**All State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency Call**

**3 – 4 p.m. EDT**

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Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the national All Vocational Rehabilitation Call. During the presentation, all participants will be in a listen only mode. Afterwards we will conduct a question and answer session. At that time if you have a question please press the star followed by the 1 on your telephone. If you need to reach an operator at any time please press star zero. As a reminder, this call is being recorded today, June 9, 2015.
I would now like to turn the conference over to Nate Arnold.

Nate Arnold: Thank you, operator. Good afternoon, everybody. I know you all probably thought you heard the last of me, but since Danielle is not available today, they called me up from the minors to pinch hit for her. We will not take too long with our updates because we do have a great presentation for you today. Dr. Joe Ashley is going to speak to you and Michelle about what it means to partnership plus opportunities that will hopefully be the bulk of our presentation.
In terms of cost reimbursement i have absolutely nothing but good news for you. Most of you probably know last month was a really good month for us here in terms of getting work back. I know you've probably heard me and Danielle say about how all the work that we did in terms of hiring great people and getting them trained last year has really started to pay off and we have really dug out of that backlog. We now only have about 2,000 cases pending. That's literally a third of where we were roughly this time last year. We're working may cases, the stuff that we're working on is much more current. You should be finding out about cases much sooner.
In terms of money, i think last month we, I know we broke the all-time record. It was a little over $29 million that went out of here in one month, which was really very impressive. Hopefully you are all enjoying that, getting new carpet for your offices or whatever you are doing with it.
But like I say, it was good, we're much more current, we're working may cases. If you have outstanding cases you have not heard about that are April or before then contact the help desk. They have been doing a really good job. I believe they are current and responding to all of your requests. If not, let us know and we will throw additional resources at that as well.
One other thing i did want to mention, we have received a number of inquiries, obviously everybody hears and reads the news and you heard about the hacking that apparently went on at the office of personnel management. We still don't know who all was impacted. As far as we know it is limited to just current and former federal employees. So it shouldn't be any concern as far as we can tell for any state VR personnel who, through the suitability process, provided personal information. If we hear anything different to that effect certainly we will be in touch with you right away.
I think with that we're going to get an update on the ticket portal so I will turn it over to Desiree Fitzgerald.

