

AGENCY NAME:	South Carolina Commission for the Blind		
AGENCY CODE:	L24	SECTION:	



Fiscal Year 2014-15 Accountability Report

SUBMISSION FORM

AGENCY MISSION	The mission of the South Carolina Commission for the Blind is to provide quality, individualized vocational rehabilitation services, independent living services, and prevention of blindness services to blind and visually impaired consumers leading to competitive employment and social and economic independence.
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Please identify your agency's preferred contacts for this year's accountability report.

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>Email</u>
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I have reviewed and approved the enclosed FY 2014-15 Accountability Report, which is complete and accurate to the extent of my knowledge.

AGENCY DIRECTOR <i>(SIGN/DATE):</i>	
<i>(TYPE/PRINT NAME):</i>	James M. Kirby
BOARD/CMSN CHAIR <i>(SIGN/DATE):</i>	
<i>(TYPE/PRINT NAME):</i>	Peter Smith

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AGENCY’S DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Our Consumers

A lack of employment opportunities continues to prevent large numbers of individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired from becoming self-sufficient and fully participating in society. Nationally representative data shows that employment rates among individuals aged 16 to 64 who are blind or visually impaired are around 31%, as compared with 75% employment among people without disabilities according to research completed by The National Research and Training Center for Blindness & Low Vision. The Bureau of Labor and the U.S. Census department also conduct surveys to identify persons with disabilities. Their surveys show that approximately 3.5 million people in the United States have a serious visual condition and over 65,000 reside in South Carolina.

The South Carolina Commission for the Blind is the primary service provider in South Carolina for the visually impaired population and provides case management, referral services, and guidance and counseling as well as independent living services. Consumers of the agency receive blindness skills training from vision rehabilitation teachers, orientation and mobility instructors, assistive technology specialists, and other professionals trained to provide services to persons who are blind or visually impaired. These services are primarily provided on campus at the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center in Columbia but also occur in consumer homes, communities, and workplaces. We also rely on community partners in rural areas to assist in providing services to our consumers who reside considerable distances from our office locations throughout the state. Consumers also receive employment-related training, job-related technology and tools, placement services, and, if needed, postemployment services, all coordinated through Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The past year was a difficult one for the Commission as we struggled with staff turnover that created numerous vacancies for long periods of time. SCCB has high standards for staff as it is our belief that highly qualified, well-trained staff is necessary to achieve our vision. Over the past several years we have worked with our counselors to assist them in obtaining the education necessary to pass the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor exam and assisting with payment for renewal of certification. We have adjusted our pay scales to attract more qualified counselors with this certification as well. A new objective for our Human Resource and Senior Leadership team is to reduce the amount of time necessary to fill a vacant position by utilizing a variety of recruitment tools such as resume searching on reputable job seeker websites and reaching out to potential candidates. At this time several positions have recently been filled, including a program director, a senior supervisor, and a new director for the Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center. While the agency had some struggles with an almost 50% counselor vacancy rate the successful closures came in 87% of the projected goal. We believe that maintaining the high qualification standards for our counselors contributed to this success. At this time the counselor vacancy has been reduced to 30% with filling those vacancies a priority to be completed by December 31, 2015. We have implemented new software in the Business Enterprise Program, restructured our new staff orientation training, and created new strategic goals to improve communication and teamwork across the agency. The agency atmosphere is one of positivity towards growth not only in our program and services, but as a statewide team of committed and dedicated professionals with a passion for helping South Carolinians with visual impairments to lead independent and productive lifestyles.

