

Arizona Department of Economic Security Rehabilitation Services Administration

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CLIENT HANDBOOK



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Welcome to the Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program.



VR works with clients, employers, and community partners across the state to connect job seekers with meaningful employment.

VR is a work program that provides counseling, guidance, services, and supports to help individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain, maintain, or advance in employment.

This handbook will provide a brief overview of the following major steps within the VR program:

- Referral
- Orientation
- Intake Interview and Application
- Eligibility and Order of Selection Determination
- Individualized Plan for Employment
- Participation in Services to Prepare for a Job
- Job Ready
- Employed
- Case Closure

Please retain this handbook so that you can reference it throughout the vocational rehabilitation process.



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EXPECTATIONS OF VR TEAM MEMBERS



Members of the VR team are tasked with recognizing the abilities of individuals with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, and maximizing opportunities for those individuals to prepare for and engage in competitive and integrated employment. All VR team members contribute to the goal of addressing barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities.

VR expects all team members to encourage, empower, and support clients of the VR program in achieving competitive and integrated employment. This means that VR team members must:

- Treat clients with equality, respect, and dignity throughout all interactions regardless of disability, age, race, ethnicity, gender, cultural affiliation, or sexual orientation. Engage with humility and kindness, even when challenges arise.
- Perform job duties with the goal of reducing a client's barriers to employment. Ensure all requests made of the client are meaningful and contribute to the client's ultimate success.



- Respect the client's right to choose their own path. Support and empower clients to make informed choices by providing professional guidance, helpful information, and resources.
- Communicate all decisions and the reasons for those decisions in a manner that is understandable and appropriate for the client. Clients have the right to ask questions and understand the decisions that affect their services.
- Establish and maintain professional boundaries.
- Attempt to resolve problems in an open and honest manner. Respect the clients' rights to speak up for themselves and partner with the client to understand problems and identify possible solutions.
- Act in a manner that ensures a safe environment for all parties (no threatening, aggressive, or abusive behaviors or communications via in-person, email, phone, etc.).
- Make decisions and provide agreed upon services in a manner that ensures the client's continued progress toward employment. Return calls and emails in a timely manner (typically within 1-2 business days). Do not become the barrier to a client's success.

- Consider the whole client during the rehabilitation process. Ask the client what they need instead of making assumptions. Connect the client to resources outside of the VR program as needed.
- Appreciate the experiences (including disability-related experiences) and culture of each client. Every client's VR journey will begin at a different place. Recognize where the client is and tailor actions and expectations accordingly.
- Approach vocational rehabilitation from a strengths-based perspective. Believe in the client's ability to succeed and create opportunities for continuous success.

If a VR client has concerns about VR team members not fulfilling the identified expectations, the following actions can be taken:

- The VR client may inform the team member that, in their opinion, the VR team member is not fulfilling one or more of the expectations and ask that the conversation or interaction be re-directed or re-focused.
- The client has a right to stop the meeting/phone call and/or request to speak to a supervisor.

The meeting or phone call will be rescheduled if all parties agree to review the expectations identified in this document and do their best to fulfil the expectations going forward.

- If the issue cannot be adequately addressed through the above-mentioned methods, VR clients may contact the RSA Ombudsman to explore filing an appeal.





EXPECTATIONS OF VR CLIENTS



As a client in the VR program, it is important to understand that VR does not find you a job. VR provides counseling and guidance to help you determine what type of job you might be good at, and then connects you with the services and supports you need to prepare for, obtain, and maintain that job. VR is here to help, but ultimately you are responsible for your own success related to finding and keeping a job.

To help ensure you are successful, VR expects you to be an active participant in your VR program. This means that VR clients must:

- Understand that VR is a work program that helps individuals with disabilities address barriers to employment and get jobs. Be prepared to talk about your disability and put in the hard work to address any limitations or barriers that are keeping you from getting a job on your own.
- Be open, honest, and realistic about your desire to work and your interests, skills, and abilities.

Developing a realistic and achievable job goal is key to your success.

- Maintain regular contact with VR team members and service providers; provide updates on your progress and needs. Return calls and emails (typically within 1-2 business days) and attend all appointments.
- Complete tasks or services in the agreed upon time. You are responsible for making continuous progress towards your employment goal. Lack of progress can result in your VR case being closed.
- Attempt to resolve problems in an open and honest manner. If something is not going right, say something. VR team members will partner with you to understand problems and identify possible solutions.
- Provide VR team members with the documentation they request. Understand that the VR program is required to obtain specific documentation to support activities or services provided to clients.
- Maintain a positive and effective working relationship with VR team members to the best of your ability. Achieving success in the VR program is a team effort.