Desiree Fitzgerald: Hello, everyone. I can't believe we're already at June. We have been talking about it and talking about it and we're finally here and that's good news for two reasons: one because the new ticket portal is ready for prime time and will be letting people in this month, but also as we implement the new ticket portal we can use those same resources to automate the VR payment process, which means we can get your payments to you much quicker, your reimbursements much quicker. So hopefully next year this time or even before this time, we are aiming for April 1st -- that we will be coming to you with good news about VR payment automation. But for this particular June we have a lot of activity related to the new portal implementation.
And we put those dates into a calendar just so you will be able to reference the variety of things that are going to be coming your way to make sure you don't miss anything. We have something coming out today which is what you can expect message. And it will review for you things you need to do to get ready to use the portal if you haven't done that, but it will also tell you what's going to be happening next week and this coming week related to the portal.
Next Monday, the 15th, everyone who is already registered or enrolled for our portal, that would be those of you who have already had communication with someone here to give them your user id and your my SSA information so they can enroll you, if you have done that then you will be getting this message that comes out on the 15th and that message will give you further direction. It will give you the link to the portal as well as information about a secure log-in page where there will be a self-paced training module, an updated user guide -- well, new to y'all, updated for those who were on the pilot, but a new user guide and other aids.
So we hope that you will pay attention to your GovDelivery so you won't miss those messages, one coming out today and one coming out Monday, but as of Monday we consider the portal as having been implemented and of course we know there will be folks who are completing suitability or initiating it and also initiating and completing the my SSA, so on a daily basis we expect that we will be enrolling people as you are ready. But the big initial launch will be on the 15th. But don't let that discourage you if you are not ready, we have heard it takes about two or so weeks for the my SSA account, so if you start now you could be enrolled by the end of the month as well, assuming suitability has already been done. But either way, if you need any help from us, we are here to help.
Back to the calendar, as we implement the current portal we will be cutting off transactions in -- I’m sorry -- as we implement the new portal -- I don't want to confuse you -- we will be cutting off transactions in the secure portal you are still providing. You will still be able to use it for inquiries and reports if you want to, but in the new portal you won't have to. Otherwise, the inquiries and reports will still be available there, but the transactions will not. That's for the 16th.
You will see that on Wednesdays from June 17th through the end of July through Wednesday, the 29th of July, there will be orientation sessions. Those orientation sessions will basically give you an overview of the training material that's available to you and it will be an opportunity for you to ask questions and then have folks on the line who can help you get used to the new tools, so that will be a good opportunity. Those sessions will be repeatable, you wouldn't be making a commitment to all of those days.
We've also scheduled one session in lieu of the July all call, in case your calendar doesn't allow you to make a Wednesday session. You already have a date reserved for your VR call and so awesome wanted to make sure you had an opportunity, so we're using that date that's already reserved as well for your convenience.
But back to the June calendar, there's going to be a systems release that will cause us to have to bring the portal down June 19th at 6:00 pm through that Sunday at 8:00 pm, so there will be down time for the systems release, and that's not unusual. That will happen every now and then. But this particular systems release is doubly important because that's the release that's going to include the capability for you to submit your electronic files, the batch file upload capability, and for the timely progress review capability.
So it won't be until after the release that happens that weekend that we'll be testing those files with the pilot participants and we do have a few agencies that are pilot participants that we can test with. And if we need testers with unique client lists or certain nature then we will reach out to additional VR agencies for that testing, or you can reach out to us if you want to be part of that testing as well.
And so that will be happening the week of the 22nd. So, depending on how that release goes with the TPR and the batch file uploads and the subsequent testing on that Monday and Tuesday or so, we are hoping that we can extend that functionality to everyone who's in the portal to all of you who are using the portal at that point. But we do want to test it thoroughly first. So you would stay tuned for that.
And then June 30th is the date where we express the current portal and IVR to no longer be available, so that will be a key date for planning to no longer be able to use the current portal, to use the new portal or to use the processes that Katie is about to tell you about, the manual processes that will be available. But we do encourage you to continue to prepare to use the new portal and reach out to us if there's anything that we can do to help.
I wanted to highlight the portal hours of operation. We may have mentioned them casually, but as we are implementing it this month we want to make sure that it's clear for everyone that there is down time for the portal and it's consistent with when SSA systems are down globally throughout the agency. So this is not negotiable, but the hours of operation are Monday through Saturday, 5:00 am through 11.59 pm eastern time, then Sunday 8:00 am through 11.59 Eastern Time. So you have between midnight and I guess 4.59 am, you do have that slot of time, a block of time when it is not available, but I hope that the hours of operation works for everyone.
For July, the ticket training Tuesdays which you are already accustomed to, those are happen and will focus on key business processes like ticket assignments and payments and timely progress reviews. And they will focus on both the portal processes and the manual processes, so in the portal you do have ticket assignment but that includes in use VFR case openings and closures so there is a capability there for you to open and close cases individually in addition to your electronic file uploads. And we realize that you all are getting the e-pay and you don't really have a need for -- well, the VREN's that get ticket assignments may not have any use for the payment processing through the portal, but it is there. And then timely progress, of course, is there for those of you who assist the beneficiary with that. But Wednesdays, as I mentioned, those orientation sessions are there so take advantage of the Tuesday, July 21st session, which is the normal time frame that you would have your -- I guess that's when you have your VR meeting -- wait a minute, I’m looking at the wrong date. The 14th is when you would have had your next VR meeting, your all call, and the orientation session will happen that day. But if you want to reinforce that or supplement it with one of the other sessions or a couple of the other sessions, just know it's the same information but it's available to you and that's a platform for answering questions.
I’m now going to turn it over to Katie Striebinger to talk to you about the portal processes and manual processes.

Katie Striebinger: Hi, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Katie Striebinger and I wanted to talk to you about the ticket portal process efficiency, the chart showing up on your screen right now if you can view the presentation. I did see a question in the chat window that I wanted to address before I started going through this.
If you have already contacted the VR help desk and given them your information and they have told you that you are enrolled in the portal, you will be receiving an email on the 15th letting you know that you are enrolled and you have access. You will be able to access the portal on the 15th if you receive an email from us if you are enrolled. You have to have done more than just have your suitability clearance.
If you have your suitability clearance and you have created my SSA account, please contact the VR help desk and tell them you are ready to go and they will contact you and get your information and get you enrolled so when we send out the email on the 15th you are included in that list.
I hope that answers that question. So on the 15th I wanted to go through the efficiencies of the ticket portal that you will see and experience compared to what you will see and experience if you are not enrolled and ready to go.
The first function is checking ticket assignability. And this is a single ticket, one at a time. And the ticket portal you will be able to type in an SSN and you will find out right then and there within a minute whether or not the ticket is assignable and at that point if you want to put that ticket in use you will have the ability to.
If you do not have enrollment in the portal and you do not have access, you will either have to have the beneficiary contact the ticket help line to find out if their ticket is assignable, or you are going to have to fax or email the SSN to awesome for a limited time. The turnaround time for that is currently 7 days.
The second item on the list, single ticket assignments. And by this I do mean opening a case. You need to enter the full SSN, their full first name, last name, and the date you wish to open a case. This is in real-time so if you push the send it button and process the case opening, that case will be assigned to you if everything is correct. The current portal where you have to find out whether or not the action worked, you will know right then and there that you have opened that case and you will see that case in your list of beneficiaries currently assigned to you.
The manual process for that is you will have to fax in an IWP and the turnaround time to find out the case has been opened successfully is 7 days from receipt.
The next item, batch ticket assignment and batch case openings and closures, through the portal you will upload the cse file and the same file you have been using. Since it is real-time you will get a response file letting you know if the cases have been opened or closed within about a minute on average. It may take a little bit longer but you will know really quickly if everything has processed and the result. And the batch files do include assignability. Case closure and ticket assignability will all happen in real-time through the portal.
The manual process for a limited time you will still be able to upload your files to move it, but that is not going to be for a very long time. We do understand that trying to get suitability and trying to get access so we're giving you some time to comply with all the steps that are involved in the process, but you will not have move it for an indefinite period of time. Please don't think that you don't need to take some action. The preferred method is using the portal. The turnaround time using move it for this limited manual process is 7 days from receipt.
The next item we're going to skip over, that's creating a payment request. That's how it will work in the future for VR cost reimbursement claims but right now that functionality is not there.
The next item, timely progress review, through the portal you will be able to select a beneficiary with a pending (inaudible) when you answer the TPR status of your beneficiaries the turnaround time, the system will be updated automatically. The only other way to help a beneficiary complete their TPR process is to fax or email the original 1375 to awesome. And that is the beneficiary requests assistance. The secure portal will only be available until the 30th and the turnaround time for that is 10 days.
The final item I want to stress is that reports, all the data is in real-time, reports in the portal. You can find your current case openings, your past case openings, payment status report does not apply to you unless you get EN payments. You can also find out the pending TPR's, all that is in real-time. Unlike the current process where there is a lag and if you are not signed up for the portal as of the 30th of June you will have to keep your own records, we will not be providing you reports.
I hope this has given you an idea of the efficiencies that are coming with the new ticket portal and the improvements a you are giving you through the system. The real-time response so that you know the status of all your cases and Desiree mentioned this time next year we'll have cost reimbursement payments and we hope the whole package is something you'll really find useful. So I’m going to turn it over to Michelle Laisure.