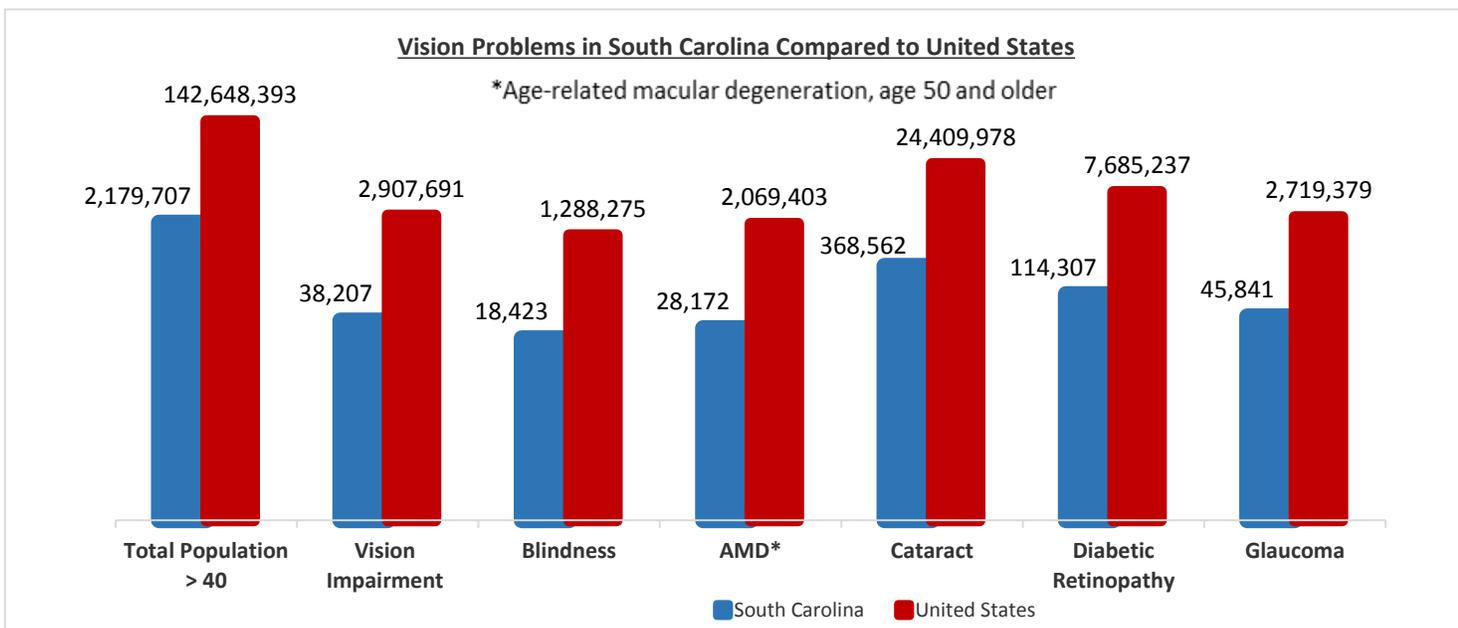
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Vocational Rehabilitation Services

South Carolina Commission for the Blind employs 16 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. All of our counselors hold Master level degrees and are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors or qualified to sit for the CRC exam as they have completed the education and experience requirements. The counselors are specifically trained to work with consumers to identify their individual skills, employment goals, and any limitations or impediments to employment. Once the counselor and consumer have identified a goal and determined the impediments, they work together to select the services that will assist the consumer in reaching not only an employment goal, but also the highest level of self-sufficiency possible based on his/her unique situation. Counselors also work with employers to remove stigmas that are attached to Blindness and educate the business community on the abilities of persons with visual impairments. Utilizing all of the programs available at SCCB, as well as community partners and vendors, the counselor provides the consumer with the tools necessary to obtain and maintain integrated, competitive employment in the community. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program served 1381 visually impaired South Carolinians during FY 2014/15. With a goal of reaching out to rural areas and the priority of filling all vacancies by December 31, 2015, it is expected that VR will provide services to an additional 100 consumers this year. We are remaining conservative in our estimate as it will take time to train new counselors and reach out to rural communities to identify those who are eligible for the program.

A Growing Population

Many serious visual impairments are age related, translating into South Carolinians 55 and older who have the desire to live independently but do not want to return to the workforce. The South Carolina State Plan shows a significant growth of the older population from 2000 to 2010 of over 30%. The chart below is data collected by the Prevent Blindness America Association to demonstrate the need for services to the aging population. SCCB Older Blind Program has seen the increase in a need for services as referrals for this program were significantly higher than the projected goal with a 58% increase over FY2013/14. Services provided to this population include Low Vision exams, low vision aids such as magnifiers and home aids to assist with independent living, and orientation and mobility training to allow for greater movement within their home and community.



