

Getting a Head Start with Vocational Rehabilitation



What Is Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)?

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program is an employment program within the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services. Most people call this program VR. VR helps individuals with disabilities go to work by providing services based on an individual's specific rehabilitation needs. When you apply at VR, you will:

- Complete an Application for VR Services that will help VR learn about you and your job interests;
- Find out if you are eligible for VR services;
- If you are eligible for VR services, work with your VR Counselor on your rehabilitation needs; and
- Based on your rehabilitation needs, find out your “Priority Category” for services. Priority Category is part of the “Order of Selection” used by VR.

How Does VR Decide If You Are Eligible?

Individuals are eligible for VR services if:

- Their disabilities make it hard for them to get or keep a job;
- They need VR services to get a job 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 information such as your medical records, your education records, information that you or your family provide, VR Counselor observations of you and disability decisions made by other agencies. Your VR Counselor generally has sixty (60) days from the date you file an application to decide if you are eligible. However, sometimes the eligibility decision takes longer. If more time is needed because something unexpected beyond VR’s control comes up, your VR Counselor should ask you to agree in writing to an extension of time. The eligibility decision may also take longer if your VR Counselor thinks your disability is too severe for VR services to help you get a job. When that happens, the VR Counselor will set up some assessments for you. These assessments are called Trial Work Experiences or Extended Evaluations. They help the VR Counselor decide if VR services can help you get a job.

Individuals receiving SSI or SSDI due to their own disability are presumed eligible for VR services if they want to work.

Order of Selection and Priority Categories

Order of Selection (OOS) is important. It is required by law when there is not enough money for VR to serve everyone who is eligible. There are four (4) Priority Categories under VR’s Order of Selection. VR decides the Priority Category (PC) for each eligible individual. By federal law, VR must serve individuals with the most significant disabilities first.

Priority Category 1(PC1) is made up of individuals with the most significant disabilities. These disabilities cause serious limitations in two (2) or more functional capacities that make it harder for an individual to work. These individuals also need two (2) or more major VR services that will take a least six (6) months to complete.

Priority Category 2 (PC 2) is made up of individuals with significant disabilities. These disabilities cause serious limitations in at least one functional capacity that makes it harder for an individual to work. These individuals also need two (2) or more major VR services that will take at least six (6) months to complete. Individuals receiving SSI or SSDI due to their own disability are at least PC 2.

Priority Categories 3 (PC3) and 4 (PC4) include individuals whose disabilities are not as significant. These disabilities do not create serious limitations in a functional capacity. Individuals in PC3 must need two (2) or more major VR services. Individuals in PC4 need only one major VR service.

The types of functional capacities used for priority category determination are listed below.

The VR Counselor determines your Priority Category after determining your rehabilitation needs based on an Employment Needs Assessment (ENA). The ENA determines:

- The functional or work limitations caused by your disability.
- Your abilities, capabilities, job skills, job interests and a specific employment outcome. This is your job goal. It is chosen by you and agreed to by your VR Counselor. It is based on your interests, abilities, capabilities, strengths, resources, priorities, concerns and informed choice.
- The VR services needed for you to reach your employment outcome.

Your VR Counselor will determine whether your disability creates serious functional or work limitations for you in one or more of the following functional capacities:

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

You will work closely with your VR Counselor during the ENA. You can help by giving your VR Counselor paperwork from your health care provider, school records, or other sources that explains your disability and limitations. If you cannot get this paperwork, your VR Counselor can help.

Priority Category 1 is always open for VR services. Other Priority Categories are open when VR has funds to provide services to the people in them. When you are placed in a Priority Category, your VR Counselor will tell you if it is open. If it is not open, you will be put on a waiting list. People on the waiting list will be served on a first come, first serve basis when their Priority Category is opened. People on the waiting list are given information about other services in their area that can help them get a job, such as a career center.

A determination of your Priority Category should normally be made within ninety (90) days after VR determines that you are eligible for services.

Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

Your IPE should be developed as soon as possible after you are placed in a Priority Category that is open for VR services. During your ENA, you and your VR Counselor identify your abilities, capabilities, job skills, job interests and a specific employment goal. This information is used to develop your IPE. Your IPE will identify the kind of job you want and the services you will need to get that job.

During your ENA, you can help identify your employment goal by answering the questions in the “Identify Your Job Interests”, “Job Planning” and “I Know the Job I Want. . . Now What?” sections below. This will help give you ideas if you do not know what kind of work you want to do. 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.

Identify Your Job Interests

1. What do you like to do? What are your interests and hobbies? There are tools to help you with these questions at <http://www.ou.edu/content/dam/Education/documents/miscellaneous/air-self-determination-scale-student-form.pdf>.

2. What kind of paid work or volunteer work have you liked?

3. Look through the help wanted ads in the newspaper and job postings on the internet. Which jobs appeal to you? Many jobs are posted at <http://www.indeed.com/> and <http://www.monster.com/>.

4. Visit your local Career Center to get information about jobs. Check the internet site <https://www.jobs4tn.gov/>. List jobs you like.

5. Look through the Occupational Outlook Handbook. This guide shows skill level and education needed for each job. It can be found at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>. What have you learned from the Handbook?

6. Talk to friends and family about the jobs they do. What jobs did you learn about that interest you?

7. Look at jobs on <http://www.tennessee-job.net/>

8. Explore career interests by using the following websites: <http://www.mynextmove.org/> and/or <http://www.careerinfonet.org/explore/>

Job Planning

Knowing the kind of work you want to do will help when you start working with your VR Counselor. Fill out this worksheet before meeting with your Counselor. Ask for help if you need it.

1. What are your strengths and abilities?

2. What education have you had?

3. What type of training have you had?

4. What kind of paid work have you done?

5. What kind of volunteer work have you done?

6. What jobs interest you? Why?

7. Do you need special 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. What type of help do you need to go to work? (Such as transportation, special equipment, interpreters, childcare, flexible work hours.) Do you need health insurance?

I Know the Job I Want...Now What?

Once you know the type of work you want and the skills needed, you may find out that you do not need special training. Your VR Counselor can help you explore options that will prepare you for work. Some job preparation options may include the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Smyrna, Tennessee or a TRC in your community. Some job preparation training may be provided through an agency called a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), or VR staff. Your VR Counselor will help you decide what you do well and the kind of work you want to do based on your interests.

If special training is needed for the job you want, your VR Counselor can help with some ideas. It is up to you to learn about and visit technical schools, community colleges, universities, and other training programs to see which one will be the best fit.

1. Talk with your school Guidance Counselor if you are still in school. Your Guidance Counselor can help find schools where you can get the training you want and need.
 2. Talk with your VR Counselor. Your VR Counselor has lots of information about schools.
 3. Remember the people you talked with about their jobs earlier? If one had a job that interested you, what kind of training did that person get and where was the training?
-
-

4. Ask your friends about the school they attend and the subject they are studying. If they are taking the same type of training as you, make a note of it. Having informal support where you will get training can be helpful. If you will be living on campus, you can “room” with a friend.
5. One possible place to get job training is at the TRC in Smyrna, TN. This is a comprehensive rehabilitation center with many kinds of personal and vocational training programs and job placement services. Talk with your VR Counselor if you want to schedule a visit to tour the Smyrna TRC or visit <http://www.tn.gov/humanserv/rehab/trc.html>.
6. There are also community TRC’s around the state where you can get vocational evaluations, employee development, personal and vocational training and job placement services. Ask your VR Counselor for more information about them.

VR Services

Not everyone will need or get the same VR services. **The types of VR services that you get depend on what is needed to establish your eligibility, identify your job goal and help you achieve your job goal.** Your VR Counselor will help you select the services that will help you reach your job goal. Your VR Counselor will also help determine if you must share in the cost for some services. Some of the services that VR provides, when appropriate, are listed below. Not everyone will receive every service on this list and not every service available is listed.

