



NDC

National Deaf Center
on Postsecondary Outcomes



Plan Your Future: A Guide to Vocational Rehabilitation for Deaf Youth

How to Use This Guide

Deaf¹ youth, like you, have many different hopes, dreams, and goals. Many programs and services are available to help you succeed. One important program is vocational rehabilitation (VR), which helps you plan to reach your educational and career goals. VR is helpful, but the process of receiving services and the language that VR agencies use can be overwhelming!

This guide summarizes the process and shares important information that will help you get the services you need to succeed. Keep in mind that each state has its own VR system, so each state has a slightly different process. For more information, check out the glossary of terms and links to additional resources at the end of this document.

What Kind of Services Can I Get From VR?

VR services include tests to determine what is a good fit for you, including career counseling, accommodations, and financial support for education or training, among many more services.

Services that VR agencies may offer include the following.

Services	Examples
 <p>Transportation to training, college, or work</p>	<p>Public transportation fare, money to cover gas and/or mileage for personal cars, and so on</p>
 <p>Accommodations needed for VR services, specific training, or work</p>	<p>Interpreting, speech-to-text services like CART, and/or assistive technology like captioned phones or screen readers</p>
 <p>Assistive technologies to support communication</p>	<p>Hearing aids, flashing/vibrating alarm clocks, captioned telephones, personal amplifiers, screen braille communicators, and more</p>
 <p>Job-related services</p>	<p>Assistance with job searches, placement and retention services like job coaching, supported employment, resume development, job application assistance, and practice interviews</p>
 <p>Equipment and clothing needed for training or employment</p>	<p>Required costs and materials, which can include clothing, uniforms, equipment, certification fees, computers, and internet access</p>

Remember that you can get services even after you have gotten a job and your VR case has been closed successfully. VR services can help you keep your job or help with career advancement. Services that help you keep a job or get a promotion are known as postemployment services. VR can provide many other services—talk with your counselor!

How Do I Get VR Services?

For deaf young adults, there are two ways to receive services from VR: pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) and general VR services. You may qualify for services if you

- are willing to work,
- have at least one disability, and
- can benefit from assistance with getting, and keeping, a job.

VR is available in every state and U.S. territory. Contact your VR office today to figure out which services are a good fit for you. See the notes at the end of this document to find an office near you!²

	Pre-ETS	General VR Services
Age Range	14–21 (age range varies by state)	High school age and above
Who Qualifies³	Youths with a disability who are enrolled in school: high school, college, or similar settings	People who face significant barriers to employment as a result of a disability and need assistance to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment ⁴
Documents to Bring	Copy of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) from school, 504 Plan (similar to an IEP) from school, or other medical disability documentation with proof of enrollment in school	Copy of medical disability documentation Optional: Proof of Social Security Income or Social Security Disability Income—though not required, can help VR determine your eligibility more quickly ⁵ If none of the above can be obtained, VR may provide assessment(s) to determine eligibility at no cost to the applicant. ⁴

Wait, What Is Pre-ETS?

A recent law, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, has made it possible for students with disabilities to receive certain services. VR agencies can provide pre-ETS for youth with disabilities who are still in high school to help them reach their educational and employment goals.

There are five pre-employment transition services:

1. **Job exploration:** Find out how your interests, passions, and abilities may be a good match for some jobs.
2. **Work-based learning:** Get real-life experience on the job to learn and apply workplace skills, like internships and co-op programs!
3. **Postsecondary counseling:** Plan and work toward a career goal through college, vocational training, or other training programs, with support from VR.
4. **Workplace-readiness training:** Gain skills in communicating, working with others, problem solving, and practicing professionalism.
5. **Instruction in self-advocacy:** Learn how to communicate about your needs and how to ask for accommodations at college, training programs, or work.⁶

Pre-ETS can give you the tools, skills, and knowledge to be ready for training, college, or work after you graduate. Pre-ETS strives to give you the confidence to make important educational and employment decisions. Pre-ETS also helps you identify and work toward goals for independent living, education or training, and employment. The goal of pre-ETS is to help you overcome common challenges, such as communication barriers, lack of effective accommodations, and discrimination.

To make the most of transition planning, ensure that your family, teachers, IEP team, and VR counselor work together. VR counselors can go to IEP meetings so that your school and VR service providers can work together on transition services that support your needs and goals. Your family should also be involved to provide support, encouragement, and information to help you and others know what to expect.⁷

How Do I Get the Best Services?

