



OKLAHOMA
Rehabilitation
Services



Rights and Responsibilities

Job Seekers guide to Vocational Rehabilitation
and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**"A journey of a thousand miles
begins with a single step."
Ancient Chinese proverb**

Start the journey to a new job, freedom

The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services provides opportunities for Oklahomans with disabilities to get a job and build economic self-sufficiency.

DRS' vocational rehabilitation programs introduce or return people with disabilities into the work force. These services create new taxpayers and reduce dependence on disability benefits and social welfare assistance.

To begin your journey to employment:

Call DRS at 405-951-3400 or 800-845-8476 and be directed to the nearest DRS office.

Visit the DRS web page at www.okdrs.gov.



About the brochure

This brochure outlines a job seeker's rights and responsibilities on their DRS journey. It also outlines what responsibilities staff of DRS' Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired Divisions have in seeing a job seeker succeed.

What services are available from DRS?



DRS' Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired help Oklahomans with disabilities to prepare for and get jobs. The services also help job seekers keep or advance in those jobs.

The basic vocational rehabilitation services, which are provided by both divisions, are counseling and guidance with job placement. Other services compensate for, correct or prevent disability-based barriers to employment.

DRS' VR programs are also linked with a network of other job training, education and employment services located at Workforce Oklahoma centers across the state.

As a result of VR services, thousands whose disabilities kept them from working become taxpayers each year, eliminating or reducing their need for disability benefits and social assistance.

What kind of services can job seekers get?

Eligible job seekers may receive vocational, medical or psychological assessments; career counseling and guidance; physical and mental restoration to improve employment opportunities; rehabilitation equipment and devices; supported employment; vocational training; college education; on-the-job training; job placement assistance; and disability specific specialized services for people who are blind, Deaf, hard of hearing or Deaf/Blind, and those with speech impairments.

High school-age students with disabilities can get a head-start on job training and work experience through DRS' Transition and Pre-Employment Transition Services. These programs are offered free of charge by VR and SBVI.

Students may receive services – such as vocational counseling and guidance, vocational assessment, work adjustment training, work study, on-the-job training, supported employment and job placement assistance. These students have boosted confidence, helping them discover strengths and improve skills needed to succeed in the job.

Who is eligible for services?

Oklahomans with disabilities are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services if they have physical or mental impairment that keeps them from being employed, and VR services are needed for them to prepare for, obtain, keep or advance at work.

DRS assumes that an individual with a disability who wants to work can benefit from VR services unless evidence indicates the disabilities are too significant.

Applicants receiving Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income are presumed to be eligible for VR services if they intend to become employed.



What do VR services cost?

Some services — such as medical examinations to determine if a person is eligible for services, vocational counseling and job placements — are always provided at no charge.

A job seeker may be asked to share the cost of some other services, depending on their income and financial resources. A counselor can provide a list of services available at no charge.

What if I need assistance to make services available

All VR/SBVI programs and services must be accessible to a job seeker. If a disability limits mobility, hearing or sight, VR/SBVI staff will provide the assistance a job seeker needs to participate fully in the VR program to the maximum extent possible.

Assistance will be provided in a job

seeker's preferred method of communication or native language, or that of their family member or other person representing them. This may include written materials in braille, large print, electronic file or audio versions; sign or foreign language interpreters; offices accessible to those with mobility disabilities; or other technology or assistance.

How to apply for services?



Individuals may apply at VR/SBVI field offices located throughout Oklahoma.

To contact the office nearest to you, telephone our toll-free hotline at 800-487-4042 or telephone the DRS State Office toll free at 800-845-8476.

Visit DRS online at www.okdrs.gov or consult the state government web pages online. Spanish speaking individuals may call 1-800-523-1565.

Oklahomans can also submit a self-referral for services online and view the status of their referral by going to www.okdrs.gov/client-portal.html. Tribal members may also apply to participate in tribal VR programs.

What is the Client Assistance Program?

The Client Assistance Program is an advocacy program, which is not part of DRS. CAP staff can help a client communicate concerns to VR/SBVI and help them work out disagreements through administrative, mediation, legal and other solutions.

For more information, contact:

Office of Disability Concerns

2400 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 426

Oklahoma City, OK 73125

Phone: 405-521-3756

E-mail: cap@odc.ok.gov

Website: www.ok.gov/odc/C.A.P./index.html.

When are medical services offered?

