



Getting a Head Start With Vocational Rehabilitation



What is Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)?

Vocational Rehabilitation is an employment program provided by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services. Since most people use the term Vocational Rehabilitation or VR, we will use that in this document. VR helps people with disabilities get paying meaningful jobs. When you apply for VR services you will:

- Have assessments to help learn about you and your job interests;
- Find out if you are eligible;
- Work with your VR Counselor on your Individual Plan for Employment (IPE); and
- Find out your “Priority Category.” (This is part of the “Order of Selection” used by VR when they do not have enough money to give everyone services who is eligible.)

How Does VR Decide if You Are Eligible?

People are eligible for VR services if:

- Their disability makes it hard for them to get or keep a job;
- They need help to get or keep a job that is right for them; and
- They can benefit from VR services.

Your VR Counselor decides if you are eligible for VR services. This decision is based on things like your medical records, education records, information that you or your family give them, VR Counselor thinks and disability decisions made by other agencies. Your VR Counselor has 60 days after you apply to decide if you will get services. However, sometimes the decision takes longer. If more time is needed, your VR counselor will ask you to agree in writing to let them take more time. The eligibility decision may take longer if your VR Counselor thinks your disability is too bad for you to get VR services to help you get a job. When that happens, your VR Counselor will set up some assessments, such as trial work experiences or extended evaluations. They help the VR Counselor decide how VR services can help you get a job.

People who get SSI or SSDI because they have a disability can get VR services if they want to work.

Order of Selection and Priority Categories

Order of Selection is important. It is required by law when there is not enough money for VR to serve everyone who is eligible for services. There are four Priority Categories. VR decides the Priority Category (PC) for each eligible person. By federal law, VR must serve individuals with the most significant disabilities first.

People who qualify as **Priority Category 1 (PC 1)** have the most significant disabilities that cause serious problems in two or more areas that make it hardest to get a job, work, and take at least six months to get a job. They want a job.

People who qualify as **Priority Category 2 (PC2)** have significant disabilities that cause serious problems in two or more areas that make it hard to get a job, work, and take at least six months to get a job. People who get SSI or SSDI because they have a disability or are blind are included. They want a job.

People who qualify as **Priority Categories three (PC3) and four (PC4)** have trouble getting and keeping jobs but are not as significant as PC1 and PC2. These disabilities do not create as severe a problem in getting a job. Individuals in PC4 need only a few VR services. They want a job.

You need to give your VR Counselor enough information from your doctor(s), school records or other sources to explain your disability. If you cannot get this paperwork, your VR Counselor can help. To qualify as Priority Category 1, this paperwork must show that your disability causes limitations in two or more “functional capacities” as defined by VR policy:

- Mobility
- Communication
- Work Skills
- Work Tolerance
- Self-Care
- Self-Direction
- Interpersonal Skills

What Does VR Do?

If you are eligible for VR services and assigned to an open Priority Category your needs, preferences and interests will help develop your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Everyone will not need the same services. Here are some examples of services:

- Diagnosis
- Career guidance and counseling
- Training
- Treatment
- Supported employment
- Job placement
- Self-employment supports
- Vocational Evaluation
- Rehabilitation technology services
- Personal care assistance program
- Post-employment supports
- Transition from school to work
- Independent living services
- Maintenance and transportation
- Assistive technology
- Interpreter services
- Client Assistance Program
- Help with self employment

Finding the Right Type of Work for You

Your VR Counselor will guide you through activities to identify your abilities, job skills, and job interests in order to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). This plan will identify the kind of job you want and what training, educating, and/or services you will need to get that job.

There are some things you can do to get ready for your first meeting with your VR Counselor. If you do not know what kind of work you want to do, here are some ways to look for ideas. Remember, you are not looking for just any job. You are looking for a job that interests you and that you can do with your abilities or with training you can receive in order to reach your employment.

If you think you would like to be self-employed, discuss how that might work with your VR Case Manager.

Planning Tool

Things That I Enjoy Doing:

Things That Are Okay to Do:

Things That I Dislike Doing:

Things I Really Dislike Doing:

Your Work Interests

1. What do you like to do? What are your interests and hobbies? Here is a tool to help:
<http://www.ou.edu/education/centers-and-partnerships/zarrow.html?rd=1>.

2. What kind of work or volunteer experiences have you enjoyed?

3. Visit Tennessee's Career Center webpage to look at jobs:
<http://www.job.com/?us=6169¶m2=Tennessee&opt=1&rmf=1&nmt=o>. Do you see jobs you like?

5. Look through the Occupational Outlook Handbook. This will help you see skills and training needed for jobs: <http://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/explore-careers.aspx>.

6. Talk to friends and relatives about their jobs. Is their work interesting? What training did they need?

7. Look at jobs at: jobs.net/Tennessee.htm. What jobs look interesting? What do you like about them? This is a pretty complicated site. Ask for help if you need it.