VR is designed to help you make the best possible plans for your future. Think about your strengths, abilities, and interests.⁸ VR professionals can provide better services when they know about your strengths and your challenges in school, the workplace, and the community. VR professionals can provide assessments and evaluations to learn more about your strengths and challenges and what kinds of careers may be a good fit for you. Federal law requires VR programs to respect individual values and choices.⁹ This is called “individualized services.”

Tips to Remember

- If you are under 18, a parent or guardian may need to attend VR meetings with you and sign any required applications and forms for you.
- Read and review forms and contracts before signing them! If you have a tough time understanding any of the paperwork, ask your VR counselor to explain. Here are some forms you should expect:
 - **Application:** These forms will ask for your personal information to help VR open your case and communicate with you.

- **Consent to Release Information:** These forms will ask for your permission to share personal medical and nonmedical information between VR and other programs to help understand your needs and provide services. For example, your IEP team may share information about the accommodations you use at school and your goals for the future.
- **Student services plan or Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):** These forms are signed agreements that have the following information:
 - » Plan start and end dates
 - » Specific steps and responsibilities for continuing to receive VR services
 - » VR counselor responsibilities
 - » Specific services that may be provided to you
- Be ready to tell the VR counselor about your future plans. Think about your interests, passions, and dreams. What do you need to reach your goals?
- Stay in touch with your VR counselor to continue receiving the services you need. Be on time for your appointments!
- Patience is key. VR is not an emergency program. It takes time to ensure that you are eligible for VR services. However, it can make things smoother if you are prepared and have everything ready beforehand.

What Happens When I Don't Get the Services I Need?

Sometimes, you may face challenges when you apply to or receive VR services. These issues can include the following¹⁰:

- Denied eligibility to receive VR services
- Placement on a waiting list
- Being told you cannot get services or funding from VR
- No VR plan development due to disagreements about goals
- VR not helping you find a job
- VR counselor not returning calls or communicating with you

There are many ways you can resolve these issues. Start by talking directly with the VR counselor. If that does not work, ask to talk with these people in this order:

1. The direct manager of your VR counselor
2. The administrator in charge of the VR manager and counselor
3. The state VR central office

If your issues still are not resolved, contact your state's client assistance program, or your state's equivalent, to help you understand your rights and how to pursue appeals.¹¹ Every state VR agency has policies and procedures to review and come to an agreement whenever disagreements arise or services are denied.¹² Your VR agency should provide you with information on your rights and

remedies. Also review your state VR's policy manual, which usually is found on the state VR website, for specific appeals information and procedures.

Your Future Awaits! You Got This!

Remember that VR is there for you—to help you plan for your future and reach your goals. Being prepared and knowledgeable about VR can help you get better services and support. You can use the **VR Checklist for Students** on the following page, also available for separate download (nationaldeafcenter.org/vrforfamilies), as a starting point while you work with your VR counselor.

VR Checklist for Students

This checklist can help you work with vocational rehabilitation (VR). Be prepared—bring all the documents you need to meetings, so you can advocate for yourself.

Applying for Services

- Learn what VR is.
 - Talk to friends and family who have received VR services.
 - Consult other resources, such as NDC’s video on VR for deaf youth.¹³

- Gather information about your local VR office.
 - Address: _____
 - Website: _____
 - Phone number: _____

- Contact your local VR office to apply for services.
 - Request accommodations for orientation and intake appointments.
 - Show up to all appointments. If you are unable, let the VR office know in advance.
 - Complete and submit your application packet or forms.
 - After submission, you will be assigned to a VR counselor. If, after a few weeks, you still have not been notified of your assigned VR counselor, follow up with the VR office.

- Gather information about your VR counselor.
 - Name: _____
 - Phone number: _____
 - Email: _____

- Collect documentation that shows you have one or more disabilities. Here are some examples of what VR may ask you to provide:
 - Audiogram¹⁴
 - Letter or documentation from your doctor
 - Social Security benefit verification letter¹⁵
 - Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan from school
 - Accommodations letter or plan from college

Sharing More About Yourself

- Collect the results of any assessments or evaluations of your strengths, weaknesses, and career goals to share with your VR counselor.
- Take the Self-Determination Inventory¹⁶ to learn more about your current ability to make your own choices, set goals, and make decisions. You will get a student report with a score that can be shared with your VR counselor.
- Gather information about how you communicate with others in school and in the community.
 - What communication tools and strategies work for you? _____

 - What communication challenges do you experience? _____

- Consider the kinds of accommodations or assistive technologies that you use.
 - Interpreters
 - Speech-to-text services (CART, C-print, captions)
 - Videophones or amplified telephones
 - Strobe lights/alarms
 - Screen readers
 - Hearing aids and/or cochlear implants
 - Other: _____
- List any other accommodations and assistive technologies you would like to try to see what works best for you at home, in school, and in the community.