- Diagnostic and assessment
- Vocational evaluation
- Career guidance and counseling
- Physical and mental restoration
- Post-secondary Training
- Personal and vocational adjustment training
- Supported employment
- Customized employment
- Job development and job placement
- Self-employment
- Personal care assistance supports
- Post-employment services
- Transition from school to work services
- Independent living services
- Maintenance and transportation supports
- Assistive technology
- Interpreter services

The major and support services that VR will provide to help you reach your job goal will be listed in your IPE.

Your Responsibilities While Working With VR Services

1. You must help develop your IPE and work towards getting a job. You must work closely with your VR Counselor in choosing a job goal, types of services, service providers, and looking for a job. You can help by keeping appointments and working to reach your job goal.
2. Your IPE is a partnership. It is important to contact your VR Counselor every month while your VR case is open to let him/her know how things are going. Call your VR Counselor if you need to change a meeting. Leave a phone message or send an email if needed. Be sure to have his/her phone number in a safe place. Answer letters and phone messages from your VR Counselor right away.
3. You should provide records that your VR Counselor requests like medical and educational records. If you have trouble getting those records, let your VR Counselor know right away.
4. You must cooperate with and stay in touch with any service providers that VR assigns to work with you. If you are having problems with a service provider, let your VR Counselor know right away.

5. You must give your VR Counselor up-to-date contact information for you. For example, if you move or your phone or email address changes, let your VR Counselor know right away.
6. VR provides many services regardless of your financial situation. You and your VR Counselor will talk about your family's income and resources. Sometimes VR may ask you to help pay for the cost of your program, unless you receive SSI or SSDI due to your own disability.
7. If you are eligible for other benefits, federal law says that you must use those benefits to help cover the cost of some services. Those benefits may include training grants, Medicare, Medicaid, Workers Compensation, and private insurance. If you refuse to apply for or use other benefits for which you are eligible, VR cannot fund those services.

Tips from a Parent of a VR Client

1. If your high school does not make a referral to VR, call them yourself.
2. When planning, be sure to think about the type of work you want to do. VR helps find paid jobs.
3. If VR places you in a Priority Category that is not currently receiving services and, as a result, you are on the waiting list for employment services, ask your VR Counselor about your options. For example, ask about other agencies that might help you find a job.
4. Once you have signed your IPE, contact your VR Counselor at least once a month. If your VR Counselor is not available when you call, leave a message.
5. Your VR Counselor must approve all changes to services listed on the IPE in advance.
6. If you receive “Ticket to Work” from Social Security, visit <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/>.
7. Tell your VR Counselor the best way to contact you. Give him/her your contact information for all phones, mail, and email.
8. Let your VR Counselor know if you need information in another format, such as digital, Braille or translated to a language other than English.
9. Call your VR Counselor right away if you have a problem that affects your job training. Your VR Counselor will help or offer some advice.
10. Keep your parent(s) and those supporting you in the loop. They will be there for you if they know you need them.
11. Do not skip classes. Every class is needed to help you meet your job goal.
12. If you have a rough semester in school, do not give up. Your VR Counselor is there to help and support you when the going gets rough. Your VR Counselor 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 at your school. They can help you talk with your teachers and 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 been employed 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 answers. Take someone (like a parent) with you to your VR meetings. If someone tells you no, ask for the VR policy the refusal is based on. You have rights.

Your Rights With VR Services

1. You have the right to know if you are eligible within 60 days after you apply for VR services. 34 CFR §361.42*
2. You have the right to develop your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) on your own or with the help of another individual or with your VR Counselor's help. When the IPE is developed, it must be approved by you AND your VR Counselor. 34 CFR §361.45 - §361.46*
3. You have the right to decide what your job goal will be. Your job goal must be consistent with your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice. 34 CFR §361.45, 34 CFR §361.46, 34 CFR §361.52*
4. You have the right to receive VR services needed to help you reach your job goal. 34 CFR §361.48*
5. You have the right to pick the VR services and service providers (schools, etc.) that are based on your rehabilitation needs. They will be identified in your IPE. 34 CFR §361.50, 34 CFR §361.52, 34 CFR §361.53, 34 CFR §361.54*
6. You have the right to change your IPE as necessary with your VR Counselor's approval. 34 CFR §361.45*
7. You have the right to review your IPE at least once a year with your VR Counselor. 34 CFR §361.45, 34 CFR §361.56*
8. You have the right to review the VR Policies. 34 CFR §361.50*
9. You have the right to appeal any VR decision 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 references are to the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Part 361, State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program. A copy of the regulations is available at <http://rsa.ed.gov/policy.cfm>.