Work Planning

Knowing the kind of work you want to do will help when you work with your VR Counselor. Complete this worksheet before meeting with your counselor. Ask a teacher or family member for help if you need it.

1. What things are you good at doing?

2. What education have you had?___

3. What type of job training have you had?

4. What work experience have you had?

5. What volunteer experience have you had?

6. What kinds of work are you interested in? Why?

7. Do you need training to do the job you want? If you do, what type of training?

8. What kinds of jobs do NOT interest you? Why?

9. Do you want to work? Do you need health insurance?

Getting Ready for Your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Meeting

Your VR Counselor can help you learn what work you want to do and the skills you need, you can find you need training. Some job training options include postsecondary programs like Next Steps at Vanderbilt, IDEAL at Lipscomb University, UnionEDGE Program at Union University, Tiger LIFE at the University of Memphis, and UT FUTURE at the University of Tennessee; a college and/or university; Tennessee College of Applied Technology; the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Smyrna, a Community Rehabilitation Provider and others. It is up to you to visit places to get training to see which is a good fit. Your VR counselor will help you make a decision based on your interests, what you do well, and the work you want to do.

1. Your school Guidance Counselor can help find where you can get training. They can help you learn which schools may be most “disability friendly.”
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2. Talk with your VR Counselor. They have lots of information about schools.
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3. Ask your friends where they will get training and what they will be studying. If they are going to the same place where you will be getting training, you can support each other.
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5. One place to get job training is the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Smyrna, TN. They have personal and vocational training. Your VR Counselor can schedule a visit for you to visit and tour.

6. There are also Community TRC’s around the state where you can get vocational evaluations, employee development, personal and vocational training. Ask your VR Counselor for more information about these.

Responsibilities When You Get VR Services

1. You must help develop your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and work towards getting a job. You need to work closely with your VR Counselor in finding types of services, service providers, and looking for your job. You can help by keeping appointments and working to reach your work goal.
2. When you are getting VR services, you must contact your VR Counselor every month to let them know how things are going. Call your VR Counselor if you need to reschedule a meeting. Leave a phone message or send an email if you need to. Be sure you have their phone number and email in a safe place. Answer letters, phone messages or emails from your VR Counselor immediately.
3. VR helps get jobs if you have money or not. Unless you get SSI or SSDI, your counselor will talk to you about your income and assets to identify much you can help pay for services. This includes federal or state financial aid. If you can get them and will not use these benefits, you cannot get VR services.

Rights When You Get VR Services*

1. You have the right to know if you are eligible within 60 days of when you apply. 34 CFR §361.42
2. You have the right to develop your own IPE. 34 CFR §361.45 - §361.46
3. You have the right to get all the services you need to help you reach your job goal. 34 CFR §361.48
4. You have the right to decide what your job goal will be. CFR 34 §361.45 and §361.52
5. You have the right to pick services and providers (schools, etc.). 34 CFR §361.45 and §361.52
6. You have the right to change your IPE, your job goal or services. 34 CFR §361.45
7. You have the right to look at your IPE at least once a year with. 34 CFR §361.45
8. You have the right to review the VR Policy Manual. 34 CFR §361.50
9. You have the right to appeal any decision made by VR that you do not agree with. 34 CFR §361.57
10. You have the right to have the Client Assistance Program (CAP) help you. 34 CFR §361.57

* All rights are in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Part 361, State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program. A copy of the regulations is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>.

These are modified from Disability Rights Tennessee's "VR Bill of Rights."

If you need help understanding any of this or if you have questions you can call your VR Counselor or visit VR's website at http://state.tn.us/humanserv/rehab/rehab_main.html, or call the main office at (615)313-4891; (615)313-5695 (TTY); 1-800-270-1349 (TTY long distance).

If you disagree with a decision made by your VR Counselor and cannot resolve it by talking to your counselor's supervisor, you can get help appealing from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Tennessee Rights at 800/342-1660; 615/298-1080 (TDD); 888/852-2852 (TTY).

