**Memorandum of Understanding between**

**A System of Technology to Achieve Results, State Services for the Blind, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

**Section 1: Introduction**

1. **PARTIES TO THE MOU**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered into by the System of Technology to Achieve Results (STAR) Program, a program of the Department of Administration, hereinafter referred to as the STAR Program, State Services for the Blind (SSB), a division of the Department of Employment and Economic Development, hereinafter referred to as SSB, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a division of the Department of Employment and Economic Development hereinafter referred to (VRS).

1. **PURPOSE**

Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act requires the state vocational rehabilitation agency to coordinate with other state agencies and other components of the workforce development system in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. Section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act and 34 CFR 361.53(b)(6) are the primary Title I statutory and regulatory provisions that govern the responsibilities of VR in providing rehabilitation technology under the VR program. In 1998, Congress enacted the Assistive Technology Act (P.L. 105-394) and amended it in 2004 (P.L. 108-364).

Cooperation between STAR, VRS, and SSB is essential to ensure maximum utilization of the services which each agency can provide to persons eligible for such services. By establishing cooperative relationships, we can increase assistive technology services utilization and understanding by taking advantage of the expertise and knowledge within each agency. Within this framework, the agreement provides a plan for:

1. Coordination of services;

2. Using the resources of the cooperating agencies to the best advantage;

3. Providing information sharing, technical support and training;

4. Facilitating the referral of eligible persons between agencies; and

5. Jointly serving eligible persons requiring assistive technology services.

1. **MISSION**

STAR’s mission is to help all Minnesotans with disabilities gain access to and acquire the assistive technology they need to live, learn, work and play.

The core state level services to accomplish that mission include:

* Device Demonstration
* Device Loan
* Device Reuse

The secondary state leadership services include:

* Training and technical assistance
* Public awareness
* Coordination with entities responsible for policies, procedures, or funding for AT devices and services

The mission of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) is to empower Minnesotans with disabilities to achieve their goals for employment, independent living and community integrations.

The mission of State Services for the Blind (SSB) is to facilitate the achievement of vocational and personal independence by Minnesotans who are blind, visually impaired or Deafblind.

1. **STAR PROGRAM**

STAR program is 100% federally funded. They are mandated to spend 60% of their funding on State Level activities:

* Device Demonstration
* Device Loan
* Device Reuse

A further 40% must be spent on State Leadership activities:

* Information and assistance
* Training and technical assistance
* Public awareness
* Collaboration and coordination with entities responsible for policies, procedures, or funding for AT devices and services

Services are grouped into the categories of Education, Employment, and Community Living. STAR demonstrates assistive technology devices to individuals with disabilities, their family members, guardians, and professionals who work with them to increase access to and acquisition of assistive technology that increase an individual’s independence at home, school, work and in their community. The AT Act forbids STAR from directly purchasing assistive technology devices for individuals.

Short-term device loans are for 30-days or less and allow consumers to try a device or software program before buying. Short-term device loans may also be used to fill-in for a device that is being repaired, while waiting for delivery of a newly-purchased device, and for professional development.

Device loans give consumers the opportunity to:

* Try a device in a real life environment
* Collect data substantiating that the device meets the consumer's needs
* Use data to justify a funding request
* Use as a short-term loaner while a personal device is being repaired
* Understand training and support needs associated with device or software
* Make an informed purchasing decision

Although there is no charge for a device loan, customers are asked to complete a short survey. If a device is provided through mail or courier service, the borrower may be asked to pay for return shipping.

Open-ended device loans are for Minnesotans who need assistive technology in education, employment, and certain community environments such as hospice or assisted living. This service could be accessed if a customer is unable to find funding or is looking for an older device no longer on the market. Open-ended loans do not have a set return date and are helpful when the borrower needs a device for more than 30-days. Once the borrower no longer needs the device it must be returned.

When appropriate, VRS and SSB will refer consumers to STAR’s device demonstration, short-term loan or open-ended loan programs.

Device reuse occurs when AT that is no longer needed is passed along to someone else either by selling, exchanging, or donating the device. Reuse also occurs when a device is repaired and cleaned (refurbished) before being sold or donated.

Eventually, a device will reach the point when it no longer functions properly or does not meet current standards and technological demands. Once a device is no longer useful, it should be recycled.