Michelle Laisure: Wow, this is really a keepsake. Thank you so much for taking the time to walk through all the processes, both that are available in the portal versus if manual processes are required, what the VR can expect in terms of turnaround time.
We have about two -- four, we have four questions for you, Katie and Desiree. We'd like to go ahead and read those to you now. James, welcome back.

James Wackerbarth: Hi, this is James. First question, where are we going with Quarterly Beneficiary Earnings alert type of file.

Desiree Fitzgerald: Actually we have the replacement service for the QBER, we have something ready that we would like to share with you all very soon. We are trying to establish a way to communicate it securely. We think that we are going to be establishing a format for a new password that you would use in connection with the fall, but we do have that, the first iteration of that QBER replacement file ready for you.

Michelle Laisure: Desiree, this is Michelle. At our July call will we be able to give an update at that time?

Desiree Fitzgerald: Hopefully they'll have it when we get to that point, but, yeah, I expect we should be getting it out probably -- yes, that call is not until mid-month so we should definitely have it out by then.

Michelle Laisure: Thank you. James, next question.

James Wackerbarth: The next question is has the batch ticket assignment been tested and, if so, up to what size amount and also what format will the return file come back in?

Katie Striebinger: This is Katie, I can answer that. The batch ticket assignment has been tested in a small portion so far but it has not been tested by any of our pilot participants. That is going to be coming soon within the next few weeks or so. Next week, excuse me, based on the chart. Then you will, as soon as we have the information to give you a guide on the formats we will make sure that you get a copy of that.

 The files should come back with the exact same return codes and characters that you are used to. We are trying to make it so you don't have to make any programming changes on your end but at the end of this file we are going to add some extra information, some extra return codes, that SSA can provide with information, further detail if I want something that was not assignable. But that should be truncated when you receive the file packets, say you normally get 100 characters back, we will make it 108 and you would just not get those extra 8 characters. We will be sending information out as soon as we have it, we are still doing the test and we do not want to send anything out until it is complete, but we will send you the instructions for that and if anyone wants to test the batch assignability or the batch openings or closings files, just contact the VR help desk and we can coordinate a test with you, we can actually test your data and you can see what results would come back. We will probably be ready to do that next week and we have that section about testing with the current aids. If you are interested in being the first group please contact the VR help desk and let them know and I will make sure you are included in our list.

Michelle Laisure: Great, thank you, Katie just in case we're posting the email address at SSA.gov. James, next question.

James Wackerbarth: The next two are pretty related. Will the test files count or will we still need to submit them through enough as well when it comes to testing this feature, then the second question was should we suspend submitting batch files, remove it at this time, due to the conversion to the new SSA portal?

Desiree Fitzgerald: With the test files I’m not sure. I don't know if we are just going to test and roll it back and have you resubmit it or just test as -- we'll contact you and let you know exactly what we are doing, whether something is going to be committed to the system or not.
That is a good point about your batch files. If you only submit them once a month, i would, i think it would be a great idea if you could hold off your June files so we can use them and test with them in June once everybody is enrolled. Otherwise we'll have to wait until July to find out everything is working correctly. Either that or there was a way you could take of your files and it in half. It is up to you how you want to do it and we're here to help you and coordinate with you.

James Wackerbarth: A follow-up to the QBER question, will timely filing be disregarded for these cases due to the delay of the replacement QBER file?

