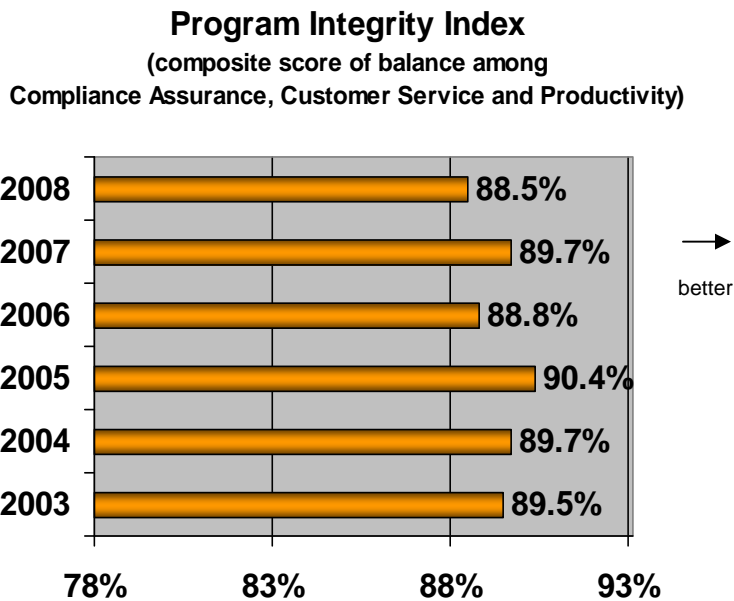
Program Integrity Index
(composite score of balance among
Compliance Assurance, Customer Service and Productivity)

Year	Value
2008	88.5%
2007	89.7%
2006	88.8%
2005	90.4%
2004	89.7%
2003	89.5%

→ better

78%   83%   88%   93%

Fig. 7.5-2
WORK TRAINING CENTER PRODUCTIVITY RATE

Standard of Excellence #3 is balance in the department's 24 work training centers, which provide job readiness training for clients and outsource work for hundreds of businesses and industries throughout the state. The productivity rate formula balances business indicators with client service program indicators.
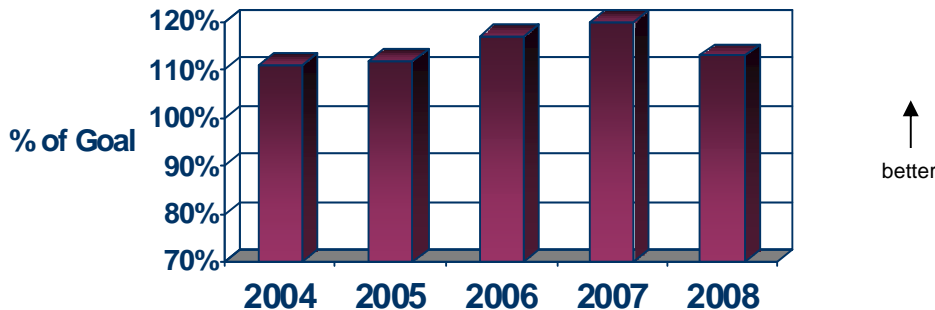
% of Goal

120%
110%
100%
90%
80%
70%

2004   2005   2006   2007   2008

↑ better

Fig. 7.5-3

STREAMLINING OF PROCESSES TO ENHANCE DIRECT CLIENT SERVICE

The department's technological advancement in streamlining service delivery has enabled it to centralize some job functions. In turn this has helped the agency redirect local area personnel from administrative tasks to more direct client service. For example, procurement has been centralized, with a state office unit handling all procurement rather than having a separate procurement specialist in each area office. The same can be said for psychological services, now centralized in a two-person unit in the Evaluation Center.