Tips

1. If your school does not make a referral to VR, call them yourself. (Directory at the back of this booklet.)
2. When planning, be sure to think about what type of work you want to do. VR helps find paid jobs. The training you get will depend on the type of work you want to do.
3. If VR says you are on a waiting list for employment services, ask them about your options.
4. Once you have signed your IPE, you will need to stay in touch with your VR Counselor at least once a month. If you call him/her, and s/he is not in the office, leave a message or send an email.
5. Your VR Counselor must approve all changes to services listed on the IPE in advance.
6. For information on a "Ticket to Work" visit: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/aboutticket.html>.
7. Tell your VR Counselor which the best way to contact you; by phone, mail, or email.
8. Let your VR Counselor know if you need information in another format, such as on a CD or Braille, or translated to another language.
9. It is important to call your VR Counselor as soon as you have a problem of any kind that affects your job training. They will help or offer advice.
10. Keep who support you in the loop (parents, etc.). They will help if they know you need them.
11. If you get training do not skip classes. Every class is essential to help you meet your career goal.
12. If you have a rough semester in college or technical school, do not give up. Your VR Counselor is there to help and support you when the going gets rough. They will have ideas that will help you.
13. Do not drop a class until you speak with your VR Counselor.
14. Connect with the Disability Services office where you attend school. They can help you talk with your instructors, help you find support services such as tutors, note takers, and more.
15. If you are living on campus, follow campus rules.
16. VR may close your case if:
 - You have completed your IPE and have successfully maintained employment for 90 days;
 - You do not cooperate with or maintain contact with your VR Counselor; or
 - You ask for it to be closed.
17. Do not expect others to look out for your rights. Ask questions until you get the answers. Take someone (like a parent) with you to your VR meetings. If someone tells you no, ask for the policy the refusal is based on. You have rights.

VR Regional Offices with Counties Served

<p><u>Region 1</u> 905 Buffalo Street Johnson City, Tennessee 37605-2120 Telephone: 423/434-6934 Fax: 423/434-6963 Counties & TRCs Served: Carter, Cocke, Grainger, Greene, Hamblen, Hancock, Hawkins, Jefferson, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, Washington</p>	<p><u>Region 2</u> State Office Building 531 W. Summit Hill Drove, Suite 301 Knoxville, Tennessee 37902 Telephone/TTY: 865/594-6060 Fax: 865/523-7852 or 865/594-6535 Counties & TRCs Served: Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Claiborne, Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Roane, Scott, Sevier, Union</p>
<p><u>Region 3</u> Eastgate Center, Suite 602-B 5600 Brainerd Road Chattanooga, Tennessee 37411 Telephone: 423/634-6700 Fax: 423/634-1976 Counties & TRCs Served: Bledsoe, Bradley, Coffee, Franklin, Grundy, Hamilton, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Moore, Polk, Rhea, Sequatchie</p>	<p><u>Region 4</u> 955 E. 20th Street Cookeville, Tennessee 38501-2472 Telephone/TTY: 931/526-9783 Fax: 931/525-1614 Counties & TRCs Served: Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Sumner, Trousdale, Van Buren, Warren, White</p>
<p><u>Region 5</u> 88 Hermitage Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37210 Telephone: 615/741-1606 Fax: 615/741-8180 Counties Served: Davidson, Robertson</p>	<p><u>Region 6</u> 6000 Trotwood Avenue Columbia, Tennessee 38401-7003 Telephone: 931/380-2563 Fax: 931/380-2567 Counties & TRCs Served: Bedford, Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis, Lincoln, Marshall, Maury, Perry, Rutherford, Wayne, Williamson, Wilson</p>
<p><u>Region 7</u> Lowell Thomas State Office Bldg, Box 15 225 Martin Luther King Boulevard Jackson, Tennessee 38301 Telephone: 731/423-5620 Fax: 731/426-0563 Counties & TRCs Served: Chester, Crockett, Decatur, Fayette, Hardeman, Hardin, Haywood, Henderson, Lauderdale, Madison, McNairy, Tipton</p>	<p><u>Region 8</u> 560 Benton Industrial Road Camden, Tennessee 38320 Telephone: 731/584-2147 Fax: 731/584-6795 Counties & TRCs Served: Benton, Carroll, Cheatham, Dickson, Dyer, Gibson, Henry, Houston, Humphreys, Lake, Montgomery, Obion, Robertson, Stewart, Weakley</p>
<p><u>Region 9</u> 170 North Main Street, 3rd Floor Memphis, Tennessee 38103-1820 Telephone/TDD: 901/528-5284 Fax: 901/543-6036 Counties & Served: Shelby</p>	<p><u>Region 10 & Region 11</u> Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (10) Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (11) Citizens Plaza State Office Building, 12th Floor 400 Deaderick Street Nashville, Tennessee 37243 Telephone: 615/313-4914 TTY, Long-Distance: 1-800-270-1349 Fax: (615) 313-6508</p>

This document was prepared by:

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Client Assistance Program (CAP), a Program of Disability Rights Tennessee

800/342-1660; 615/298-1080 (TDD); 888/852-2852 (TTY)
<http://www.disabilityrightstn.org>

Tennessee Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (VR)

615/313-4891; 615/ 313-5695 (TTY); 800/270-1349 (TTY Long Distance)
400 Deaderick Street, Second Floor, Nashville, TN 37243
http://www.tn.gov/humanserv/rehab/rehab_main.html



TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN SERVICES



Helping shape Tennessee lives.



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