Nate Arnold: This is Nate Arnold. I can't imagine that the delay that has been experienced thus far would actually cause anyone to miss being able to file claims timely. And I think we always, in my mind, at least, certainly it is not SSA's responsibility to provide you all with earnings data. Technically you are supposed to be tracking this on your own so I think we would not be in a good position to just say we are going to have a blanket waiver of timely filing because we didn't send listings out for a little bit. I would encourage you, though, we do try to be flexible and understanding. Any time you have a case that you believe is not going to be timely filed, give us an explanation and we will certainly take a look at it. If it has merit we will try to be flexible.

James Wackerbarth: And the final question that we have is the July all VR call are a combination orientation and regular call.

Michelle Laisure: It will be a combination. We will work with ORDES because we know that many of the current orientation sessions is addressing many of the EN's concerns so we will look at the item for the orientation session that apply to VR's, but I know it's important for all of you to be able to ask your cost reimbursement questions so we will definitely make time for -- we may have to go for an hour and a half but we will let you know that when the agenda goes out. Desiree, do you want to add anything to that? We'll work on the agenda and make sure we cover our bases.

Desiree Fitzgerald: No, I don't have anything to add to that.

Michelle Laisure: Is that all the questions, James?

James Wackerbarth: Yes.

Michelle Laisure: Great. So thank you for that overview and presentation, Desiree and Katie and Nate I would now like to turn our attention to our presentation this afternoon and again this is Michelle Laisure, EN Development and Training Manager. It's my pleasure to welcome our guest speaker this afternoon, Dr. Joe Ashley. He is the assistant commissioner for grants and special programs with the Virginia department for aging and rehabilitation services. Joe is no stranger to awesome or SSA, he has been a leader and a frontier in dealing with many, many issues impacting the VR an ENs with the ticket to work program. And it's definitely always a pleasure to work with him. His fashion for seeing the growth and opportunities with the ticket program pushes all of us to the next frontier. So it's my pleasure to have Joe on the call today to speak to us about the work force innovation and opportunities act. And I’m not sure, Joe, you can correct me, is this LIOLA.

Joe Ashley: I always say work force WIOLA.

Michelle Laisure: Ticket plus opportunities.

Joe Ashley: Michelle, thank you so much. I want to congratulate Desiree and Nate on their rollout of the portal. It's been a lot of work I know for you all and that's going to really help automate us and move us forward and it's an exciting time to see that coming forward and I’m looking forward to that and the batch files.
I also want to thank you for staying with us on the QBER and making sure that's available, that resource is available, because that's made a big difference in Virginia and we appreciate all you are doing around that and i look forward to this thing being launched, probably not as much as you all, but we want to to congratulate you for that great work.
Some of you may have heard this presentation if you were at the CSAVR at the cost reimbursement training, or some pieces of it, anyway. Michelle and i have done this discussion around WIOA and the partnership plus opportunities it mentions or what we're considering the partnership opportunities and we had the opportunity also to discuss this on an all CSAVR call for the directors. At that call we went through these as well, so we thought it might be important just to be sure that most people understand some of the requirements that are coming. Because the law passed, as you all know -- well, you probably are so in the middle of it like we are here in Virginia -- has passed some of the elements of it go into effect in a couple of weeks and we should have new regs in January. That's what we keep being told, so we'll see.
But one of the things that becomes important to think about, there's 3 places where the act mentions ticket so we want to talk about that a little bit today. I want to say in Virginia we have pushed pretty hard about getting, working our ticket and we have done a number of different interventions. We've done some in working with SSA and the OSM and some other contractors to be sure that we could get partnership plus up and run not guilty Virginia. And we believe in it very strongly. David Leon has taken a sizable jump forward with us in getting our agreements in place.
It used to be that a good year in Virginia was 1.8 to 2.4 million. It has moved up to 5 million and Nate, thank you for what you just mentioned and all the work you put into it. This year we're going to hit 7 million in our state fiscal year in cost reimbursement and we find that to be phenomenal. The only problem is my boss and David’s boss turned to us and said, now how much of that are we going to be able to sustain? And we don't know the answer to that.
We believe very strongly that finding ways to enhance our partnership plus and our handoffs will be the strategy we will use to keep this sustainable by growing that particular side of the business with the ticket to work. So Michelle I think you want to move to our next slide.

 Slide 3, VR and EN partnerships, the key to success. I think Michelle probably skipped offer the one that has her name on it and my name on it. One of the things i found interesting, as i talk to Michelle and I’m not sure everyone understands, she does know something about VR, having been a VR counselor and administrator in our system so she's been very good to work with and helping to figure out some of the solutions that have helped us do a better job. Nate's been involved with that in the past, things like figuring out how to improve handoffs and that's been critical to what we consider our success in Virginia.
But the opportunity here with WIOA is we have, finding ways to work together to make sure that we can build upon the resources of our, of what we've got in VR and then use the ticket for a partnership plus opportunity to have follow along support. We saw that as a strategic advantage in Virginia and my boss, our commissioner, literally had to recruit some people to say, come on, go down this road with us because several of them had very long memories and remembered some of the early days of the ticket program and literally didn't want to do it.
So what we ended up doing was saying, yes, we need to go down this road with them. So what we're doing now is what we've got, I just got something that says we got 15 minutes so I’ll talk fast.

