

Your Guide To Employment



Handbook of Services



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
fldoe.org



Mission

To help people with disabilities find and maintain employment or advance in their career and enhance their independence.

Vision

To become the first place people with disabilities turn to when seeking employment and a top resource for employers in need of qualified employees.

Purpose of Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational Rehabilitation, known as VR, helps eligible individuals with physical or mental disabilities find, get or keep a better job.

Who is Eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services

You may be eligible for VR services if your goal is to become employed and:

- You have a physical or mental disability.
- Your disability results in a significant barrier to employment.
- You need VR services to get or keep a job.

The Role of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Your VR Counselor:

- Provides information, resources, guidance and counseling about your disability and working.
- Helps you learn about your strengths, priorities, abilities and interests, so you can prepare for and find a job that you choose together.
- Works closely with you to write your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) in order to help you reach your job goal.
- Arranges services you need to get and keep a job.

Things You Can Do to Be Successful Are:

- Stay in touch with your VR counselor.
- Make sure that VR has your correct contact information (e.g., phone number, address) so they can reach you.
- Give your VR counselor information and records so they can help decide if you are eligible for VR and to plan the services you need to reach your job goal.
- Look for additional sources of funding for your services including: Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Ticket to Work (TTW), Medicare, Medicaid, other insurance, public assistance, educational scholarships, grants and other community resources.
- Do not go to any appointment or service unless you are sure that your VR counselor has approved it ahead of time. VR will not pay for any services that are not approved first.
- Choose a job goal with help from your VR counselor. Your VR counselor will help you look at the types of jobs that are available in your area so that you can choose a job goal that leads to being employed.
- Stay actively involved in making your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). It is based on your choices, needs and interests. Your VR counselor will help you choose a job goal. If your choice changes at any time, discuss it with your VR counselor.
- Be on time for all appointments and follow through with assignments. If you need to reschedule, let your VR counselor's office know as soon as possible. If you do not keep or change your appointment early, your services may be delayed. Finish the actions you agree to do in your IPE.

Your Rights

As a person with a disability working with VR, you have many rights. If you believe your rights have been violated, there are people who can help. You have the right to appeal a decision by VR if you do not agree, or if there is a problem that you cannot resolve with your VR counselor. Your counselor, their supervisor, the Client Assistance Program or the ombudsman, can help you resolve most problems. If you do not agree with a decision, you have the right to request an appeal. You have 21 days after receiving written notification of a decision to file a written appeal. You have three options to help with your appeal. They are:

1. You may request an **informal review** by contacting the local VR area director. Any VR staff member at your local office can help you with information on how to contact the area director.
2. You may request **mediation** by contacting the VR state director.
3. You may request an **administrative hearing** by contacting the VR state director.

To request mediation and/or administrative hearing, you must email at VRDirector@vr.fldoe.org or write to: State Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 4070 Esplanade Way, Tallahassee, FL 32399-7016.

When you request an appeal, you need to include:

- A copy of your VR counselor's decision letter.
- An explanation of what you believe needs to be resolved.
- How you want to resolve the issue.
- The type of appeal you are requesting.

Informed Choices

Informed choice, or making a choice based on good information, is the center of the vocational rehabilitation process. VR works with you in making informed choices about:

- Your job goal.
- Services you need to reach your goal.
- Who will provide the services you need.

You share responsibility with your counselor for identifying options and exploring the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Your choice of employment outcome must be consistent with your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities and interests. Please ask questions as you work with your counselor so that you understand every available option.

If You Disagree with a Decision

Sometimes you may have a problem with VR services, or your counselor and you may disagree. If this happens or you have concerns or questions, then the following list of people are ready to help you.

Your Counselor's Supervisor

If you have any problems with the VR process that your counselor cannot help with, you may contact your counselor's supervisor at any time for assistance.

The VR Ombudsman Office

The VR Ombudsman Office is an impartial service available to any VR customer who has questions, concerns or believes they did not get the services they expected. The Ombudsman listens and helps in resolving complaints. Call toll free at 866-515-3692 or email at Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org.