As part of its commitment to promoting the reuse of assistive technology, STAR maintains an online device exchange known as STAR Technology Exchange (STARTE). This free device exchange site allows Minnesotans and others to donate, sell, and buy previously owned but still usable assistive technology.

1. **REFERRAL**

Individual consumers may be referred by either STAR, VRS, or SSB when the agency serving the consumer requests the expertise and services of the other agency to best serve the consumer. Referrals are subject to the confidentiality requirements set out in Section 4.

**Section 2: Assistive Technology Services**

1. **Demonstration of Technology**

To increase understanding of assistive technology and to determine whether or not specific device(s) will meet a consumer's needs, the following duties will be performed by VRS and SSB staff:

* Demonstration of assistive technology to consumers. For the purpose of this agreement, a demonstration is:
  + - * Requested by a consumer, family member, guardian or professional working with an individual with a disability
      * Provided free of charge
  + When appropriate and possible, provides product comparison by reviewing features of similar devices
* Obtain a completed customer survey (provided by STAR) from the consumer **at the time of the demonstration.**
* Enter data from completed customer survey (no later than one month after demonstration provided) using STAR's online data collection tool known as the National Assistive Technology Act Data System (NATADS).
* When appropriate, provide a referral to additional assistive technology related services and resources, including STAR's device loan program.

In addition, DEED agrees to:

* Provide STAR with the name, title, and location of staff that will be providing demonstrations.
* Provide assurance, by signing this agreement, that staff providing demonstrations are knowledgeable and have skills necessary to demonstrate devices.
* Contact STAR to arrange for staff training/instruction on:
  + - * Proper completion and retention of customer survey
        + Hard copies of surveys to be returned to STAR upon request
* Entering data using STAR’s online data collection tool (NATADS)
* Provide a minimum of one anecdote per federal fiscal year (October-September) highlighting a specific demonstration and explaining how the demonstration helped the consumer determine if the assistive technology would meet his or her needs. (Optional, but highly recommended so STAR can show its federal funder a compelling example of cross-agency collaboration.)
  + Procedure for notifying STAR of lost, stolen, or broken devices (e.g., how to complete and submit appropriate form)
* Notify STAR, in writing, when there is a change to staff providing demonstrations of STAR devices.
* Complete and submit appropriate form if a device is lost, stolen or broken
* Notify STAR in writing if device is no longer being demonstrated
* Take reasonable precautions to ensure that devices are properly maintained and securely stored
* Return devices to STAR when no longer being demonstrated or upon request [Devices are purchased with federal funds and remain the property of STAR.]

# The following duties will be performed by STAR:

* Review requests from VRS and SSB for assistive technology to be used for demonstrations.
* Purchase and loan assistive technology to VRS and SSB for demonstrations. (STAR's ability to purchase AT for demonstration by VRS and SSB staff will vary depending upon availability of federal funds and overall needs of STAR program.)
* Provide VRS and SSB with customer survey form and instructions on proper completion and retention of the form.
* Provide VRS and SSB staff who are designated to do demonstrations with access to and training on using STAR's online data collection tool known as the National Assistive Technology Act Data System (NATADS).
* Provide VRS and SSB with form and instructions on reporting lost, stolen or broken devices.

**II. Cross Agency AT Workgroup**

STAR convened a Cross Agency AT Workgroup. The purpose of the workgroup is to facilitate ongoing communication between agencies on topics related to assistive technology, including Olmstead work plans; identify common ground related to policies, procedures, and best practices; and, seek out opportunities to collaborate.

Participation by VRS and SSB, with the AT Cross Agency Workgroup will continue through development and implementation of collaboration efforts.

**III. AT SUPPORT**

SSB can provide AT support to STAR. Equipment purchased by STAR for demonstration and loan with individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or DeafBlind may require the expertise of SSB for set up, basic operation and maintenance. SSB can provide non-monetary technical AT support to STAR. SSB can assist with:

* Set up
* Installation of hardware/software
* Start Up
* Updates
* Upgrades
* Troubleshooting
* Information and referral
* Diagnoses of malfunction
* Collaboration with STAR for consumer demonstration

To request technical assistance:

* STAR will contact, by phone, the SSB supervisor who covers the SSB AT Specialists.
* STAR will follow up the phone call with an email of the request.
* The SSB Supervisor will check with SSB AT Specialists for availability.
* The request will be assigned to an SSB Specialist based upon availability and technical skill.
* The assigned SSB AT Specialist will contact STAR to fulfill the request for assistance.

