

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 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 or stay 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.
- 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.

Tips for Success

- Stay in touch with your VR counselor and be actively involved following through with assignments.
- Make sure that VR has your correct contact information (e.g., phone numbers, home/ mailing address, email) so they can reach you.
- Give your VR counselor information and records to help move your case forward.
- 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.
- Make sure all appointments or services are approved by your VR counselor ahead of time. VR will not pay for any services that are not approved first.
- Be on time for all appointments. If you need to reschedule, notify your VR counselor's office as soon as possible. If you do not keep or change your appointment ahead of time, your services may be delayed.
- Dress for success. What you wear to appointments and meetings should be similar to your clothing you wear to job interviews.

The Florida Department of Education, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is an equal opportunity employer. It is against the law for VR 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. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. VR program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2022 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$175,063,093. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs (\$47,775,094) were funded by Florida State Appropriations. Revised October 2023.

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 VR Ombudsman, can help you resolve most problems. If you do not agree with a decision, you have the right to request an appeal. After receiving written notification of a decision, you have 21 days to file a written appeal of that decision. You have three (3) options to help with your appeal:

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.
Note: VR may decline requests for mediation.
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, 325 W. Gaines St., Suite 1144, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400.

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 means that you and your VR counselor will explore all the different available options to help make the best decisions that will lead to your work success. VR works with you in making informed choices about:

- Job goal.
- Services needed to reach your goal.
- Who will provide the services you need.

You and your counselor share responsibility for identifying options and exploring the positives and negatives of each option. The choice of job goal must be consistent with your:

- Unique strengths
- Resources
- Priorities
- Concerns
- Abilities
- Capabilities, and
- Interests

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.

VR Ombudsman Office

The VR Ombudsman Office is a part of VR that provides a neutral service available to any individual who has questions, concerns or believes they did not get the services they expected. The VR 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. Send mail: 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 helps eligible individuals prepare for, keep or start a job based on their 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

After applying for VR services, VR must determine how your disability affects your ability to keep or start a job and whether you need VR services to help you go to work. You can help with this determination 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 the evaluations you need 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.
- Generally, if you receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) because you have a disability, you are eligible for VR services.



Steps to Prepare for, Keep or Start a Job Continued

Write Your Individualized Plan for Employment

Your counselor can help you develop all or part of your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). You may also choose to create your IPE with assistance from Disability Rights Florida's CAP. If you choose to create your own IPE, your counselor will tell you what you need to do to develop your plan. Your IPE will include:

- The job goal that you and your counselor agree on;
- The services needed to reach your job goal;
- Any available community resources to cover services; and,
- The amount of money you may need to contribute for your services, if any.

You and your counselor must agree to and sign your plan. 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 communication.

The IPE is not a contract, but rather a *plan* that is agreed upon in good faith, which delineates the employment outcome and services to be provided that are needed to achieve the outcome.

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Possible Wait List Category

If you are determined eligible for services, VR will look at how much your disability currently affects your ability to work, the services you may need to become employed, and how long those services may be needed. Based on this information, VR will determine whether you are an individual with a:

- Most Significant Disability (Category 1);
- Significant Disability (Category 2), or
- 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)—starting with Category 1, then Category 2 and then Category 3. Depending on the category you are assigned, you may be put on a wait list for services.

VR also provides information and referrals to other agencies that may help you. If you are on a wait list and your situation 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.

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IPE Deadlines

- Your counselor must work to finish writing 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 and Comparable Benefits

- 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). Depending on your income, you may be required to pay a portion of the cost of VR services.
- A person with low income, no income or those who receive public assistance, SSDI or SSI may not have to pay for services.
- During your first meeting with your VR counselor, they will talk to you about how financial participation may apply to your case. VR is also required to use any available community resources (Comparable Benefits). For example, health insurances, financial aid or non-profit organizations, to cover the cost of some services.



Steps to Prepare for, Keep or Start 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 by providing services that get you ready for work success. Some VR services are delivered by your counselor (Guidance and Counseling). Other services are managed by VR but delivered by vendors (e.g., medical doctors, psychologists, trainers, job placement specialists). You are responsible for participating in the services you agree to in your IPE.



Become Employed!

When you are ready to work, your counselor and possibly a service provider will work together with you to:

- Help you find available jobs in your community that match your IPE job 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 may be provided to help you keep working.



Case Closure

After you have worked on your job for at least 90 days, you and your counselor will discuss the successful closure of your VR case. 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 to discuss possible ways we can assist.

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.
- 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.
- 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.
- May discuss information regarding your rehabilitation services with CAP at Disability Rights Florida when you requested their assistance.

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 and have reviewed it with VR staff. I do understand my rights to confidentiality, how I can appeal decisions that VR makes, and my right to make informed choices about my VR services. I also understand that I have the responsibility to be involved and actively participate while receiving VR services.

Print Name

Customer's Signature

Date

File Copy

Review Acknowledgement

Your Guide to Employment: Handbook of Services gives you general information about VR services. VR staff will review the information in the handbook with you when you apply for services. After the information is reviewed, VR staff will ask you to sign and return this form. Your signature tells us that you have received, read and understand the information in this handbook. If you have any questions, discuss them with your VR counselor.

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 VR staff. I do understand my rights to confidentiality, how I can appeal decisions that VR makes, and my right to make informed choices about my VR services. I also understand that I have the responsibility to be involved and actively participate while receiving VR services.

Print Name

Customer's Signature

Date

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

Customer Copy



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VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION

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 feedback 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 visit www.RehabWorks.org/RehabCouncil.shtml.

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.

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.