The Client Assistance Program

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights Florida helps with any problem related to VR services. You may contact them any time while you receive VR services. Mail to: Disability Rights Florida, 2473 Care Drive, Suite 200, Tallahassee, FL 32308. Call toll free at 800-342-0823 or 850-488-9071; TDD at 800-346-4127. For more information about CAP, visit www.DisabilityRightsFlorida.org

**Keep this book handy so you can refer to it at any time.
If you have questions, your VR counselor will help you.**

The Steps to Using Vocational Rehabilitation to Prepare for, Keep or Start a Job

The VR process is a series of steps that will help you prepare for, keep or start a job based on your interests and abilities.



Be Referred for Services

You can be referred for VR services by anyone—including yourself! Once you have completed a referral for services, VR will contact you with information about a group or individual orientation session and the next steps in the process.



Apply for Services

Any person who has a physical or mental disability can apply for VR services. Once you have decided that VR is right for you, and that you want to keep or start working, VR staff will help you apply for services.



Eligibility Decision

Your counselor will help you learn how your disability affects your ability to keep or start a job. The counselor needs to learn whether you are eligible for VR services that will help you go to work. You can help your counselor decide by bringing information from doctors, schools, jobs or other people who know about you. If you do not have current information, your counselor will help you get needed evaluations at no cost to you.

Eligibility

- You have the right to a decision about your eligibility within 60 days.
- If something unexpected happens, you and your counselor can agree that more time is needed.
- If you receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) because you have a disability, you are eligible for VR services that may lead to a job.



Write Your Individualized Plan for Employment

Your counselor will help you write your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Your IPE will include:

- The job goal that you and your counselor agree on;
- VR services that you will receive;
- Things you will do to get ready to go to work; and,
- The amount of money you will contribute for your services, if any.

A signed copy of the IPE will be given for you to keep. The IPE will be explained to you in your native language or any other mode of communications.

Your counselor can help you develop all or part of your IPE. If you choose to develop your own IPE, your counselor will tell you what you need to do to develop your plan. You and your counselor must agree and sign your plan.

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IPE Deadlines

- Your counselor must work to finish your IPE as soon as possible, but no longer than 90 days.
- If finishing the IPE takes more than 90 days, time can be added.



Financial Participation

- VR is required to look at the income of eligible individuals to find out if they must share the cost of some VR services (Financial Participation).
- A person with no income or those who receive SSDI or SSI do not have to pay for VR services.
- Some VR services are free. VR will never make you pay for services needed to make a decision about eligibility.
- Your VR counselor will talk to you about how financial participation may effect you during your first visit. If you do not provide your VR counselor your financial information, you will not be able to receive many VR services.



Possible Wait List Category

After your VR counselor determines you are eligible for services, they will look at how much your disability affects your ability to work and the services you may need to become employed. Based on this information, your counselor will decide whether you are:

- A person with the most significant disability (Category 1);
- A person with a significant disability (Category 2), or
- A person with a disability (Category 3).

When VR does not have enough money or staff to help everyone who is eligible for services, VR prioritizes assistance based on the significance of disability (Order of Selection). VR helps people with the most significant disabilities first. Second are people with significant disabilities. Third are people who do not fit into one of these two categories. Depending on the category you are assigned, you may be put on a waiting list for services. Your category is determined based on services you might need in order to obtain and maintain a job, and for how long those services might be needed. The cause of your disability is not included.

VR also provides information and referral to other agencies that may help you. If you are on a wait list and your life or job changes, then contact your counselor to decide if you need to be assigned to a different category. The VR process continues if you are not put on a wait list or when your time on the wait list ends.

Steps to Prepare, Get or Keep a Job Continued

- 6 Participate in Services to Get Ready for Work**
- VR can help you improve your ability to get and keep a job. Some VR services are delivered by your counselor (Guidance and Counseling). Other services are delivered by vendors (e.g., medical doctors, psychologists, schools, stores). Some complex, disability-related services are delivered by specific service providers (e.g., on-the-job and work readiness training, Pre-ETS and job placement services).
- You are responsible for participating in the services you agree to in your IPE.

- 7 Become Employed!**
- When you are ready to work, your counselor and/or a service provider will work together with you to:
- Help you find available jobs in your community that match your IPE employment goal.
 - Give you ideas and advice on how to fill out applications and interview for the jobs you want.
 - Work with your employer to change the job site and provide assistive devices to meet your needs, if necessary.