 I think what we've got here is three mentions, there's three places where the ticket is mentioned in the act. It's important to remember that when the act, when VR was last reauthorized was 98 and there is no mention in it of the ticket program. Well, that's pretty much because the ticket program wasn't passed until 99.

 So there's no references to it and to requirements around it. So you're going to find 3 places where it's mentioned. One is around assurances. Basically what it says around assurances is that state agencies will assure that they have coordinated -- VR agencies will assure that they have coordinated with any other state agency that's acting as an employment network. And in our business what an assurance typically means is you have a memorandum of understanding with some other organization. You will find in most cases where in some states their work force has one employment network for the entire work force development, the WIBs. Others mental health may have it, developmental disabilities may have agencies that are state sponsored. So that's really what it's saying in those cases and it's really about collaborating and making sure everyone knows what's going on.
Another is where it talks about the fact where there's a situation where you have a person who has an IPE in place or is developing an IPE, and their ticket is either assigned or they want to assign their ticket to an employment network, it is the responsibility of the VR counselor in this process to be sure that they have coordinated the services of the employment network is going to do and what the VR agency is going to do.
Now it says very clearly that we have to be a part of making sure who's going to do what to whom by when or with whom, so we've really got to identify the services VR is going to provide and the ones the employment network is going to provide. It's up to the VR agencies to figure out how to train their counselors how do this and I imagine it will fall on us to figure out how it will take place. If it happens here, it might happen with you the same way. So it's up to you to figure out who is going to do what and how it's differentiated.
This doesn't mean if somebody takes their ticket and puts it in with a different employment network and not the VR agency that we can say in that case we're not going to provide you services and close the case. I don't think that's what this means. I don't think see how VR can do that but different people have different policies. We have to figure out how we are going to be paid for what service.
In the IPE development if you have an individual who is on SSI or SSDI, there is a requirement that we, meaning VR, in the development of this identify the services that are necessary for that person to be successful including what they call benefits counseling, i like to refer to as work incentives and benefits counseling. And make sure that they are aware of that.
Also it mentions that when it comes time for post-employment or case closure we need to make people aware that there are resources out there that may help them maintain or retain their employment, including employment networks. It doesn't say you have to very clearly say to them the list of all SSA-certified networks in their area, but we have to make sure the benefits counseling and what resources might be available.
We have made a strategic decision here in Virginia that we believe that handing off directly to an employment network that has work incentive specialists, which is what we call people who are experts in either CWIC through VCU or through the Cornell, their work incentives certification, increases the likelihood that they will maintain or retain their employment and stay engaged. So we have literally used or infrastructure grant when it was available and our INE resources to help people get this certification and have put it in our partnership plus employment partners. I think the new number is 71 of these experts around the state in these -- several of our partners have multiple of these. Some of them are in state agencies so we have, we're trying to create a culture that helps people understand this choice to go to work and supports it through this process. And we have found it extremely beneficial to us. It also have a reason to help our VR counselors understand why they might want to do a handoff for a person who is not a supportive employment client to someone who is part of the ticket program. That's what we saw.
We had an agreement among David and me, that we would try to increase resources going to our employment network partnership plus organizations to increase that resource in our state by $500,000. We believe this they are stronger then the ability of our clients to be successful gets stronger in these organizations. So we have done a lot of different things to put things in place and we see these new, what we think will become regulations and requirements as making that case of looking at those long-term employment supports.
That's basically where we see it. I tried to condense this from the other presentations we've done into the shortest possible. But i did just want to take a few minutes and let you know and, Michelle, if there's any questions, are you going to talk to them about -- there are a lot of partnership plus agreements out there in Virginia. We have one that has a retention benchmark payment and a few other things, but every organization and every agency needs to do one that fits for them. And Michelle has a resource base that if you haven't done this, if we choose to do a formal partnership plus agreement, it's not required, we just find it makes it a little easier to know who's going to do what and the process for the handoffs. Michelle has a resource that can tell you what other states have done because there's many good agreements out there. We have one we like but there are others that may work much better for your state.
In addition to my role here, one of the things where I've learned a lot about the ticket and Employment Networks and things I happen to be on the board of a national employment network association and chair of the partnership plus committee. Gina huff, who I believe is online as well, ticket coordinator, is the cochair of that committee. If any of you are trying to figure out how to create some opportunities around partnership plus that's a good place to get information. You can join Gina and the more of us on the part innership plus working on the EN side can create stronger partnerships.
I'll take a breath so you can get a word in.

