

Getting a Head Start with Vocational Rehabilitation



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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 VR, we will use that throughout this document. VR helps people with disabilities get paying meaningful jobs. The application process includes:

- Intake to learn about you and your job interests;
- Completing an application;
- Finding out if you are eligible for VR employment services; and
- Finding out your “Priority Category” for employment services.

For everyone who is eligible for VR, the “Order of Selection” is important. The Order of Selection is required by law when there is not enough money to provide for everyone who is eligible. VR must give first priority to eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities. This group of individuals will be assigned to Priority Category 1 (PC 1). Those individuals meeting the criteria for PC 2, 3, or 4 may choose to remain on a waiting list in the event there are future changes in funding that would allow VR to serve them. Individuals who are determined to be PC 2, 3, or 4 will be given information about other resources where they live that help them get a job. The term “open priority category” refers to the Priority Categories that are open for VR to provide employment services to clients.

An applicant who receives SSI (Supplemental Security Insurance) or SSDI (Social Security Disability Income) because s/he has a disability, or is blind, automatically meets the criteria of Priority Category 2, if s/he wants to get a job.

It is helpful to give your VR Counselor enough paperwork from your medical doctor, school records, or other sources to help explain your disability. If you are unable to get this paperwork, your VR Counselor can lend a hand. To qualify as Priority Category 1, this paperwork must show that your disability causes limitations in two or more of the following “functional capacities” as defined by VR policy:

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

What Does VR Do?

Once you are eligible and assigned to an open Priority Category, your needs, preferences, interests, and available resources will be considered when developing the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Not everyone will need the same service to get a job. Your VR counselor will help you decide which of the following will help you get a job. Your VR counselor will help determine if you need to share in the cost of some services.

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

If you need help understanding this information or if you have questions please call your VR Counselor or visit the VR 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 need assistance with appealing a decision made by VR or if you disagree with your VR Counselor and cannot resolve it by talking to your counselor's supervisor, call the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee at 1-800-342-1660; 1-888-852-2852 (TTY).

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 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.



Identify Your Job Interests

1. What do you like to do? What are your interests and hobbies? A tool to help answer these questions is available at http://education.ou.edu/zarrow/files/AIR_S-D_Student.pdf.

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

3. Look through the help wanted ads in the newspaper. Which jobs look appealing?

4. Visit your local Career Center to gather information about jobs. List jobs you like.

5. Look through the Occupational Outlook Handbook. This guide will help you look at skill level and educational requirements for each job. It is available at, <http://www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/lmi.htm>. What have you learned from the Handbook?

6. Talk to friends and relatives about the jobs they do. What jobs did you learn about that interest you? Where did they get their job training?

7. Look at jobs on JobNet at <http://www.tn.gov/labor-wfd/mainfindajob.html>. What jobs look interesting here?



Job Planning

Knowing the kind of work you want to do will help when you start working with your VR Counselor. Complete 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 work experience have you had?

5. What volunteer experience have you had?

6. What kinds of jobs are you interested in? 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 what type of work you want to do and the skills required, you may discover 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 another agency, called a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP), or VR staff. Your VR counselor will help you make a decision based on your interests, what you do well, and the kind of work you want to do.

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 facilities to see which one will be the best fit.

1. Talk with your school Guidance Counselor. S/he can help find schools where you can get the training you want and need. S/he can also help you learn which schools may be most “disability friendly.”
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2. Talk with your VR Counselor. S/he has lots of information about schools.
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3. Remember the people you talked with about their jobs earlier? If one had a job you found interesting, what kind of training did s/he get and where did s/he get their training?
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4. Ask your friends what school they are going to attend and what subject they will be studying. If they are taking the same or similar 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.
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5. One possible place to get job training is at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) in Smyrna, TN. This is a comprehensive rehabilitation center with various 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 located 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 these.

Responsibilities When You Receive VR Employment Services

1. You must help develop your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and work towards getting a job. You will need to work closely with your VR Counselor in choosing an employment goal, types of services, service providers, and looking for a job (job placement). You can help by keeping appointments and working hard to reach your work goal.
2. Your IPE is a partnership. It is important to contact your VR Counselor every month to let him/her 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 necessary. Be sure to have his/her phone number in a safe place. Answer letters and phone messages from your VR Counselor immediately.
3. VR provides many services regardless of your financial situation. You and your counselor will discuss your family's income and resources. Sometimes VR may ask you to contribute to the cost of your program, unless you receive SSI or SSDI.
4. If you are eligible for other benefits, federal law requires that you use those benefits to help cover the cost of some services. These 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 pay for the planned services.

Rights When You Receive VR Employment 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.VR may share personal information with the Social Security Administration.
2. You can get information from your VR file. Request the information in writing. If a physician or psychologist provided the information to VR, you may need to get it from them.
3. You may receive 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.
4. You may reapply for services after VR has closed your case. Your eligibility will be determined at the time you reapply.
5. If you disagree with a decision, you have the right to appeal. Tell your VR Counselor or put it in writing to your VR Counselor or his/her supervisor. You must appeal within 30 days of the decision. CAP can assist you with your appeal.

Vocational Rehabilitation Rights

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 Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).**
34 CFR §361.45 - §361.46*
3. **You have the right to receive the full scope of services needed to help you reach your job goal.**
34 CFR §361.48*
4. **You have the right to decide what your job goal will be.**
5. **You have the right to pick services and service providers (schools, etc.) 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, including your job goal or services provided.**
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 Policy Manual.** CFR §361.50*
9. **You have the right to appeal any decision made by VR that you do not agree with.**
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://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>.

Modified from Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee's "VR Bill of Rights."

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If you need assistance with appealing a decision made by VR or if you disagree with your VR Counselor and cannot resolve it, call the **Client Assistance Program (CAP)** at Disability Law & Advocacy Center at 800/342-1660; 615/298-1080 (TDD); 888/852-2852 (TTY).

Tips from a Parent

1. If your high school does not make a referral to VR, call them yourself.
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 puts your name on a waiting list for employment services, ask your VR Counselor 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.
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/aboutticket.html>.
7. Tell your VR Counselor which is the best way to contact you; by phone, mail, and 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 right away if you have a problem of any kind that affects your job training. S/he will help or offer some advice.
10. Keep your parent(s) and those who support you in the loop. They will be there for you if they know you need them.
11. 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. S/he 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 to them. 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.

DRS Regional Offices with Counties Served

<p><u>Region 1</u> Susan Arwood, Regional Supervisor 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> Ruth Brock, Regional Supervisor State Office Building 531 Henley Street, Suite 520 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> Andy Bible, Regional Supervisor 311 East Martin Luther King Boulevard 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> Sandy Shepherd, Regional Supervisor 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> Deidra Sawyer, Regional Supervisor 88 Hermitage Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37210 Telephone: 615/741-1606 Fax: 615/741-8180 Counties Served: Davidson</p>	<p><u>Region 6</u> Pattye Fort, Regional Supervisor 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> Sue Lesikar Acting Regional Supervisor Linda Randolph, Acting Regional Supervisor 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> Ken Arnold, Regional Supervisor 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> Annyce Lockett, Regional Supervisor 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> Patti Bell, Supervisor 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>

This document was created by:

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http://www.tn.gov/humanserv/rehab/rehab_main.html

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



*For people with intellectual
and developmental disabilities*



**DISABILITY LAW &
ADVOCACY CENTER**
of Tennessee

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF
HUMAN SERVICES



Helping shape Tennessee lives.



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