If assistance is not available from another source, VR/SBVI can provide diagnosis and treatment of physical and mental

impairments when these services are needed for job seekers to obtain, keep or advance at work.

Vocational Rehabilitation process

Step 1: When applying for VR Services

Once a potential job seeker has contacted DRS, agency staff will arrange for them to make an application and meet with a vocational rehabilitation counselor. The potential job seeker can provide the information during that meeting that is needed for VR/SBVI to determine if they are eligible for services. The application process can be sped up by bringing or emailing current medical, psychological and educational records or other information about the potential job seeker's disability with them to the appointment.

During the first interview, the counselor will explain the rehabilitation process and gather information about the applicant. During that meeting, the applicant may also register to vote or change their voter registration information when applying for or receiving services from a VR/SBVI office.

Step 2: Evaluating a job seeker's disability

VR/SBVI staff must evaluate the applicant's disability to find out if they are eligible for services.

The applicant may be asked to help get medical or other records. If additional tests are needed, VR/SBVI will pay for the tests required to determine their eligibility. The purpose of the evaluation is to gather diagnostic information and explore the applicant's background, abilities, disability-related barriers to employment and rehabilitation needs to help them prepare for employment.

All information is confidential and will be used only for vocational rehabilitation, unless the applicant has signed a release form giving written consent, or in situations where the law requires VR/SBVI to release the information.

Applying for VR services

Evaluating your disability

Determining eligibility

Planning your services

Receiving VR services

Getting a job

Step 3: Determining eligibility

VR/SBVI has 60 days from the time a person applies for services to determine



whether they are eligible unless they and their counselor agree to a specific extension.

If a person is eligible, they will be assigned to a priority group based on the significance of their disability. Sometimes there is a waiting period — called an order of selection. All priority groups can be under an order of selection. Applicants in priority groups may have to wait until funds are available to pay for their services.

Those who have completed an Individualized Plan for Employment before an order of selection begins will continue to receive services under the IPE. If there is an order of selection when a person applies for services, their counselor will explain it to them.

Even when they are not eligible for VR services or when they are placed on a waiting list, VR/SBVI will provide vocational rehabilitation information and referral assistance to help them obtain services from other sources.

VR counselors will refer them to other federal or state programs that may help with their employment needs, including those located at Oklahoma Works career centers.

Step 4: Planning the job seeker's services

If a person is determined to be eligible, their counselor will provide information about choices they have for developing an Individualized Plan for Employment. This is a plan of VR services that they will follow on their journey to work. Their IPE is based on their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice, and must be approved by DRS staff according to Rehabilitation Act requirements.

They may write the plan themselves, work with their counselor or use the assistance of someone else who is willing to help. The plan must be in writing. If a job seeker decides to write the IPE themselves, their counselor will explain what items should be included and what assistance is available. The plan must be completed within 90 days of the determination of eligibility unless they and their counselor agree to a specific extension.

Information will be provided about the types and costs of services, length of time services are expected to last, and who is available to

provide services and qualifications of service providers.

As part of the planning process, the job seeker will have the opportunity, with the help of their counselor, to choose an appropriate employment goal, the VR services to be provided under their plan, the businesses or companies that will provide the services and the methods for providing those services. The job seeker may be required to participate in assessment activities to help gather the information needed to identify their interests, capabilities, strengths and rehabilitation needs.

A job seeker's counselor will do a financial status determination based on their income before any services are provided. The purpose is to find out if the job seeker will need to share the cost of some services. Some services are available to all eligible individuals without charge. For example, evaluations or other diagnostic assessments used to determine eligibility and rehabilitation needs; vocational



counseling and guidance; information and referral to other sources; job search; on-the-job training and placement. Their counselor can provide a list of other services available to them at no charge. Those receiving Social Security disability benefits do not have to share costs for their rehabilitation programs.

After the job seeker and their counselor sign the IPE, the job seeker will get a copy. The plan will be provided in any requested format including large print, braille, electronic or audio versions. To the maximum extent possible, the plan will be provided in the job seeker's native language or method of communication, or that of their family member or other person representing them.

At least once each year, the job seeker and their counselor will review their financial status and the IPE to be sure it is still the best plan for the job seeker. If their needs change while they are in vocational rehabilitation, the job seeker's plan may need to be changed. The job seeker may ask for a review of their plan at any time.

The IPE is like a road map of VR services.