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Early intervention

Studies show that 80% of early learning is done visually. For over 450,000 children with visual impairments in this country future success is often dependent upon receiving services as early as possible so they are equipped with the necessary tools and skills to achieve success. We partner with community agencies across the state who serve the preschool and elementary age children with disabilities. Providing this early intervention for children with visual impairments is crucial to not only educational success, but also to the level of social success as they progress through the mainstream school system. SCCB provides Children’s Services to families with children 3 to 14 who meet eligibility criteria for visual impairments. There were 32 new referrals received in FY2014 with more than 50% opened as active cases to receive services.

A Focus on the Youth Population

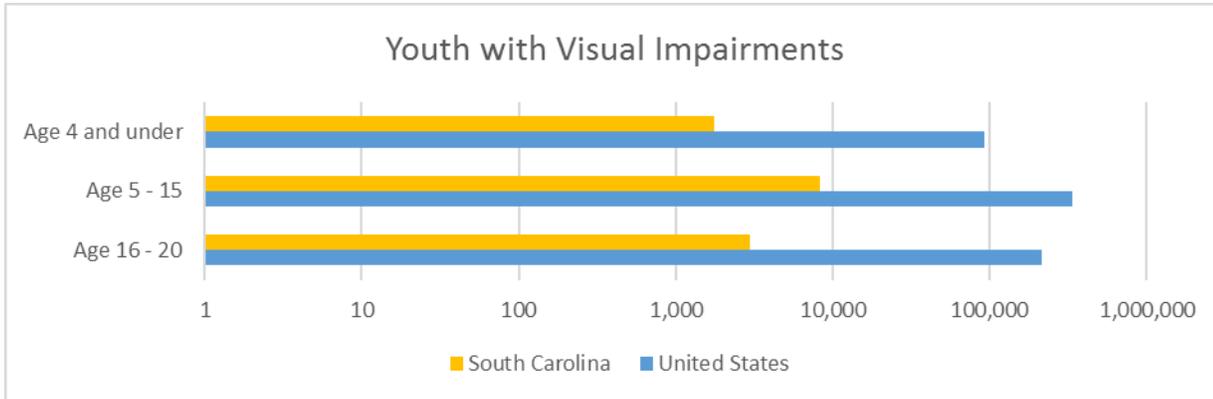
The Rehabilitation Services Administration has recognized the importance of increasing services to the younger population and engaging them in employment related activities while still in high school. The Workforce Investment Opportunity Act has recently been revised and challenges agencies to develop specific programs in this area. SCCB has doubled the number of counselors assigned to this population and is working diligently with South Carolina high schools to provide greater opportunities for youth with visual impairments. The Ellen Beach Mack Rehabilitation Center is home to our Summer Teen program where consumers who are at least 16 years old and still enrolled in high school live at the center for 4 weeks. While in residence they receive intensive training to obtain the necessary skills for living independently after graduation from high school. The curriculum includes work experience, career exploration, orientation & mobility, home management, manual arts instruction, Braille, education about their visual impairments and adjustment counseling, as well as leisure activities. The program is designed to teach young consumers how to have a positive outlook on their future and provide the tools to lead a full and productive lifestyle with a visual impairment. During FY2014/15 we saw 10 South Carolina teenagers with significant visual impairments complete the program and take the next step towards independence. To meet the RSA challenges the Vocational Rehabilitation Services team is diligently designing a Work Skills program to be implemented over the next year that targets the youth with visual impairments population. The goal is to not only increase employment for youth but also to encourage further education and the benefits of a rewarding career versus making a life on disability benefits alone. This program will not only target youth still in high school, but will also be available to assist those under age 21 who either left school before graduating or graduated but now have no prospect for employment or education due to their visual impairment and lack of vocational skills. While we have set a goal to increase the number of consumers in this population for both employment and education, we have kept the growth conservative at 30% for the first year as we train new staff and implement a new program. We do anticipate continued growth in future years as we reach out to rural and underserved areas of the state. The chart below demonstrates the prevalence of visual impairment based on the American Community Survey completed by the U.S. Census Bureau.