- Act in a manner that ensures a safe environment for all parties (no threatening, aggressive, or abusive behaviors or communications via in-person, email, phone, etc.).
- Request clarification when a decision, policy, or process is confusing. There are times when VR team members may say no to your request or ask for more information. You should receive a clear explanation as to why a decision is being made.
- Stay in contact with VR team members for at least 90 days after you get a job. VR can help you maintain your job if you begin to have challenges and we also want to hear about your success!

If a VR team member has concerns about VR clients not fulfilling the identified expectations, the following actions can be taken:

- The VR team member may inform the client that, in their opinion, the client is not fulfilling one or more of the expectations and ask that the conversation or interaction be re-directed or re-focused.

- The team member has the right to stop the meeting/phone call and/or involve a supervisor. The meeting or phone call will be rescheduled if all parties agree to review the expectations identified in this document and do their best to fulfil the expectations going forward.
 - If the issue cannot be adequately addressed through the above-mentioned methods, VR team members may consult with their supervisor to explore next steps, which may include moving toward case closure.

Ultimately the end goal of the rehabilitation process is successful employment. Please use the above information to understand the expectations of both the VR team member and client of the VR program. We look forward to helping you in your journey to employment.





INFORMATION COLLECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY



The VR program will collect information from you and other sources at various times during the VR process. This information is required to process your application, verify your disability and work limitations, facilitate your engagement in services, document your employment, and prepare required programmatic reports.

Examples of the information that VR requires includes but is not limited to:

- Identification and documentation of your legal ability to work in the United States (e.g. Driver's License, Social Security Card, etc.).
- Name, address, birthdate, Social Security Number, gender, ethnicity, education level, marital status, military service, major sources of income/support, family size, tribal affiliation, etc.
- Emergency contacts. This may be family, friend, case manager, teacher, etc.

- Medical or psychological records that prove you are a person with a disability and that you require VR services to work.
- Documents that show you are currently eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), if applicable.
- Financial documentation (e.g. recent federal tax return, paystubs, bank statements) in the event you require VR services that are dependent on financial need.
- Names, addresses, and phone numbers of people from other agencies that work with you (e.g. DDD Support Coordinator, Case Manager from your behavioral health team, school counselor, parole/probation officer).
- Documentation regarding any education, training, or credentials that you are working on or have completed.
- Employment documentation such as paystubs, offer of employment, employer contact information, verification of wages and benefits, etc.
- Information about your employment, wages, and education/credential attainment for up to one year after your VR case is closed.

This information will be used by Arizona VR team members and service providers directly involved in your program to support your rehabilitation. Arizona VR will only share your information with others if a court orders us to release it, if there is a law enforcement investigation, or if it is requested by the Social Security Administration. Information may also be shared to protect you or other people if it is determined that you pose a threat to your own safety or the safety of others. Outside of these circumstances VR will not share your medical and personal information with any other person or organization without your written permission.



INFORMED CHOICE



Informed choice is an important part of the vocational rehabilitation process. Making informed choices means that you have accurate information about the options that are available to you, and you use that information when making decisions about your job goal, services, and service providers.

Your VR Counselor will assist you to make informed choices throughout the VR process. They will help you identify, understand, and evaluate the options that are available to you. They can also connect you to services and resources that can help you gather more information about your options and build decision-making skills.



STEP 1: REFERRAL

Any individual who is present in the State of Arizona and who reports having a disability may be referred to VR and apply for VR services.

- You can locate the VR referral form on the Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation website des.az.gov/rsa; or
- You can contact your local VR office and a VR team member will complete the referral form on your behalf.
 - To locate the VR office near you, please call 1-800-563-1221 or visit the 'Contact Information' section on the VR website.

Once your completed referral form has been received by the VR program, you will be contacted by a VR team member to schedule your orientation appointment.

- You will be asked to provide the following types of documents to VR staff either before, or during your appointment:
 - Current medical and/or psychological records that document your disability;
 - Copy of SSI/SSDI award letter (if applicable);
 - Educational records (if available); and



STEP 2: ORIENTATION

At your orientation appointment, a VR team member will provide you with information about the VR program and answer any questions that you may have.

