

FACT SHEET

THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

1. WHAT IS THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) SERVICES PROGRAM?

Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Act), States and Territories receive Federal grants to operate a comprehensive VR program. This program is designed to assess, plan, develop and provide VR services to eligible individuals with disabilities, consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice. By providing services in this way, the VR program enables individuals with disabilities to prepare for and engage in gainful employment.

2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN “INDIVIDUAL WITH A DISABILITY”?

An “individual with a disability” means any individual who:

- has a physical or mental impairment which constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment for the individual; and
- can benefit from VR services to achieve an employment outcome.

3. WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES?

To be eligible for VR services, an individual must:

- be an “individual with a disability,” as defined above; and
- Require VR services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment.

4. IS ANYONE AUTOMATICALLY ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES?

Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits are Presumed to be automatically eligible for VR services, unless there is clear and convincing evidence that they are too severely disabled to benefit from VR services.

5. HOW DOES AN INDIVIDUAL APPLY FOR VR SERVICES?

- An individual has the right to submit a written application.
- An individual will be considered to have “submitted an application” when he/she “requests” VR services and provides sufficient information for VR to determine eligibility.
- VR should determine eligibility within 60 days of application.

6. HOW DOES AN INDIVIDUAL RECEIVE VR SERVICES?

- The VR agency assigns a VR counselor to each eligible individual.
- The counselor gathers as much information as possible about the individual’s work history, education and training, abilities and interests, rehabilitation needs and possible career goals. In gathering the information, the counselor will first look to existing information so it is important for an individual to bring copies of medical, educational and similar documentation.
- If existing information is not sufficient to determine whether the individual is eligible for VR services, then VR will provide assessment services to gather the needed information.
- Based on the information gathered in this assessment phase of the VR process, an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies the individual’s desired employment outcome is developed. The IPE also lists, among other things, the steps necessary to achieve the individual’s employment outcome, the services needed to help the individual achieve that outcome, and evaluation criteria used to determine progress toward the employment outcome.
- The VR agency may only provide those services listed on the IPE.
- The VR counselor provides some services directly to the eligible individual and arranges for other services from providers in the community.

7. HOW DOES AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOP AN IPE?

- Once an individual is determined eligible to receive VR services, he or she must develop an IPE. The individual

must be given the opportunity to make an informed choice in selecting, among other things, an employment outcome, needed VR services, and providers of those VR services.

- The individual may develop the IPE: on his/her own; with the assistance of a qualified VR counselor; or with the assistance of anyone else who is willing to help.
- The VR agency must provide the individual with information in writing, as well as in an appropriate mode of communication, explaining the assistance available to the individual when developing the IPE as well as the full range of components that must be included in the IPE.
- Both the individual and the VR counselor must sign the IPE.

8. WHAT ARE THE VR SERVICES AN ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUAL MAY RECEIVE?

VR services are those services that an eligible individual may need in order to achieve his/her employment outcome. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- an assessment for determining eligibility and VR needs;
- vocational counseling, guidance, and referral services;
- physical and mental restoration services;
- vocational and other training, including on the job training;
- maintenance for additional costs incurred while the individual is receiving certain VR services:
- Transportation related to the receipt of VR services;
- Interpreter services for individuals who are deaf;
- reader services for individuals who are blind
- services to assist students with disabilities to transition from school to work;
- personal assistance services (including training in managing, supervising, and directing personal assistance services) when an individual is receiving VR services;
- rehabilitation technology services and devices;
- supported employment services; and job placement services.

9. DOES THE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUAL HAVE TO PAY FOR VR SERVICES?

Based on the individual's available financial resources, the VR

agency may require an eligible individual to help pay for services. However, the following services are available to all eligible individuals, regardless of their financial resources, without charge:

- assessments to determine eligibility and VR needs;
- vocational counseling, guidance, and referral services; and
- job search and placement services.

10. WHAT ARE COMPARABLE SERVICES AND BENEFITS?

“Comparable services and benefits” are those benefits or services that are: 1) paid for in whole or in part, by another Federal, State or local public agency or employee benefits; 2) available at the time the individual needs them; and 3) comparable to the services that the individual would receive from the VR agency. Merit-based awards and scholarships are not considered “comparable services and benefits.” Before providing certain VR services, the counselor must determine whether another source, such as medical insurance or Medicaid, etc., can pay for the service. However, the counselor is not required to look for a “comparable service or benefit” if it would delay: 1) the individual’s progress toward achieving an employment outcome; 2) an immediate job placement; or 3) the provision of services to an eligible individual who is at extreme medical risk.

11. WHAT IS THE CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CAP)?

CAP is available in each State to assist individuals in their relationships with the VR agency. If an applicant for or the recipient of VR services is not satisfied with the services received or the decisions made by the VR counselor, CAP may be able to help resolve the dispute.

12. DO INDIVIDUALS HAVE APPEAL RIGHTS WITH THE VR PROGRAM?

Yes. If an applicant for or recipient of the VR program is unhappy with a decision made by a VR employee, he/she may request a review of that decision. The law requires the VR agency to offer at least two methods of resolving a dispute: mediation or a formal hearing process. An individual may choose to use one or both of these processes to resolve the

matter. In addition, the law provides the VR agencies with the flexibility to develop and Implement informal review procedures to resolve disputes prior to the mediation or formal hearing process. These informal review procedures generally involve the applicant or individual, or as appropriate, the applicant or individual representative, negotiating a resolution with the counselor or the counselor's supervisor.

13. WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE VR AGENCY IN MY STATE?

Division of Disabilities and Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Department of Human Services
Knud Hansen Complex – Building A
1303 Hospital Ground
St. Thomas, VI 00802-4355
(340) 774-0930

Client Assistance Program
Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands
Main Office:
63 Estate Carlton
Frederiksted, St. Croix, VI 00840
(340) 772-1200

St. Thomas Office:
9003 Havensight Mall, Suite 313
St. Thomas, VI 00802
(340) 776-4303