

Vocational Rehabilitation: An Introduction

Overview

Twenty percent of the adult population has a disability. Most deaf individuals do not seek vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, but those that do most often come to VR seeking employment-related services or education and/or training to prepare for employment.

What is a vocational rehabilitation?

Vocational rehabilitation is a state-federal partnership program, with each individual state managing its own program within set federal guidelines. The broad-based goal of VR is to provide employment-related services that result in competitive employment in a career that matches the VR consumer's strengths, interests, abilities, and employment goals.

What kind of services can vocational rehabilitation provide?

Vocational rehabilitation agencies offer a variety of services including, but not limited to, career counseling, vocational assessment, assistive technology, job placement, soft skills development, and on-the-job training. The specific services provided by vocational rehabilitation are tailored to meet an individual's specific career goal and are determined when developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Research findings indicate that deaf vocational rehabilitation consumers are more likely to become competitively employed after receiving services ranging from postsecondary education, on-the-job training, assessment, counseling and guidance, restoration, and other job placement services.¹

Who is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services?

Any individual who has a disability that creates a substantial barrier to employment and can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services is eligible to apply to their state program. However, VR is not an entitlement program, and not all applicants are eligible for services. According to section 102(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, in order to qualify for VR services, an individual must:

- Have a physical or mental impairment which constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment;
- Be able to benefit from vocational rehabilitation services by achieving an employment outcome; and
- Require vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain gainful employment.

Moreover, as a result of funding constraints, federal and state regulations often mandate that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive services first. VR determines this eligibility through a process referred to as the "Order of Selection." While Order of Selections vary from state to state, and not all states use the "Order of Selection" process, most follow a four-category priority system. Those individuals with the most need tend to present disabilities that result in serious

functional limitations in three or more functional capabilities, while those given the lowest priority are those that meet the minimum qualifications described above.

What does the overall VR process entail?

- 1. The application process and determination of eligibility:** VR services begin with an intake interview with a VR counselor and submission of an application. Determining eligibility is a process that takes 60 days or less.
- 2. Assessment of vocational needs:** To learn more about the applicant's interests, skills, and determine effective services, VR will administer a battery of assessments related to the goal of employment.
- 3. Development of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):** An IPE is a plan that charts a course of action to achieve a specific employment goal. The VR counselor and the person with a disability work together to develop the plan based on vocational goals and assessment results. Once completed, services begin.
- 4. Implementation of the IPE:** With an IPE in place, VR coordinates services consistent with the IPE.
- 5. Job placement:** Placement services may include job coaching, identifying job leads, interviewing and on-the-job training. To ensure long-term success, VR monitors and provides support for the first 90 days on the job.

Where can someone find out more information about vocational rehabilitation services?

Since each state manages its own department or division of rehabilitation services, individuals need to contact their state agency to obtain more information. Contact information for all state vocational rehabilitation offices is included in the Resources section below.

Individuals with disabilities are not required to be VR clients in order to receive accommodations at postsecondary institutions. With the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA, institutions of higher learning are obligated to provide accommodations to individuals with disabilities. However, it is common for VR and the postsecondary institution to work in tandem to provide accommodations.

Additional Resources

- Vocational Rehabilitation: Understanding Service Options: www.nationaldeafcenter.org/vrservices
- State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs: www.parac.org/svrp.html

Additional resources on this subject may be available at www.NationalDeafCenter.org.

References

- ¹ Moore, C. L. (2001). Disparities in job placement outcomes among deaf, late-deafened, and hard-of-hearing consumers. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*. 44 (3). 144–150. Retrieved from: www.tinyurl.com/coreymoore2001