If you determine that you are ready for the VR program to help you achieve your employment goal, a VR team member will arrange for you to meet with a VR Counselor to complete an intake interview and VR application form.





STEP 3: INTAKE INTERVIEW AND APPLICATION

At the intake interview meeting, your VR Counselor will explain the rehabilitation process and give you an application form to complete. They will assist you in completing the form as needed.

During this meeting, your counselor will ask you in-depth questions about your disability, employment experiences, educational background, and other personal/historical details. This information is necessary to understand your disability, how it impacts your ability to work, and what your rehabilitation needs might be. The information will be documented in your Vocational Rehabilitation case file and used to determine your Eligibility and priority for service (also known as the Order of Selection) for the VR program.

Upon completion of the interview, your counselor may determine that they need more information to understand your disability, how your disability impacts your ability to work, and your potential rehabilitation needs. If this is the case, they will ask you to provide additional information/documentation or they will arrange for you to complete specific diagnostic tests or assessments to obtain the necessary information. VR will pay for these assessments. Examples of assessment services that VR Counselors might request you to participate in include, but are not limited to:

- Psychological Evaluation to determine an individual's mental health status and limitations.
- General Medical Exam to determine the presence and the extent of disability.
- Audiology Exam to determine hearing loss, etc.

Your assistance in providing the needed information and keeping all scheduled appointments is important and necessary.



STEP 4: ELIGIBILITY AND ORDER OF SELECTION

Your VR Counselor will utilize the documentation of your disability, the information provided by you or your family, and any assessments that were completed during the initial interview process to determine your eligibility for the VR program as well as your Order of Selection priority category.

To be eligible for VR, you must meet all the following requirements:

- You have a documented physical or mental disability;
- Your disability creates barriers to getting or keeping a job;
- You require VR services to prepare for, secure, retain, regain, or advance in a job; and
- The provision of VR services will enable you to achieve a job in the community that pays at least minimum wage.

Your VR Counselor has up to 60 days from the date your VR application is signed and received to determine whether you are eligible for VR services. In some situations, it may take longer to determine your eligibility. If this is the case, your VR Counselor will contact you to discuss an extension.

Once you are determined eligible for VR, your VR Counselor will assign you to an Order of Selection priority category based on how significantly your disability impacts each of the following areas of your life:

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

When looking at each area, your VR Counselor will consider:

- How the area is impacted by your disability as it relates to employment;
- The number of services you will need to address the identified limitations; and
- How long the services are expected to last.

VR will notify you in writing about your eligibility determination, order of selection category, and when your VR services can start.

If funds are not available to provide services to everyone who is eligible for the VR program, VR will serve individuals in order of their priority status as funding allows.

Priority Categories are as follows:

- Priority Category 1 (Eligible persons with the most significant disabilities): a person with a severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits three or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome; and whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require two or more vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period (longer than 6 months).
- Priority Category 2 (Eligible persons with significant disabilities): a person with a significant physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome; and whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require two or more vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period (longer than six months).
- Priority Category 3: All other eligible persons



STEP 5: INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT

What is an IPE?

After you are determined eligible and able to receive services, you and your VR Counselor have 90 days to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment or IPE. The IPE is the plan you will follow to get and keep a specific type of job. It is your 'roadmap' to employment.

The IPE will include details such as:

- Your job goal;
- The steps (intermediate objectives) you will need to accomplish to reach your job goal;
- Services and supports you will participate in to prepare for an achieve our job goal;
- Timelines for completing services and achieving your job goal;
- The person or entity who is going to provide your services/supports;
- Responsibilities of VR team members;
- Your responsibilities; and
- The responsibilities of anyone else involved in your plan.

How is an IPE developed?

Your VR Counselor will work with you to explore your interests, skills, abilities, capabilities, and resources to determine what type of job might be right for you. They will also help you determine what types of services and supports you need to address your disability-related barriers to employment and prepare for your job goal. The goal is to discover the answers to the following types of questions:

- What type of job are you interested in?
- How does your disability affect your ability to get that job?
- What would help you overcome the challenges you face when looking for work?
- What resources do you have that will be helpful when starting a job (e.g. car, childcare, internet)?
- How quickly do you need to start working?
- What skills or education do you need for the job you want?
- What skills or education do you already have that you can use in a job?
- How hard are you willing to work to get the job you want?

To prepare for developing your IPE, talk to your VR Counselor, your family, friends, or other people in your life about what type of job is right for you and what you need to be successful in getting and keeping that job. Do some research to see what companies are hiring and what types of jobs are available in your community. You may want to call potential employers and ask questions or job shadow.