Michelle Laisure: No, that's fine. No, thank you for that overview and thank you for your leadership, you and david, on all the different types of creative ways you have looked at collaboration and expanding the ticket program wherever possible.
As we get past the partnership plus agreement language, many of you have partnership plus agreements. They are not mandatory but as Joe said they provide clarity about roles and responsibilities. Definitely many of the agreements we are seeing lately are including descriptions of the role of certified work incentive coordinators. Some of the agreements we're seeing are even speaking to making sure beneficiaries are aware of what impact and how to maintain their health insurance. So the agreements can be as creative as the individuals working on it and as we just said, it's not mandatory but we've seen a lot of good practices and good things happening through those utilizations.
The table that we have shown here on gather place identifies the 8 agreements that as far as we know of currently exist between state VR agency and another state agency, so that other state agency might be department of labor, work force, DDS or mental health. Clearly those state that is have moved forward with these types of agreements are right in line with one of the first citation that speaks to assurances and working with other state agencies. So kudos to you, those states that are already in place and definitely other states can, you can use them as a resource.
We have copies of many of these agreements. The staff here is definitely willing and able to assist you in providing you copies of these agreements if you would like to look at them. We have 16 states that actually have agreements available for employment networks to sign on. We have a few states, three of them, that at this point in time have decided not to have agreements and they have other formal working relationships outlined, five states with advancement or benchmark payments, we have the New York statewide administrative EN in place, and our work isn't done because we know there is more to develop and to grow around partnership plus in terms of creativity that you at the local level can develop and share with us and share with your fellow states under VR
the next slide shows a visual collaboration picture where partnership plus is from east coast to the west coast, it's everywhere. Also the black dots identify those states with state to state agreements. And I’m going to stop there and see if we have any questions from any of our listeners. Operator, do you have anyone that's called in?

Operator: Yes, just as a reminder for those who would like to register an audio question, please press the star followed by the 1 on your telephone key pad. Our first question from the line of Gina Hoff.

Michelle Laisure: Hi, Gina. Share with us what's going on in your state around Partnership Plus.

Gina Hoff: Partnership Plus in Wisconsin just has been going really well in Wisconsin. The agencies that we have approximately 6 agencies in Wisconsin that we do partnership plus with. Obviously we're a more rural state but it has been great, we are hoping to get more agencies up and running because it is a wonderful source for our consumers to be able to have on-going support. Our counselors are really getting on board handing our consumers offer to the employment networks and seeing the benefits in it and it has really provided that on-going support for our consumers and it has really been a win-win for actually i would say a win-win-win because it's a win for our agency, for the employment network and most importantly for our consumers because it provides a nice smooth transition and on-going support for them for many years after VR closure. It's been great and I think many people are starting to see the benefit of it.

Michelle Laisure: Gina, do you want to share with us -- thank you for the summary and also just how positive it's working for your state. But I know there's challenges out there. What would you say is one challenge for Wisconsin around partnership plus?

Gina Hoff: Trying to get some of the more rural areas covered, so trying to get northern Wisconsin, trying to get partnership plus agencies up there to work there. So that has been a challenge, trying to get that area covered.
Trying to get some of our, trying to get some of the agencies that we want to work with because we see them as active vendors within our agency and we see that they are good VR's or good employment networks, trying to get them on board with becoming an EN because I think they still have it in their mind of it being that competition or trying to get the employment networks that are employment networks to open up to being a partnership plus with us. Both James, who is on the call, is fabulous and myself have reached out to some of them and they just won't respond back. So sometimes that is a challenge.

Michelle Laisure: Gina, thank you for that. Part of our recruitment effort this year and in the future, given our fee process and all of that, is to look at working with state VR agencies and identifying those areas where just as you explained that recruitment, given the VR vendors, to look at the ticket program as a new revenue source, a new source for them to consider and become part of the ticket program. So thank you for that.
Did you have any closing remarks before i move on to the next call?

Gina: No, that's all, thank you, Michelle.

Michelle Laisure: Thank you. Operator, do we have anyone else that's called in?

Operator: Your next response is from the line of Tom Shurett.

Tom Shurrett: Actually, I have a question in regards to the old reimbursement process. First of all what I want to recognize is the tremendous amount of work that's been done in working down the pending list to, you know, historical levels. But what we're seeing is an increase in the number of denials that we have questions about and that's resulted in so far this fiscal year submitting 42 reconsideration requests, which is far above our historical average. What we're finding is certainly an increase in the number of denials for entitlement issues where we have a ticket in use and also a number of denials for SGA reasons where we definitely have proof of 9 months of SGA so we're, what we're beginning to think is that although you are cranking out the numbers, the quality maybe is not up where it needs to be yet and I'd just like to make that comment and ask if any other states are seeing that and maybe if you are aware of that if anything is being done in regards to that.

Nate Arnold: Hey, tom. Obviously we watch, you know, when people file recons to see if there's a trend or a pattern and use it as a guide for refresher training on our staff if we find out, in fact, that somebody has a misunderstanding or is not following it correctly.
I don't think, i would not say that if there is a fall off in quality that it's because people are working too fast. It would be more that you have somebody who's just not clear on a particular subject or something. Sometimes even people who have been doing the job for a long time fall into bad habits. We have had a couple of refresher training sessions for the whole staff along areas that we became aware were somewhat problematic, but we'll stay on top of it and if you notice it from your end and you think it's a pattern, get it to the help desk or to Danielle or if I’m back in in the minor leagues and you can get hold of me, let me know.