It helps a job seeker prepare for, obtain and keep a job based on their interests, strengths and capabilities.

Job seekers are encouraged to ask questions. Their participation in planning and carrying out VR programs is critical to their success.

Step 5: Receiving VR services

Many different services are available to help job seekers reach their employment goals. Their VR services will probably be different from those received by other job seekers because the services outlined in IPEs are based on individual needs and goals.

- Medical, psychological and other assessments are used to determine eligibility, abilities, disability-related barriers to employment and rehabilitation needs.
- Vocational evaluation, counseling and career planning guidance are provided by counselors to job seekers throughout the rehabilitation process.
- Information and referrals help individuals get appropriate services from other agencies.
- Employment services, including job search, placement and follow-up services, help job seekers obtain and keep suitable employment in their chosen careers.
- Assistive Technology is any item, piece of equipment or product system used to maintain or improve the ability of people with disabilities to prepare for employment and function more effectively in the workplace, or any service that assists individuals in selecting, obtaining or using an assistive technology device.
- Training includes vocational, post-secondary education, on-the-job, personal and vocational adjustment training, job search skills development and job coaching.
- Diagnosis and treatment of physical and mental disabilities may be provided to enhance job seekers' employment opportunities when services are not available through health insurance or other benefits.
- Maintenance helps pay expenses beyond a person's normal living expenses, that are necessary to enable the person to participate in VR assessments or services.
- Transportation, including training in the use of public transportation, is provided in connection with other services needed to reach employment goals.
- Instructional services, such as rehabilitation teaching and orientation and mobility services, assist individuals who are blind.
- Self-employment programs help individuals who want to work for themselves or operate their own businesses.
- Personal assistance services are

intended to help an individual with a disability perform daily living activities on or off the job. These services can be provided when necessary to enable a person to participate in vocational rehabilitation services and achieve an employment outcome.

- Transition services help high school students with disabilities prepare for and reach employment and other post-school goals.
- Supported employment assists individuals with significant physical, emotional, intellectual or multiple disabilities with employment in the community.
- Specialized programs assist job

seekers who are blind, Deaf, hard of hearing, Deaf-blind and individuals with speech impairments, significant disabilities and those who require independent living services.

Step 6: Getting a job

A job seeker's counselor will assist them in finding a job, working with potential employers to match qualified job seekers with suitable employment.

Job seekers should notify their counselor when they start working at a new job. It's a good idea for a job seeker to keep in touch with their counselor to solve any issue that arises. Generally, the job seeker's VR case will be closed after they have worked successfully for 90 days.

VR/SBVI responsibilities

DRS is committed to treating individuals with disabilities fairly and with respect. As an applicant and as a job seeker, Oklahomans who are eligible for services can expect VR/SBVI to:

- Contact the job seeker by phone or in person within 30 days if they are referred for services or ask VR/SBVI about services.
- Evaluate and provide services to an eligible job seeker without regard to their race, sex, religion, age or disability.
- Determine whether an applicant is eligible to receive services, generally within 60 days. If they are legally blind, they will also be referred to a rehabilitation teacher to find out if they are eligible for rehabilitation teaching services.
- Include a job seeker as a full participant in decisions about their vocational rehabilitation.
- Look for services and benefits that are available to job seekers through other government programs. Even when another program can provide a service, DRS can pay for the VR service if using the other program would delay their progress toward employment or delay services when they are at medical risk.
- Provide relevant information so that the job seeker can make informed choices about their program.
- Authorize services for the job seeker according to their IPE.
- Notify an applicant or job seeker in writing as soon as possible about any negative decision concerning their case.
- Inform the job seeker of their rights to a fair hearing or mediation when they disagree with decisions about their case and refer them to the CAP for help in resolving concerns they may have about their VR case.