United States--2013

Age 16 - 20	212,500
Age 5 - 15	338,600
Age 4 and under	93,200

South Carolina--2013

Age 16 - 20	2990
Age 5 - 15	8219
Age 4 and under	1749



Technology equals Independence

Living with a visual impairment at any age requires the ability to do many daily activities differently than a sighted person. Imagine not being able to read your mail or even prescription bottles without assistance. An older consumer may only need a high power magnifier or hand held device that allows them to adjust light and color to resolve this problem and remain independent. However a young college student with a visual impairment may need a handheld device that can provide an audio version of the textbooks and a computer with software to read emails and online coursework to them. A simple cell phone can now provide applications that identify money, objects, and even map out walking directions in audio. Speech to text technology allows modern day dictation to take notes or even write reports and papers. There are tools for the home that include talking clocks, timers, and medical necessities such as talking blood pressure and glucose monitors. Technology has become very instrumental in allowing people with visual conditions to reach levels of independence, education, and participate in activities that were once out of their reach.

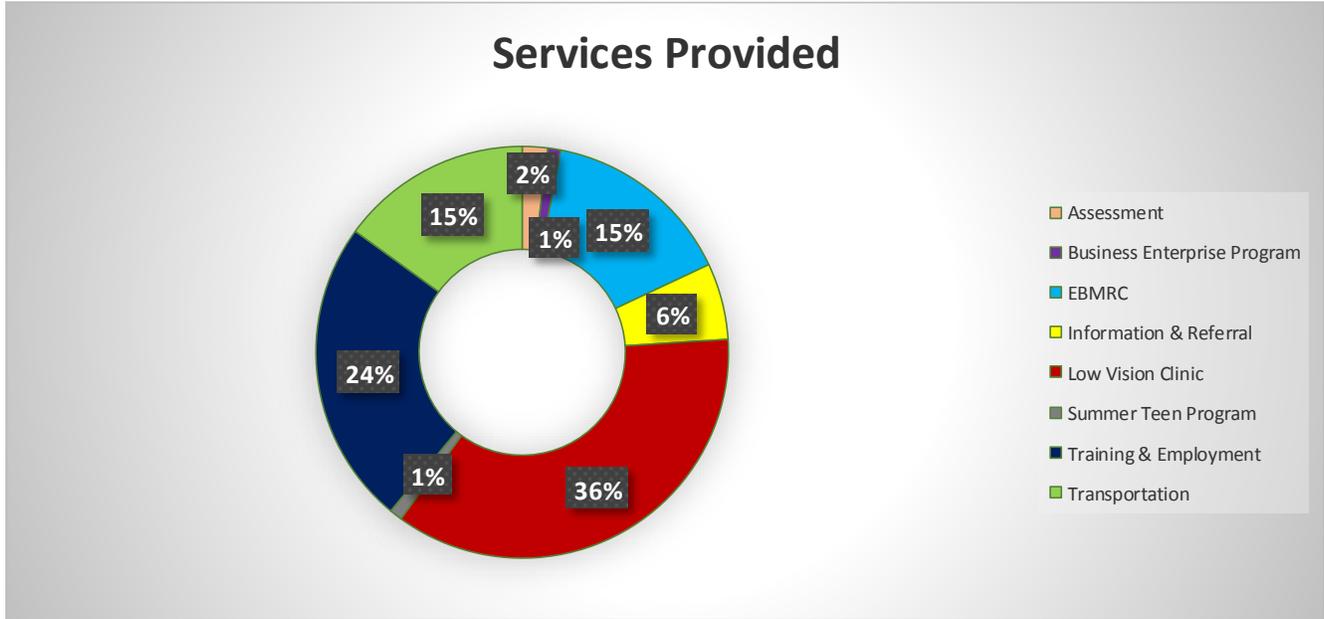
SCCB fully embraces this technology with a well-equipped, up-to-date computer lab where consumers participate in learning computer programs and how to operate assistive devices on the job and in their homes. Technology training is often the difference between a consumer living independently or being reliant on others for day to day tasks. Consumers receive training that will assist them in obtaining competitive employment along with placement assistance from employment counselors. Staff in this department participates annually in trainings to maintain updated skills as software programs are frequently updated. Community relations is also key to the success of the employment counselors and they work daily to build and maintain professional relationships within the business community. A few of our most notable community partners are Blue Cross Blue Shield, Verizon, and Goodwill. The Training & Education program served 280 consumers in FY2014/15.