Tom Shurrett: Nate, thank you very much for that. Like I said, I certainly want to recognize the tremendous work your staff has done in catching up on the pending list and we will certainly take you up on that and find you in dubuque, don't worry about that.

Operator: Your next question comes from the line of John Duplessis.

John Duplessis: One of the unfortunate parts is that I've been trying to work with my local state vocational rehab since I became (inaudible) three years now, from my understanding they don't participate with the partnership plus. They have the only separate agreements and even with separate agreements trying to work with them has been very challenging and I’m hoping maybe they can be brought on board in the future. Because there are a lot of services that there are consumers that actually leave rehab and our agency that question the difference.

Michelle Laisure: This is Michelle. So you are an Employment Network?

John Duplessis: Yes, uh-huh.

Michelle Laisure: You are on gather place, did you see my contact information? You could shoot me an email so I can contact you with your ticket coordinator.

John Duplessis: Okay, sure, no problem. Just contact you. Your name again?

Michelle Laisure: Michelle Laisure. I will definitely get you in contact with your ticket coordinator so the two of you can talk about partnership plus.

John Duplessis: That's a ticket partner in Alabama.

Michelle Laisure: Yes, I didn't ask what state you were from, but yes, that would be the ticket coordinator in Alabama.

John Duplessis: Yes, ma'am, I have tried to work with her. I am familiar with the ticket coordinators here in Alabama but they have been very difficult to work with.

Michelle Laisure: Let's see what we can do. Send me an email, please.

John Duplessis: Okay, I will do so. Thank you so much.

Michelle Laisure: Thank you. Thank you for calling in. Next question, operator.

Operator: Your next question comes from David Leon:

David Leon: Hi, how are you? I wanted to add a little bit about what we're doing in Virginia. One of the things we've almost got ready to roll out, we have been working on changing our partnership plus agreements to reflect that the WIOA changes so the language is current, but another of the benefits that it depends on how each state approaches it. Because we have so many partnership plus agreements, one of the issues we used to face often was where we had clients and they might be in our system with an incorrect social security number or during the intake the numbers got inverted and in those kind of cases we would never be in a position to get reimbursement.
And we have, in the time I've been here, probably changed 30 clients' information to make sure those tickets were in use SVR because our partnership plus agency working with them while the case was open, noticed that a case they wanted us to help with the handoff was not in use SVR, so there are a lot of side benefits to partnership plus for a VR agency if you are working closely with your partners and they understand the benefits of cost reimbursement. I think that's a piece that people miss often.

Michelle Laisure: Thank you, David. Do you want to share with us one of your challenges?

David Leon: Well, honestly, I would say the biggest challenge right now is assisting -- one of the things we have switched to is we are promoting the administrative employment model because we have a lot of smaller agencies that become involved in ticket but they lack the internal capacity to actually regularly do all the things required to do the systems up. We have groups we work with where their passwords would expire for various systems because they didn't have a need to go in them as often as the requirements and we're trying to address that challenge through the administrative employment network model.
Otherwise there's always our data could always be better. There's more room to grow in every area and just kind of keeping all the balls in the air is always a challenge.

Harold Thornton: I'd like to thank Dr. Ashley for his presentation. I had a chance to co-present with Dr. Ashley when he was here and know the state is really moving out on partnership plus.

 I just have one question I want to ask about the WIPA program and how things are going with the review to identify who is going to be providing services in the respective catchment areas. I look at WIPA services as being essential to partnership plus working and also getting to successful outcomes that are in competitive level employment. Without effective WIPA services and effective WIPA service program i don't think that we can really see the ticket to work program really blossom into what it should -- what it's intended to be. Are we, is there any -- how are the reviewers coming in identifying the next grantees and is there a connection that other states see between WIPA services and partnership plus?

Desiree Fitzgerald: Harold, this is Desiree. Nate went to get someone to give an update on the WIPA, we don't have anyone in the room right now who can give a status on how things are going.

Harold Thornton: Okay, great.

Desiree Fitzgerald: He says they are going well, though. We want to try to grab someone to give an update.

Harold Thornton: Great. I know the new contracts are supposed to begin on August the first and that requires some ramp up time for us to get their selves in position for the continuity of services. So if there is some information you can provide the state agencies that would be great.
I do see, again, that services are essential even in the VR process because it helps individuals to really understand how the work incentives can help them to achieve self-sufficiency to improve their quality of life.

Desiree Fitzgerald: Harold, we have the source here, Carol Cohen.

Carol Cohen: All things WIPA, that's right.

Desiree Fitzgerald: If you'd kind of recouch your question for Carol.

Harold Thornton: I was just trying to get a status how things are going with the awarding of the grant for new WIPA contracts August 1st.