Most accounting duties have been centralized. The result is more consistent, compliant services and the ability to add positions back into the area office teams for direct client service, with a focus on serving those with the most challenging needs such as brain injury, spinal cord injury, and mental illness.
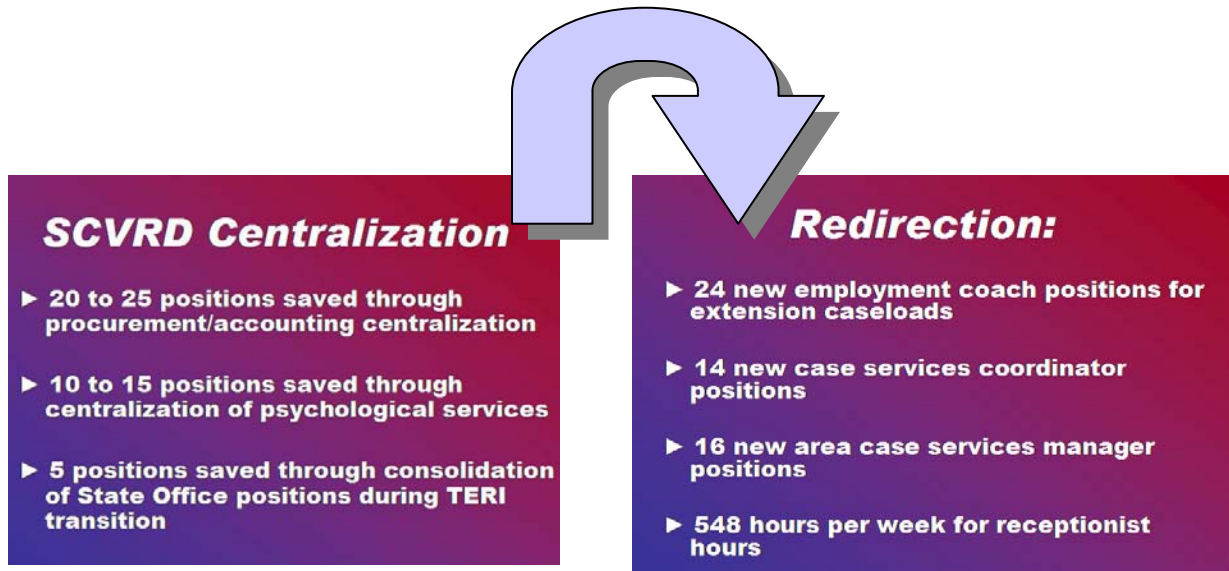

SCVRD Centralization
- ▶ 20 to 25 positions saved through procurement/accounting centralization
- ▶ 10 to 15 positions saved through centralization of psychological services
- ▶ 5 positions saved through consolidation of State Office positions during TERI transition

Redirection:
- ▶ 24 new employment coach positions for extension caseloads
- ▶ 14 new case services coordinator positions
- ▶ 16 new area case services manager positions
- ▶ 548 hours per week for receptionist hours

Fig. 7.5-4

CYCLE TIME FOR SUCCESSFULLY REHABILITATED CLIENTS

The most recent RSA statistics (FY2006) for mean time spent in the VR program for clients with employment outcomes show that SCVRD ranked **#3 nationally in shortest cycle time (16.5 months) for clients to achieve employment.** Nevada was ranked first. Mississippi was second in the Southeast region at 17 months.
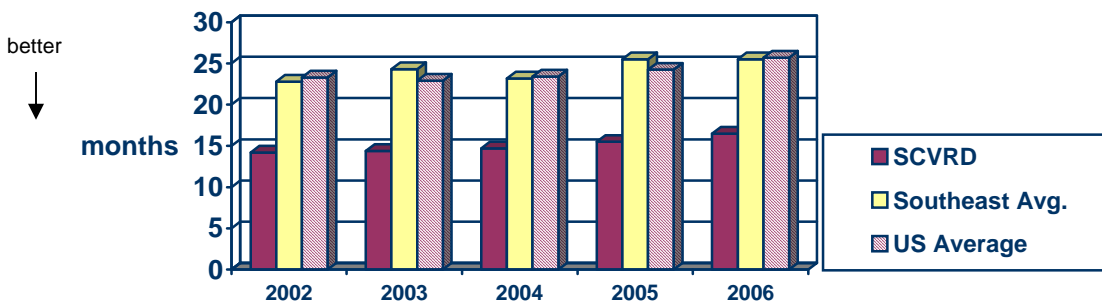
7.6 Regulatory/Legal Compliance/Community Support

ETHICAL BEHAVIOR/STAKEHOLDER TRUST

The department has not in recent history had an employee grievance case reach the state employee grievance committee for action.