**IV. Transition aged youth**

When possible, STAR, SSB, and VRS will collaborate to provide AT-related transition services to students and adults.

Under the AT Act, as amended, STAR is required to spend 5% of 40% of its annual grant award on transition-related activities (i.e., training and technical assistance). Transition covers a range of life events, including:

* Secondary school to post-secondary
* School to work
* Integrate to community living
* Institution to community living

Each (federal) year, STAR must conduct at least one school-related transition activity and at least one community-living transition activity.

The mandated 5% set aside includes STAR staff time spent on transition related activities and equates to a small amount of money (less than $10,000 in FFY2016).

**V. Updates to State Rehabilitation Council (SRC/SRC-B)**

STAR will provide quarterly updates to be shared with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the State Rehabilitation Council – Blind (SRC-B).

The updates would include:

* Update on AT purchased for VRS/SSB use
* Data related to demonstrations provided by VRS/SSB
  + Number of demonstrations
  + Counties served
  + Outcome (AT would/would not meet needs of the consumer)
* Program updates related to employment that may be of interest to the SRC/SRC-B, including updates related to the Cross Agency AT Workgroup

**Section 3: Administrative Relationship**

1. **FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CONSIDERATION**

Each party is financially responsible for the services it provides under its own laws and rules. In lieu of payment, STAR will provide VRS and SSB with newly purchased assistive technology for demonstration by VRS and SSB staff. Written requests for additional devices from VRS’s and SSB’s Authorized Representative will be considered on an as needed basis and dependent upon available funds. STAR may require, by written request to the agency’s authorized representative, that VRS and SSB return devices not being used for demonstration as evidenced by a lack of usage reported using STAR’s online data collection tool.

1. **Continuing Evaluation of Working Relationships**

Representatives of STAR, VRS and SSB will meet at least annually for the purpose of developing, reviewing, and evaluating cross agency collaboration related to assistive technology services.

1. **AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE**

STAR’s Authorized Representative is Kim Moccia, Program Director, Centennial Office Building, 658 Cedar Street, Room 358, Saint Paul, MN 55155, 651-201-2297, or his/her Successor.

VRS’s Authorized Representative is John Bredehoft, Rehabilitation Specialist, 2800 County Road 42 West, Burnsville, Minnesota 55337, 952-703-3153.

SSB’s Authorized Representative is Carol Pankow, Director State Services for the Blind, 2200 University Ave W. Suite 240, Saint Paul, MN 55114, 651-539-2273.

**Section 4: Exchange of Information**

1. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

STAR, VRS, and SSB will maintain consumer confidentiality and protection of records per 34 CFR 361.38 of the Rehabilitation Act and the MN Data Practices Act. Data that identify STAR consumers are private under MN Stat. 13.64 subd. 2b. By agreeing to perform device demonstrations on STAR’s behalf and to accept use of new STAR AT devices at no charge, valuable consideration is being exchange between the parties allowing STAR to share private data with VRS and SSB as STAR’s agent in performing device demonstrations. As required by state law, VRS and SSB can seek consent from individual DEED consumers to share private DEED data with STAR. Absent consent, VRS and SSB will provide STAR contact information to consumers so that consumers have information they need to contact STAR themselves.

**Section 5: Effective Date of Agreement/Provisions for Modification or termination:**

The period of this agreement shall be from the date signed by both parties and shall be renewed automatically annually thereafter unless canceled by either party. The agreement may be canceled at any time upon agreement of all parties or by either party after giving thirty (30) calendar days prior notice in writing to the other parties. This agreement shall be reviewed annually and be modified at any time as agreed to in writing.

The parties agree that any changes to the MOU must be by formal amendment reviewed, approved and signed by the authorized personnel for each party. The parties agree that no other documents, including correspondence, acts and oral communications by or from any person, shall be construed as an amendment to the MOU. This agreement shall be effective upon final signatures from all parties and shall remain in full force.