

Quick Tips for Support Service Professionals

Vocational Rehabilitation

Serving Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) is partnership program between states and the federal government. Each state manages its own program within federal guidelines. The overall goal of VR is to provide services resulting in competitive employment in a career that matches the VR consumer’s strengths, interests, abilities, and employment goals.



VR Services:

Vocational rehabilitation agencies offer myriad services including vocational assessment, soft skills development, career counseling, job placement, assistive technology, and on-the-job training. Specific services are tailored to meet an individual’s career goals; they are determined while developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

VR counselors work closely with the student to create the IPE and coordinate services needed to carry it out. VR relies on numerous other providers, both VR employees and independent contractors. In-house personnel may include testing and assessment specialists, employment coaches, and job placement specialists. Independent contractors may include audiologists, doctors, psychologists, and community rehabilitation providers. Interpreters may be in-house personnel or independent contractors, depending on the state.

Who is Eligible:

Eligible applicants include any individual who has a disability that creates a substantial barrier to employment and can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services. VR is not an entitlement program and not all applicants are eligible to receive services.

Federal and state regulations often mandate that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive services first. Eligibility is determined through a process referred to as the “Order of Selection.” These vary from state to state, and not all states use this process. Individuals with the strongest need tend to have disabilities that result in serious functional limitations in three or more functional capacities. Lowest priority is reserved for those who meet VR’s minimum qualifications.

The VR Process

1. The application process: VR services begin with an intake interview with a VR counselor and submission of an application. Determining eligibility takes 60 days or less.
2. Assessment of vocational needs: To determine which services will be effective and learn more about the applicant’s interests and skills, VR may administer a battery of assessments related to the goal of employment.

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3. Development of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE): An IPE charts a course of action to achieve a specific employment goal. The VR counselor and the student develop the plan based on vocational goals and assessment results. Services begin thereafter.
4. IPE implementation: With an IPE in place, VR coordinates supportive services.
5. Job placement: Placement services may include identifying job leads, practice interviews, job coaching, and on-the-job training. VR provides support for the first 90 days on the job to ensure long-term placements.

Determine VR Services:

The VR counselor and consumer team to identify IPE assessments and/or evaluations to guide the decision-making process. These 1) create an objective mechanism about the strengths, abilities, capabilities, interests, resources, and concerns the student has at the time of the evaluation; and 2) provide a way to identify products (hearing aids or assistive technology, for example) consistent with the student's employment goals.

Common VR Services:

- Counseling and guidance: Counseling and guidance is usually provided by the VR counselor to identify strategies to address any barriers to achieving employment. Topics discussed in counseling include vocational goals, personal adjustment, and social and family issues.
- Training: Many types of training options are available through VR. This may be as simple as learning how to use assistive technology, focus on job readiness, or include on-the-job training. Training can also be long-term, focusing on a set of vocational skills that will improve an individual's ability to find work in a particular field. It is often vocational, occupational, or results in a postsecondary degree.
- Job-Placement: Many VR services center on employment readiness, job seeking, placement and on-the-job support services. It usually involves working individually with a professional with specialized experience obtaining and maintaining employment for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. A student may learn how to identify potential employment opportunities, develop a resume, or practice interview skills. Job coaching is also available.
- Technology: The purchase of technology for deaf or hard of hearing individuals may be recommended if it supports employment goals. This may include hearing aids, assistive listening devices, vibrating alarm clocks, computers, or other adaptive equipment.
- Other: Other services or tangible products like transportation assistance, textbooks, uniforms, or assistive technology may be necessary for employment. Sometimes these services can be provided by VR.

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