- List disabilities or disorders and how they are a challenge for you at home, school, or in the community.

Planning for the Future

- Describe what you want to do after high school. _____

- List your interests, hobbies, and passions. _____

- Describe what people have said that you would be good at. _____

- Do you want to go to vocational school or college? _____
- If you had a job or volunteered, describe what you liked and did not like about the experience.

- List the careers, majors, or industries you want to learn more about. _____

- Do you want to attend deaf camps or events to learn more about careers and majors?¹⁷

- Do you want to visit a company or organization related to your career interests?

- Do you want to ask questions about careers or job shadow with deaf professionals?

- Do you want to gain experience in different jobs to find out what you like and dislike?

Glossary

- **Accommodations:** Any change or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that would allow a person with a disability to access all education and employment settings equally^{18,19}
- **Assistive listening devices and systems:** Technology that increases volume to help deaf people better understand speech²⁰
- **Job retention services:** Additional support to help VR clients perform work responsibilities and keep their jobs; examples can include the following:
 - Job coaching
 - Funding for work-related activities (e.g., clothing, tools, equipment, transportation, union dues)
 - Funding for assistive technologies (e.g., ear molds, hearing aids and accessories, flashing/vibrating alarm clock)
- **Postemployment services:** Services to help people keep, regain, or advance in their jobs after their VR case has been closed

Notes and More Information

1. The term *deaf* is used in an all-inclusive manner to include people who identify as deaf, deafblind, deafdisabled, hard of hearing, late-deafened, or hearing impaired. NDC recognizes that for many individuals, identity is fluid and can change over time or with setting. NDC has chosen to use one term, *deaf*, with the goal of recognizing the shared experiences of individuals from diverse deaf communities while also honoring their differences.
2. For a list and contact information for state and territory VR agencies, visit the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion website:
askearn.org/state-vocational-rehabilitation-agencies
3. Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center. (n.d.). *Pre-employment transition services*.
wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services
4. Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). *34 CFR § 361.48: Scope of vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities*. [law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/34/361.48](https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/34/361.48)
5. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2017). *Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about RSA*. www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/faq.html#question2
6. For more information, visit our Self-Advocacy: The Basics webpage:
nationaldeafcenter.org/resource/self-advocacy-basics
7. National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes. (2019). *Family support for deaf teens*.
nationaldeafcenter.org/resource/family-support-deaf-teens

8. National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes. (2019). *Choose your future activity kit*. nationaldeafcenter.org/resource/deafverse-choose-your-own-adventure-activity-kit
9. Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). *29 U.S. Code § 701: Findings; purpose; policy*. law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/29/701
10. National Parent Center on Transition and Employment. (n.d.). *Client Assistance Programs*. pacer.org/transition/learning-center/benefits/client.asp
11. International Center for Disability Resources on the Internet. (n.d.). *Client Assistance Program (CAP) site listings*. icdri.org/legal/CAP.htm
12. Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). *29 U.S. Code § 722: Eligibility and Individualized Plan for Employment*. law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/29/722
13. National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes. (2020). *Plan your future: A guide to vocational rehabilitation for deaf youth* (Video). youtu.be/JhlJP2v52bl
14. Hands & Voices. (n.d.). *Communication considerations A to Z: The audiogram*. handsandvoices.org/comcon/articles/audiogram.htm
15. Social Security Administration. (n.d.). *Social Security benefit verification letter*. ssa.gov/myaccount/proof-of-benefits.html
16. For more information, visit our Self-Determination Inventory webpage: nationaldeafcenter.org/self-determination-inventory
17. Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. (n.d.). *Summer camps for deaf and hard of hearing children and teens*. www3.gallaudet.edu/clerc-center/info-to-go/national-resources-and-directories/summer-camps.html
18. Job Accommodation Network. (n.d.). *The JAN workplace accommodation toolkit: Building your inclusive workplace*. askjan.org/toolkit/The-JAN-Workplace-Accommodation-Toolkit.cfm
19. For more information, visit our Accommodations 101 topic page: nationaldeafcenter.org/topics/accommodations-101
20. National Deaf Center for Postsecondary Outcomes. (2019). *Assistive listening systems 101*. nationaldeafcenter.org/als101



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