Job seeker's responsibilities

Oklahomans with disabilities also have responsibilities as an applicant or job seeker. To help make their vocational rehabilitation a success, they should:

- Provide information and be available to complete the assessment process to find out if they are eligible for services.
- Be on time and keep appointments with VR/SBVI staff, doctors and others. Call in advance or as soon as possible if they cannot come to an appointment.
- Follow the advice of doctors and other medical professionals.
- Apply for and use benefits, services and additional sources of funding — such as education grants, public welfare programs and private insurance — to help pay for their VR services if other funding is available to them.
- Participate with their counselor in developing their IPE, including participating in assessments needed to determine a job seeker's needs and strengths.
- Make progress toward completing the steps outlined in a job seeker's IPE to reach their employment goal.
- Provide enrollment documents to their counselor, if their IPE includes educational and training services. When their plan includes college, provide enrollment documents to their counselor before the college's designated add/drop deadline.
- Attend education or training classes on a regular basis and maintain a cumulative 2.0 grade point average based on a 4.0 scale, if their IPE includes these services.
- Review their IPE with a job seeker's counselor at least once per year and participate in revising the plan when needed.
- Inform their counselor of changes in their address, financial status or other program-related changes.
- Abstain from drug and alcohol abuse. Refusal or failure to cooperate will be considered a reasonable cause to end services.
- Work with their counselor to get or keep suitable employment when their other services are completed.





Appealing a decision

Job seekers have the right to discuss a problem or concern with their counselor at any time during their vocational rehabilitation journey. Job seekers are asked to call for an appointment. Most concerns or problems can be worked out between the counselor and the job seeker.

If a job seeker is not satisfied with a decision about their case, they have the right

to due process, which means the job seeker can get decisions evaluated by department management in an administrative review, resolved through mediation or reviewed at a fair hearing.

CAP staff can help job seekers communicate concerns to VR/SBVI and assist them with administrative, mediation, legal and other solutions.

The appeal process

If a job seeker is not satisfied with a decision by VR/SBVI staff, which affects their case, they have 30 days to make a written request for a fair hearing. The request may be sent to their local VR/SBVI office or directly to the Hearings Coordinator in the State Office:

VR/SBVI Hearings Coordination

Department of Rehabilitation Services

3535 N.W. 58th Street, Suite 500

Oklahoma City, OK 73112-4824

Phone: 405-951-3400

Toll Free: 800-845-8476

1. If a job seeker asks, the local office will help them complete their request and give them information from their case record. Services being provided under an IPE will not be stopped, delayed or reduced because they have requested a fair hearing.

They have the right to be represented by another person, including a lawyer, at their own expense. A job seeker may want to ask CAP for help in preparing their appeal. If the job seeker does not request a fair hearing within 30 days, they will lose the right to appeal the decision.



2. VR/SBVI staff will start an administrative review to try to work out the disagreement, but the review cannot be used to delay or deny mediation or a fair hearing. The job seeker will get a letter explaining the decision resulting from the administrative review. If the problem is solved, they do not have to have a fair hearing.

3. When they ask for a fair hearing, a job seeker and VR/SBVI can use mediation to find a workable solution if both parties agree. Mediation cannot be used to delay or deny a fair hearing or other rights. The department will pay mediation costs.

The mediation session will be scheduled in

a timely manner at a location as convenient to the job seeker as possible. Discussions will be confidential. If the job seeker agrees to a solution, it will be written in a case record, and they will be provided with a copy. They do not have to go to a fair hearing.

4. A fair hearing must be held within 60 days from the date a "Request for fair hearing" form is received by the VR/SBVI hearings coordinator, unless they agree to a solution or to a longer period.

The fair hearing is a formal meeting with an impartial hearing officer. At the fair hearing the job seeker or the job seeker's representative and VR/SBVI will present



their problem or concern. They will receive a letter from the impartial hearing officer with a decision within 30 days after the fair hearing.

5. A job seeker can request a review of the impartial hearing officer's decision within 20 days by contacting the VR/SBVI hearings coordinator. The review request will be sent to the governor's office or its designee. A written decision will be provided within 30

days of their review request.

6. If the job seeker is not satisfied with the decision of the governor's office or its designee, they can bring a civil action asking a state court or district court to review the decision. The last decision of the governor's office or its designee will be implemented while the court reviews their case.



OKLAHOMA
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VR and SBVI connections

Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services

State Office

3535 N.W. 58th Street, Suite 500

Oklahoma City, OK 73112-4824

Phone: 405-951-3400, Toll Free: 800-845-8476, Fax: 405-951-3529

Toll Free Office Locator: 800-487-4042

www.okdrs.gov (Online self referral available)

Contact DRS about services

DRS Division: _____

Counselor: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

Programs Manager: _____

Phone: _____

Field Coordinator: _____

Phone: _____

Key DRS contacts

Additional resources

A list of additional resources for Oklahomans with disabilities is available online. It can be reached by scanning this QR code or by going online to www.okdrs.gov/resources.



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