After you begin work, your counselor will continue to make sure that you and your employer have everything you need to do well. If you have problems on the job, contact your VR counselor. More services can be provided to help you keep working.

- 8 Case Closure**
- After you have worked on your job for at least 90 days, you and your counselor will discuss ending VR help. During this discussion, you and your counselor must agree that you no longer need VR services to keep your job. If you need help to keep your job in the future, you should contact VR for additional services.

Confidentiality

Florida law allows VR to get medical and/or psychological information from doctors or other professionals with your written permission. This information is requested only to help your counselor determine your eligibility and the services necessary to help you get and keep a job. All information discussed with and given to your counselor is confidential. VR will not discuss or release any information about you without your written consent, as required by law, with the following exceptions:

- VR electronically exchanges customer information with the Social Security Administration (SSA). If the information does not match SSA, VR will notify the customer in writing to verify and, if necessary, correct our records.
- VR may release records to (1) service providers to provide services to you; and (2) other Florida government agencies and legislative members who have requested information in the performance of official duties.
- VR is legally required to (1) report declared intention to harm self, others or property; (2) release information in response to investigations by local, state or federal authorities, and investigations of fraud or abuse; and (3) to release information to report abuse, neglect or exploitation of an elderly person, a person with a disability, or a child.
- VR may discuss information regarding your rehabilitation services with the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights Florida when you requested their assistance.
- VR may release information to employers for the purpose of verifying employment and wage information in the administration of the program.

Rights and Responsibility Acknowledgement

I have received a copy of *Your Guide to Employment: Handbook of Services* from the Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. I reviewed it with my VR counselor. I understand my rights to confidentiality, how I can appeal decisions that my VR counselor makes, and my right to make informed choices about my VR services. I also understand that I have the responsibility to be involved and active while receiving VR services.

Print Name

Customer's Signature

Date

File Copy

Revised June 2019

The Florida Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2018 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$161,765,853. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs (\$43,781,610) were funded by Florida State Appropriations.

Review Acknowledgement

Your Guide to Employment: Handbook of Services gives you general information about vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. You and your VR counselor will read the information in the handbook together when you apply for services. After you and the VR counselor review the information in the handbook, your VR counselor will ask you to sign and return this form. You signing the form tells us that you have received and understood the information in this handbook. Please ask your VR counselor any questions you may have.

I have received a copy of *Your Guide to Employment: Handbook of Services* from the Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and have reviewed it with my counselor. I do understand my rights to confidentiality, how I can appeal decisions that my VR counselor makes, and my right to make informed choices about my VR services. I also understand that I have the responsibility to be involved and active while receiving VR services.

Print Name

Customer's Signature

Date

Customer Copy

Please detach this card and keep it where you can easily find it should you need to call the VR Ombudsman's Office of CAP for assistance.

**VR Ombudsman Office
Customer Service**

The VR Ombudsman Office will assist you in resolving your customer service needs.

Call toll free at 866-515-3692

or email Ombudsman@vr.fldoe.org

If you email, include your phone number and the best way to contact you.



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Your Guide to Employment: Handbook of Services provides an overview of the vocational rehabilitation program and services offered by the Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

VR WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU

Your feedback and thoughts are very important, and VR cares about what you think of the program. During and after you have finished with VR, we may ask you to respond to VR customer satisfaction surveys. We hope you will answer these surveys, because your feedback or thoughts are very important to us so we can improve VR services in Florida.

We also encourage you to visit a Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC) public forum and its quarterly meetings. For dates and locations of FRC/VR public forums, contact your VR counselor, call 800-451-4327 or visit www.RehabWorks.org/rehabcouncil.shtml.

An Equal Opportunity Employer Program: It is against the law for the Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation as a recipient of Federal financial assistance, to discriminate against any individual in the United States on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, political affiliation or belief.

The application process used by VR to determine eligibility for services, any subsequent services, and the entire VR process are subject to these non-discrimination requirements.



Client Assistance Program (CAP)

800-342-0823

www.DisabilityRightsFlorida.org

40 Years of Protecting Your Civil Rights
Providing free and confidential services to
Floridians with disabilities.