In its "Annual Report on Appeals Process" to the RSA, U.S. Department of Education, the department reported no new requests for mediation with SCVRD clients during the year and no disputes needing resolution in an impartial hearing process (formal administrative review). The client relations specialist, staff attorney, human resources department, commissioner's office and the Client Assistance Program (CAP) in the Governor's office work closely together to ensure ethical and fair treatment of agency clients before extreme measures would become necessary. The chart below shows that a high percentage of complaints against SCVRD by clients through CAP or other means are resolved by telephone/email without the need for a meeting. Despite the large number of clients served (more than 40,000 per year) the number of complaints registered with the client relations specialist has averaged only 120 per year during this span.
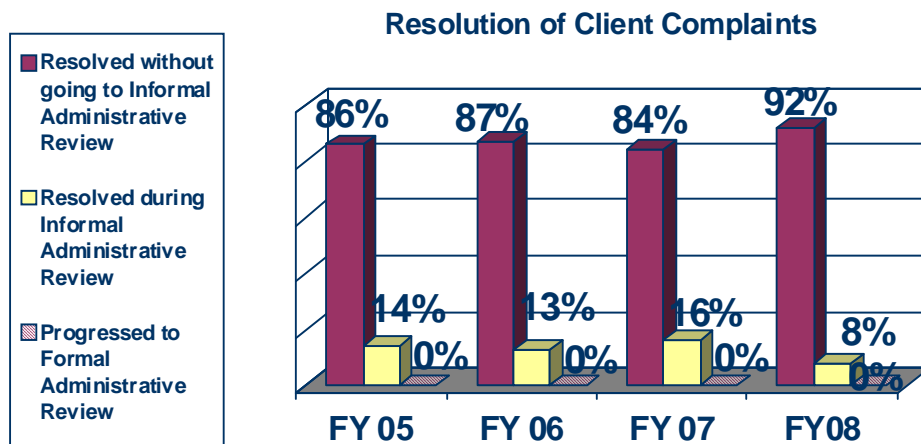
Resolution of Client Complaints

- Resolved without going to Informal Administrative Review
- Resolved during Informal Administrative Review
- Progressed to Formal Administrative Review

	FY 05	FY 06	FY 07	FY08
Resolved without going to Informal Administrative Review	86%	87%	84%	92%
Resolved during Informal Administrative Review	14%	13%	16%	8%
Progressed to Formal Administrative Review	0%	0%	0%	0%

FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The department must adhere to budgeting and procurement codes, building codes, and various other state and federal regulations that any government agency would be subject to. Fiscal accountability is established through internal and external audits. Financial audits are conducted annually by the State Auditor's office and any findings are addressed through corrective actions. Procurement audits, conducted by the state every three years, are extremely favorable. The most recent benefits audit has been very positive as a result of the department adding involvement from the finance department to serve as a "check and balance."
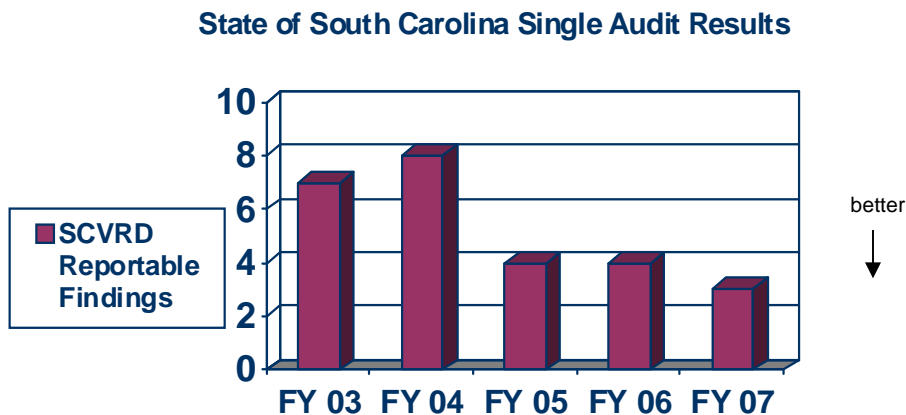
State of South Carolina Single Audit Results