Carol Cohen: I wish I had more information that I was permitted to share, but at this point what I can say is that all applicants will learn of their status on or before august 1st. I’m sorry, I can't say much more than that. We're still in process.

Harold Thornton: I understand. Are the awardees expected to begin services on August 1st?

Carol Cohen: Well, they're going to have their award by august 1st, on or before august 1st. We realize that there will be some start-up time, of course, and we'll be providing a great deal of technical assistance and training and support from the staff here directly, your project officers and also, of course, our contractors. But we realize that for some projects that may be new to this there will be lots and lots of support and ample opportunity to ramp up.

Harold Thornton: Okay, thank you so much, I appreciate that.

Carol Cohen: You're welcome, sure.

Operator: Your next question comes from Eugenia Cox.

Eugenia Cox: A couple questions. I was working with the portal as one of their test states and I was having problems assigning tickets and I didn't know if that glitch had been looked at. I haven't got an update yet. There was a few glitches in their providing more information than should be provided and not being able to find tickets. So that was one question I had.

Michelle Laisure: Thank you. You said you had a second question?

Eugenia Cox: I didn't know if you wanted to respond to that one.
The other question I had was for Joe Ashley. Are you still there, Joe? Real quick question on that second requirement on WOIA, did you say if anyone was in plan with VR that they had to coordinate that? Did I misunderstand that?

Joe Ashley: What you have to have is a plan that says here's what VR is going to do in relation to what the IWP says.

Eugenia Cox: This is prior to the plan. In plan development?

Joe Ashley: It depends on the person in the system. It could be as you are developing a plan and they are saying my ticket is assigned -- this is how I read it. So you may want your policy people to look at this.

Eugenia Cox: Yeah, because that's the first I've heard.

Joe Ashley: Yeah, this is new. This is new. It's on the -- the exact language is on the slides. It basically says if they are in a plan or they are developing a plan and their ticket is assigned to another employment network or they are choosing to assign a ticket to another employment network, then the VR plan has to be clear about how it coordinates with the other plan.

Eugenia Cox: Because we have a hard time getting --.

Joe Ashley: I can hardly wait. I know exactly where you are going.

Eugenia Cox: We also have ENs that provide little to no services at all, you know, reimbursement of money, which it doesn't coordinate at all with anything that we do. So that's going to be interesting as far as --.

Joe Ashley: I don't think it's just us, I think it will be interesting to see if the regs also require on the EN side that they coordinate. There's also a requirement that they do that on the social security side when they refer. So i don't know if that's going to be included in here or not. But on the VR side we have to have identified -- it's basically who's going to do what, by when.

Eugenia Cox: Yeah, we don't usually get the information on whether somebody's ticket is assigned to another provider until after they are in plan and we have reported to Social Security. So that's kind of difficult to write it into a plan when you don't even know.

Joe Ashley: Then you would have to go back and amend it, I think.

Eugenia Cox: Okay.

Nate Arnold: Or you start asking different questions when you develop the plan.

Eugenia Cox: Yeah, because a lot of people don't remember or know that their ticket is assigned to somebody else. They either forgotten or they assume -- I'll talk to you about it later.

>> we may start doing, we may start checking things out earlier to find out if their ticket is assignable. There are a lot of different ways to address this and that's what we're going to have to talk about over the next several, over the next year. It's going to take some thinking through to do this in a way that makes sense. I would agree.

Eugenia Cox: Yeah, that's going to be a real lengthy discussion, i think, something we can talk about later.
The other thing I wanted to say you did say, Joe, when you talked a little bit about NENA, I do want to encourage other state areas, there are so few of us to see you set up as part of NENA and I can't even describe how beneficial it has been for us to provide our input on VR culture and how we operate and the things we have learned from ENs and the things they have learned from us, it's so beneficial especially with it being written in, the has to be there and you and I are definitely a good way to do that. It's not that expensive for the benefits that you get.

Joe Ashley: I agree with that.

Eugenia Cox: I just wanted to say that, too. I’m done, sorry.

Michelle Laisure: No, that was good. Thank you, Joe and Gina, that was good.

Joe Ashley: Michelle, I've got a grant that's due and I must apologize I got to jump off and take care, put out a little fire here.

Michelle Laisure: No, no, thank you, Joe.

Joe Ashley: I wanted to say thanks for the opportunity to talk with everybody.

Michelle Laisure: Absolutely. And we are 17 minutes after the hour, i know that we started a little late today, but this is good conversation. I want to thank our presenter, Joe Ashley and SSA for the updates they gave. I will turn it over to you if you have any closing remarks, Nate, otherwise we can conclude our call today.

Nate Arnold: Thanks, Michelle, also thanks to Joe. You guys are doing a great job and I think the work is really paying off.
I don't really have any more closing remarks. We will look forward to the July call which I’m sure will also, as she said, probably be an hour and a half or close to it because we'll have a lot of information to go over at that point. So everybody, have a good one until then, we'll talk to you next month.

Michelle Laisure: Thank you. Thank you all for hanging in there today. We really appreciate it. Have a good evening, bye-bye.

[CALL ENDED]