Modified from the "VR Bill of Rights" available from Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee (DLAC), which runs CAP in Tennessee

More Important Information When You Receive VR Services

1. VR cannot release your personal information to anyone else unless:
 - It is necessary to carry out your VR program;
 - VR has your written consent; or
 - Law requires it.
2. You can get information from your VR file. Make your request in writing. If VR decides the information may be harmful to you, VR may ask you to identify a third party to receive it.
3. If you believe the information in your VR file is wrong or misleading, you can ask VR to change it. If VR does not agree, you can ask VR to include your request in your file.
4. You may get some VR services after you get a job and VR has closed your case. These services must be short term and required to help you keep your job.
5. If you do not agree with a VR decision, you can appeal it. Tell your VR Counselor you want to appeal or put your appeal in writing to your VR Counselor or his/her supervisor. You must appeal within thirty (30) days of the decision. CAP can help you with the appeal.

If you need help understanding this information or have questions, please call your VR Counselor or visit the VR website at http://state.tn.us/humanserv/rehab/rehab_main.html or call them at 615/313-4891; 615/313-5695 (TTY); 800/270-1349 (TTY Long Distance).

If you need help with appealing a decision made by VR or you have problems with VR services, call CAP at DLAC at 800/342-1660; 615/298-1080 (TDD); 888/852-2852 (TTY).

DRS Regional Offices with Counties Served	
<p><u>Region 1</u> 905 Buffalo Street Johnson City, Tennessee 37604-6719 Post Office Box 2120 (mailing address) 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> Langley Building 520 West Summit Hill Drive, 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> 311 East Martin Luther King Boulevard, Suite 301 Chattanooga, Tennessee 37403-4108 Telephone: 423/634-6700 Fax: 423/634-6712 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 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</p>	<p><u>Region 6</u> 6000 Trotwood Avenue Columbia, Tennessee 38401 Telephone: 931/380-2563 Fax: 931/380-2567 Counties & TRCs Served: Bedford, Cheatham, Dickson, Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis, Lincoln, Marshall, Maury, Perry, Rutherford, Wayne, Williamson, Wilson</p>
<p><u>Region 7</u> Lowell Thomas State Office Bldg, Room 140, 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, 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) Tennessee Rehabilitation Center 460 Ninth Street Smyrna, Tennessee 37167 Telephone: 615/459-6811, ext 289 Fax: 615/355-1373 All Counties Served</p>

The information above about DRS offices is subject to change. A current list of VR locations and contact information can be found at: http://state.tn.us/humanserv/st_map_trc_ttap.html.

If you need additional contact information, call VR at 615/313-4891; 615/ 313-5695 (TTY); 800/270-1349 (TTY Long Distance).

This document was created by:

The Arc Tennessee
615/248-5878 or 800/835-7077
151 Athens Way, Nashville, TN 37228
<http://www.thearctn.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, Tenth Floor, Nashville, TN 37243
http://www.tn.gov/humanserv/rehab/rehab_main.html

Client Assistance Program (CAP) of Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee (DLAC)
800/342-1660; 615/298-1080 (TDD); 888/852-2852 (TTY)
<http://www.dlactn.org/>



DISABILITY LAW &
ADVOCACY CENTER
of Tennessee



Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services
Tennessee Department of Human Services
"Customer Focused...Employment Driven"

The Arc Tennessee values diversity and does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, religion, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender, or level of disability.