

Chapter 15

Request For Approval

15.00 Definition. Request for approval is a petition to gain an approval from the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) State or Area Office prior to initiating certain vocational services for individuals. If the request is approved, the services requested will be included on the IPE or IPE amendment, as appropriate.

The counselor is responsible for identifying cases requiring approval and obtaining the required supporting documentation.

Services requested should not be initiated or provided until the request for approval is granted, signed and returned to the area/unit staff.

15.01 State Office Approvals.

Definition: The approval of policy exceptions and certain medical/ psychological services by the State Office. The services are to be included on the IPE or IPE amendment, as appropriate.

For detailed information, refer to Field Services Operating Procedures (FSOP) – Request for Approval.

Services that require a request for approval at the State Office level are:

1. **Extraordinary or experimental medical/psychological services.** These include:
 - a. All Transplants;
 - b. All procedures to be performed on persons with cancer;
 - c. Cochlear implants (CI) and other implantable hearing devices (CI and bone-anchored hearing aid [BAHA] speech/sound processor [external device] replacements or repairs do not require state level approval);
 - d. Gastrointestinal procedures (e.g. laparoscopic gastric sleeve surgery) for morbid obesity;
 - e. Hyperbaric oxygen treatments for any condition;
 - f. Intrathecal baclofen Infusion for Cerebral Palsy (cerebral dystonia); or
 - g. Brain surgery.
 - h. Comprehensive InPatient/OutPatient Pain Management Programs conducted by a multi-specialty team or by an individual physician. The program could utilize single or multiple modalities such as narcotics, indwelling drug administration devices, acupuncture, implanted stimulation devices, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) units, physical and massage therapy, and/or psychological support. Epidural injections beyond a 3-injection trial requires approval at the State Office level.
 - i. Any cosmetic/reconstructive surgery;
 - j. Any medical condition with an uncertain prognosis or outcome;

- k. Gender affirmation surgery or treatment; or
 - l. Bone Stimulator.
2. **Treatment to be provided out of state** except in Southern Georgia or Alabama when in close proximity to the individual's home. **Note:** the determination of whether an individual lives in close proximity is based on the individual's needs, which may include availability of transportation and availability of services. [Reference Chapter 11, Section 11.01(3).]

3. **Policy Exceptions.**

For detailed information, refer to FSOP – Request for Approval.

- a. An individual, through his or her counselor, may seek an exception to policy that is needed in order to meet his or her unique rehabilitation requirements to secure, maintain, retain, or advance in employment.
- b. The policy exception(s) shall only be granted if the request meets the following criteria:
 - i. **Needs of an individual:** The exception(s) to the policy must be necessary because of the unique needs of an individual. The request for the exception must explain why the policy should not apply to the particular individual's services.
 - ii. **Legality:** The granting of a policy exception must not violate any federal or state law or regulation.
 - iii. **Intent of the policy:** Granting an exception must not violate the intent of the given policy. For example: Policy requires that there be evidence in the case file and on the IPE that an individual can succeed in training before that training can be provided. The intent of the policy is to ensure that individuals are moving appropriately toward a viable vocational goal and to ensure the prudent and efficient use of public funds.
 - iv. **Fairness and Equity:** The granting of the exception must not violate fairness to other individuals. For example: If an individual is granted an exception(s) for a certain type of service(s), other individuals that fall within that same category and circumstance may be given the right to request an exception(s) based upon individual need.
- c. **Financial Participation Determination** - In exceptional cases, circumstances may occur where rigid adherence to the financial participation assessment procedures could seriously jeopardize the individual's opportunity to achieve rehabilitation objectives and an employment outcome. For example, the individual may need immediate medical intervention and may not have the funds immediately available. In such cases, the counselor may elect to seek an exception to the policy.

- An exception can only be requested based on at least one of the following reasons:
 - i. substantial change in financial circumstances (based on employer-generated pay stubs, retirement program documents, or documentation from public or private economic support groups);
 - ii. need for immediate medical intervention (based on medical recommendations included in the case file); or
 - iii. the required financial participation, based on the percentage of participation, exceeds the individual's applicable income as calculated in the Financial Participation Assessment Form (Form DOE/DVR VCMT094).
- For detailed information, refer to FSOP – Casework Process 4 – Financial Participation which identifies the required information, including the budget worksheet in which the exception is sought. (Reference: FSOP – Budget Worksheet and Expense Analysis.)
- When an exception to the financial participation policy is granted, the individual is not required to pay for the service or costs included and approved in the request. This exception does not exempt the individual from the required financial participation for any other service.

15.02 Area Office Approvals.

Definition: An approval obtained from an area director to include certain vocational services on the IPE or IPE amendment.

For detailed information, refer to FSOP – Request for Approval.

The services requiring a request for approval at the Area Office level are:

1. Services to VR or staff (this includes privatization staff) and family members who reside within the same VR area.
2. Services on an IPE or IPE amendment, which can reasonably be expected to require expenditures totaling \$40,000 or more. Approval will be required for each increment of \$20,000 thereafter.
3. Training to be provided out of state except in southern Georgia or Alabama when in close proximity to the individual's home. The determination of whether an individual lives in close proximity is based on the individual's needs, which may include availability of transportation and availability services. [Reference Chapter 13, Section 13.07]
4. Graduate level training.

5. Maintenance payments \$750 or more per month [See Chapter 11.06 and the FSOP – Budget Worksheet and Expense Analysis.]
6. Other goods and services \$750 or more provided and not classified as maintenance. [Reference Chapter 11, Sections 11.06 and 11.10 and the FSOP – Budget Worksheet and Expense Analysis.]
 - a. The counselor must obtain written verification from the individual’s employer of the specific goods and services necessary for employment prior to initiating the authorization process. Other goods and services provided for self-employment must be contained in the individual’s approved business plan. The supervisor or counselor analyst may not approve any authorizations for other goods and services for employment without documentation. [Reference Chapter 9, Section 9.01(9)]
7. Waivers of maintenance in extenuating circumstances.
8. Occupational Licenses, Tools, Equipment, Initial Stocks and Supplies \$1,000 or more. [Chapter 11, Section 11.07]
 - a. The counselor must obtain written verification from the individual’s employer of the specific occupational licenses, tools, equipment, initial stocks and supplies necessary for employment prior to initiating the authorization process. Occupational tools and stocks provided for self-employment must be contained in the individual’s approved business plan. The supervisor or counselor analyst may not approve any authorizations for occupational tools and stocks for employment without documentation. [Reference Chapter 9, Section 9.01(9)]
9. Purchase of non-adaptive computers and related equipment of \$3,000 or more [Reference Chapter 11, Section 11.07.]

Stevens Amendment

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 2021 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded were \$176,836,896. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs (\$47,860,557) were funded by Florida State Appropriations. Revised October 2021.