better ↓

- SCVRD Reportable Findings

	FY 03	FY 04	FY 05	FY 06	FY 07
SCVRD Reportable Findings	7	8	4	4	3

Fig. 7.6-3
COMPLIANCE

A thorough Rehabilitation Services Administration (SCVRD's regulatory agency) review was conducted in February 2005. The agency received the final report of that review in December 2005. Three areas were identified as being out of compliance and requiring corrective action. These were addressed in a corrective action plan submitted in February 2006 and revised in May 2006. Satisfactory conclusion of the corrective action plan was achieved on schedule in March 2007.

Compliance assurance comprises one-third of the Program Integrity Index. The department has a strong compliance record covering several years. However, further improvements are a priority and the agency has a long-range plan to centralize compliance assurance.
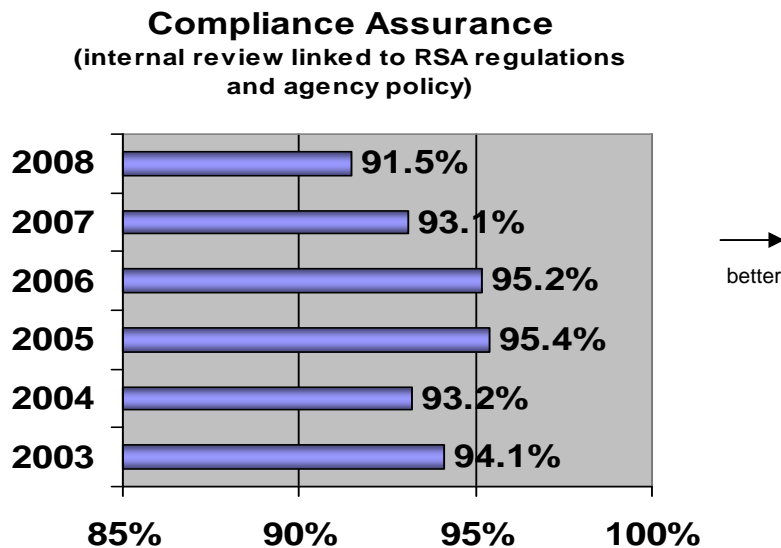
Compliance Assurance
(internal review linked to RSA regulations and agency policy)

Year	Value
2008	91.5%
2007	93.1%
2006	95.2%
2005	95.4%
2004	93.2%
2003	94.1%

better →

Fig. 7.6-4

COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

SCVRD has strong relationships with key state agencies and disability-related organizations in communities throughout the state, as required by the Nine Standards of Excellence. Staff members are assigned to maintain relationships and be involved in the organizations' initiatives, and SCVRD offers grants to associations for conferences when employment is a topic. SCVRD participates in the state's emergency preparedness plan by providing personnel and equipment in the event of an emergency, especially in the areas of crisis counseling and transportation.

The department has increased its collaborative efforts with private, non-profit organizations to expand its services to people with significant disabilities.

Community involvement is essential for SCVRD area supervisors and their staff. These contacts allow staff to spread the word about programs and encourage partnerships with businesses. Through involvement in local chamber of commerce activities, legislative delegations, Rotary groups and other community organizations, SCVRD staff members consistently form bonds within their communities that lead to employment for clients and outsourcing agreements with companies for work training centers.

The agency is also quite active in community assistance projects. Food is collected year round for Harvest Hope Food Bank. Other activities include participation in The United Way; Salvation Army; Red Cross blood drives; The Good Health Appeal; Prevention Partner Wellness Walks; Walk for Breast Cancer; adopted family efforts during the holidays; Lunch-n-Learn workshops on subjects such as hearing loss, anger management, and brain injury; Heart Healthy Month; Red Dress Days; National Disability Employment Awareness Month and National Disability Mentoring Day.

The department has won statewide community-based awards for its wellness activities, such as the Prevention Partner Award for Excellence in 2005 and a 2007 Bronze Award from "Eat Smart Move More South Carolina."