Entrepreneur Opportunity

SCCB also maintains a Business Enterprise Program where individuals who are legally blind can become independent entrepreneurs of a BEP food service facility. The program is in compliance with the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, most recently amended in 1974 to provide priority options for the Blind to operate vending or food service facilities on federal and other properties. The scope of a facility varies from a small vending machine route to operating the primary food service facility at the nearby Fort Jackson military base. The qualification and training programs are very intensive but the rewards for the consumer are limitless upon completion as they become self-employed and control their own earning potential. During FY2014/15, 75% of the consumers who completed the full 16-week in depth-training and certification program were placed in a facility where they are now self-employed. During the past year this program implemented a new software system to assist in tracking the performance of each facility as well as allowing counselors to maintain cases

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electronically which provides greater efficiency as much of their work is done in the field and not in the office. BEP also participated in events within South Carolina as well as in Washington, DC and Texas. Three facilities were renovated during this year and in response to heightened national health awareness, facilities are offering a greater number of healthy choices to their customers. BEP continues to provide support and ongoing training to facility vendors.



Behind the Front Line

Internally SCCB is strengthening their Information Technology, Quality Assurance, and Human Resource programs to provide greater communication, security, consistency, and quality for all of our staff. An internal server was recently initialized to allow the SCCB Information Technology team to maintain a secure online environment for SCCB. Storing the information on the Columbia campus allows more control over security and reduces the risk of confidential information being accessed by unauthorized users. At this time the process of moving the AWARE recordkeeping system to the internal server is also being explored. I.T. maintains 100% compliance with the external host for AWARE and Human Resources.

The Human Resource department of South Carolina Commission for the Blind is also diligently working to provide greater training opportunities for staff, resources for consumers, and closing the lengthy gap between a vacancy occurring and filling the position. A new orientation program has been implemented where each member of the senior leadership team presents a brief overview of their program during orientation. This provides new staff with a personal introduction to each key member of the organization. HR is also working to shorten the time required to fill a vacant position. Utilizing online resources that allow HR staff to search resumes and reach out to potential candidates with an invitation to apply for an open position at SCCB. Training opportunities for staff are being increased by utilizing free trainings provided by Hadley School for the Blind and the National Research and Training Institute on Blindness and Low Vision. This will allow staff to provide a higher quality service to consumers and also to earn credits for certification renewal for staff with certifications, all at no cost to the agency. The agency also assists certified staff from the financial perspective of obtaining and maintaining professional certification. Implementation of recruiting procedures that includes utilizing online job

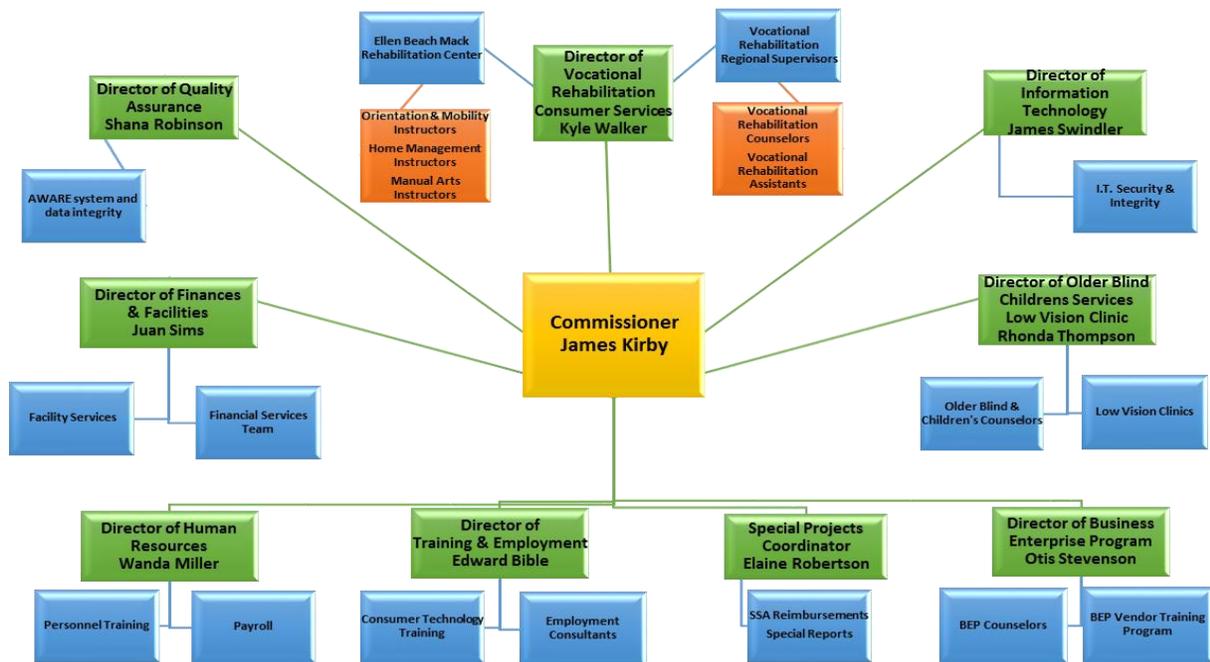
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search engines to review posted resumes and initiate contact with potential candidates has reduced the current vacancy rate to 18% for the agency statewide. This reduction in vacancies will provide the opportunity for SCCB to achieve the goals for each program and reach out to a greater number of South Carolinians with visual impairments.

The Leadership

Overall the South Carolina Commission for the Blind is emerging from a difficult period with a strong leadership team and highly qualified staff to have a strong FY2015/16. Together the team has set priorities of filling vacancies and improving communication. The monthly performance measurement meetings will illustrate any areas that may be having difficulty and as a team, troubleshooting can provide the tools to finding solutions and making the necessary adjustments. The dedication of this team will also bring a sense of unification for all staff which will create a strong agency to provide exemplary services to empower all South Carolinians struggling with a visual impairment to obtain and maintain the highest level of independence possible.

Senior Management Team & Responsibilities



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							Strategic Planning Template
Type	Item #			Description			
	Goal	Strat	Object				
G	1			Deliver quality, individualized vocational rehabilitation services that will assist Blind and visually impaired individuals in obtaining or maintaining competitive employment.			
S		1.1		Increase the number of consumers served by the vocational rehabilitation program.			
O			1.1.1	Increase public awareness of SCCB services to the unserved and underserved minorities and rural counties with media distribution by June 2016.			
O			1.1.2	Expand outreach services to unserved and underserved rural counties based on data received from Statewide Assessment in March 2016			
O			1.1.3	Develop a commensurate ratio of consumer to provider on all caseloads to ensure expediency of service in all areas by June 2016.			
S		1.2		Increase successful placements and closures in competitive, integrated employment for all consumers.			
O			1.2.1	Provide adjustment to blindness, assistive technology, and job readiness training consistently at EBMRC and in outreach locations with new curriculum by September 2016.			
O			1.2.2	Expand job search, development, and placement opportunities by requiring all Employment Consultants to make 10 new contacts each month by September 2016.			
O			1.2.3	Increase successful placement rate for youth consumers aged 14 to 21 and consumers requiring supported employment services with 3 new placements by September 2016.			
O			1.2.4	Increase the number of successful case closures with a goal of 175 by September 2016.			
G	2			Provide services to assist eligible consumers who are not seeking employment to maintain the highest level of self-sufficiency possible.			
S		2.1		Develop and maintain consistent and quality individualized service plans.			
O			2.1.1	Increase community interaction through home visits and developing new referral sources in unserved and underserved rural counties with creation of 5 new community partners annually beginning September 2016.			
O			2.1.2	Collaborate with nonprofit, social, and human service organizations to provide early intervention services and increase referrals to 35 per year beginning September 2016.			
G	3			Provide the administrative leadership to build a strong team that will strive to fulfill the agency mission.			
S		3.1		Create a diversified, highly qualified workforce with the administrative leadership necessary to ensure accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency.			
O			3.1.1	Develop a process to recruit highly qualified candidates and heighten employee satisfaction to increase retention and implement by September 2016.			
O			3.1.2	Provide staff development training opportunities by creating a training database to improve employee's skills and provide up-to-date information to consumers by September 2016.			
O			3.1.3	Strengthen the communication among the leadership team to create a consistent flow of information to staff by conducting monthly progress meetings for the team beginning October 2015.			

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Performance Measurement Template

Item Performance Measure		Last Value	Current Value	Target Value	Time Applicable	Data Source and Availability Reporting Freq.		Calculation Method	Associated Objective(s)
1	Increase referrals from unserved and underserved areas of South Carolina.	889	680	1008	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated from referral information data entered into AWARE.	1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.2.4
2	Increase open Supported Employment cases from 9 to 11.	8	9	11	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated from employment information data entered into AWARE by counselors.	1.1.1; 1.2.1; 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4
3	Expand existing cooperative agreements in rural and underserved areas to increase consumers served in all programs by 10%.	2115	2052	2155	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated from information entered into AWARE system by Training & Employment staff.	1.1.2; 1.2.4
4	Create a baseline caseload size for consumer to provider ratio for optimum service delivery with lowest stress and highest quality.	New program	VR Counselor—49 OB Counselor—64 CS Counselor—41 A.T. Instructor—11 A.T. Specialist—18 Employment Consultant—51 Braille Instructor—6 Home Management Instructor—14 Manual Arts instructor—14 O & M Instructor--6 BEP counselor—21 Interpersonal Competency--12	VR Counselor— 60 to 75 OB Counselor—55 CS Counselor— 40 A.T. Instructor— 15 A.T. Specialist—20 Employment Consultant—40 Braille Instructor—12 Home Management Instructor—18 Manual Arts instructor—18 O & M Instructor--6 BEP counselor—17 Interpersonal Competency--18	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated from AWARE data and management research of nationwide case sizes based on best practice methods.	1.1.3; 1.2.4

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Performance Measurement Template

Item Performance Measure		Last Value	Current Value	Target Value	Time Applicable	Data Source and Availability Reporting Freq. Calculation Method Associated Objective(s)			
5	Maintain all Business Enterprise facilities at 100% compliance with state and federal regulations.	100%	100%	100%	October 1 - September 30	LIBERA Case Management system	Annually	Calculated from site visit data entered into LIBERA by BEP staff after mandatory 10 visits per year to BEP facilities.	1.2.1
6	Utilize consumer satisfaction survey data to evaluate quality of service delivery.	VR—90% OB—91%	VR—85% OB—91%	VR—100% OB—100%	October 1 - September 30	Quality Assurance tracking reports	Annually	Calculated from survey responses collected and tabulated by Quality Assurance Department.	1.1.3; 1.2.1; 1.2.4
7	Develop a minimum of 1 new business relationship per month across the state to increase consumer placements in competitive, integrated employment.	131	92	104	October 1 - September 30	Training & Employment data	Quarterly	Calculated from data collected by Training & Employment program director from mandatory 10 contacts per month for each Employment Counselor.	1.1.2; 1.2.2; 1.2.4
8	Increase employment placements for youth ages 14 to 21 after completion of Work Skills/Readiness Workshop.	New Program	New Program	10	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated by counselor data entry.	1.2.3; 1.2.4
9	Increase the number of youth ages 14 to 21 in higher education after completion of Work Skills/Readiness workshop.	New Program	New Program	70	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated by counselor data entry.	1.2.3; 1.2.4
10	Develop and implement Work Skills and Work Readiness workshops for youth consumers to increase youth employment or pursuit of higher education and to comply with RSA WIOA regulations. Track number of workshops conducted.	New program	New program	8	October 1 - September 30	VR Director monthly reports	Monthly	Calculated from workshop reports collected by VR supervisors monthly.	1.2.3; 1.2.4

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11	Conduct monthly random case reviews to monitor compliance with Rehabilitation Services Administration regulations.	New program	New program	100% compliance	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Monthly	Calculated from information entered into AWARE system by VR counselors.	1.2.4
12	Identify and engage community partners to assist in meeting the needs of the Older Blind consumers to increase successful closures.	291	361	362	October 1 - September 30	Older Blind Program quarterly report	Quarterly	Calculated from data collected by Older Blind Program manager based on contacts made by program staff.	2.1.1
13	Participate in statewide events focusing on Children's services to increase referrals for this program at SCCB.	25	32	35	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated from referral information data entered into AWARE.	2.1.2
14	Develop and maintain contact with early education programs and elementary schools statewide to increase eligible consumers in the Children's Services program.	112	92	93	October 1 - September 30	AWARE Case Management system	Quarterly	Calculated from eligibility information entered into AWARE case management system.	2.1.2
15	Utilize outreach services, job fairs, community events, and online resources to create a pool of highly qualified candidates to fill vacant positions in an efficient and expedient manner, reducing length of time positions are vacant.	New program	Average 180 days to fill vacant position.	90 days from vacancy occurring to filling position	October 1 - September 30	Human Resource Data Collection	Quarterly	Calculated from HR database with information entered as positions become vacant and then are filled.	1.2.4; 3.1.1
16	Create a staff training database to ensure highly qualified staff receives training to maintain credentials and all staff is knowledgeable on current best practice in their field of expertise.	New program	100% staff current on required trainings and credentials	100% staff current on required trainings and credentials	October 1 - September 30	Human Resource Data Collection	Quarterly	Calculated from staff training database and staff credential file maintained by HR to document all trainings completed by staff.	1.2.4; 3.1.2
17	Coordinate monthly Senior Leadership Team meetings to enforce accountability for each program on meeting Agency goals and Vision.	New program	New program	100% attendance by Senior Leadership Team each month	October 1 - September 30	Special Project Coordinator reports	Monthly	Attendance and reports collected at monthly leadership meetings to show progress towards goals set in Strategic Plan.	3.1.3

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Program Template

Program/Title	Purpose	FY 2013-14 Expenditures				FY 2014-15 Expenditures				Associated Objective(s)
		General	Other	Federal	TOTAL	General	Other	Federal	TOTAL	
Administration	Provides leadership and direction to administration, finance, information technology, and consumer services.	\$ 1,008,277	\$ 549		\$ 1,008,826	\$ 1,091,680	\$ 893	\$ -	\$ 1,092,573	3.1.2; 3.1.3
Rehabilitation Services	Provides individualized services leading to integrated competitive employment and highest level of self-sufficiency possible for each consumer.	\$ 1,340,002	\$ 59,994	\$ 5,966,742	\$ 7,366,738	\$ 1,384,972	\$ 83,021	\$ 6,006,159	\$ 7,474,151	1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 1.2.1; 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4
Older Blind	Provides individualized services to visually impaired South Carolinians who are 55 years or older that do not want to work but wish to remain independent.	\$ (25,799)	\$ 84,793	\$ 376,983	\$ 435,977	\$ 102,243	\$ 59,139	\$ 364,994	\$ 526,376	1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.1.1
Children's Services	Provides individualized services to visually impaired South Carolina children ages 3 to 13 to prepare them for greater independence and educational success.	\$ 114,312			\$ 114,312	\$ 82,985	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 82,985	1.1.1; 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 2.1.2
Employee Benefits	To attract and retain highly qualified staff in all programs.	\$ 280,628	\$ 98,791	\$ 996,862	\$ 1,376,281	\$ 315,713	\$ 13,629	\$ 957,581	\$ 1,286,923	3.1.1