Ultimately, the job goal that you choose must be attainable and sustainable based on your skills, abilities, interests, capabilities, current labor market, etc.

What types of services does VR provide?

Once you have an idea of the job you want to pursue, your VR Counselor will work with you to determine the services you need to prepare for and obtain that job. Eligibility for the VR program does not entitle you to receive any specific service or set of services. Any service that VR provides must be required to help you address your disability-related barriers to employment and achieve your employment goal.

Types of VR services include, but are not limited to:

- Vocational Guidance and Counseling;
- Assessments/diagnostic testing and treatment;
- Job Services (job search, job coaching);

- Disability-Related Training (cane instruction, bus training);
- Job Training; and
- Assistive Technology equipment and training.

Some VR services are only available if you require the service and have a financial need. Other VR services require the identification and use of comparable benefits (i.e. services and benefits that are provided or paid for by someone other than VR such as health insurance or PELL grant). Your VR Counselor will provide you with more information on these services as you begin developing your IPE.

Who can help me write my IPE?

If you have any questions about developing your IPE, talk to your VR Counselor. They can help you explore your interests, skills, abilities, capabilities, and resources and come up with a plan that will meet your needs. Your final plan must be approved and signed by your VR Counselor, but you can ask any of the following people for assistance developing your plan:

- A qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor who is not employed by Arizona VR;
- A disability advocate; or
- Any other person you feel might help you write your plan.

Benefits Counseling

When developing your IPE and choosing your job goal, it is important to remember that benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) may be affected by wages and benefits from your future job. This information may impact your choices related to your job goal so please ask your VR Counselor about benefits counseling and/or visit Disability Benefits 101 at www.az.db101.org for more information.

Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work is a Social Security Administration (SSA) program for those who qualify for Social Security Benefits (SSI/SSDI). If you are a Ticket holder under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) and you choose to receive services from Arizona VR under an Individualized Plan for Employment, your ticket will be considered "in use" by VR and will not be available for assignment to another employment network until your case is closed. If you have questions or would like more information, contact the Beneficiary Call Center at 1-866-968-7842 (If you use a TTY/TDD, please call 1-866-833-2967) or visit the website at: www.chooseworkttw.net



STEP 6: PARTICIPATION IN SERVICES TO PREPARE FOR A JOB

Once your IPE is approved and signed by all required parties, you will begin participating in the services identified on your IPE to prepare for your job goal.

During this time, you must:

- Actively participate in VR services;
- Make consistent progress toward achievement of the intermediate objectives and job goal; and
- Maintain contact with your VR Counselor.

Your VR Counselor will monitor your progress and help you address any challenges you are having with your services, service providers, etc.

Talk to your VR Counselor if there are changes to your job goal, disability, or service needs. Your IPE can be adjusted if changes are necessary and agreed upon by all required parties. The goal is for you to complete services and obtain your job in a timely manner.



STEP 7: JOB READY

What does it mean to be 'job ready'?

'Job ready' means you have completed the majority of services identified on your IPE to prepare you for your job goal, and you are ready to start applying for jobs. You might need a little help with putting together a resume, looking for jobs, or preparing for an interview, but you should feel confident that you have the skills necessary to find a job.

Job Readiness Checklist

Use the following checklist as a tool to assess your job readiness. Share the results with your VR Counselor and discuss any areas of concern.

- I know what types of jobs I would like to seek and pursue
- I know what the general minimum requirements are for my job goal
- I meet the general requirements for my job goal
- I have an idea of what companies I can work for
- I have a current resume and a list of my previous work experience
- I have practiced my interview skills and am ready to talk about my skills and abilities with a potential employer

- I know how to look for jobs (online/in the community) and how to complete a job application
- I know what type of accommodations I might need for an interview and how to ask for them (if applicable)
- I know what to wear on an interview and I have these clothes available
- I have a plan to address personal needs such as childcare, transportation, health concerns during the interview process and once I start a job
- I understand how my benefits (SSI/SSDI) may be impacted by wages from my job (if applicable)

What if I do not feel 'job ready'?

Talk to your VR Counselor and identify any barriers that will prevent you from obtaining/maintaining a job. Your VR Counselor will work with you to address the barriers that are preventing you from being 'job ready'.

I am 'job ready', now what?

If you can look for work and apply for jobs on your own:

Your VR Counselor will refer you to community resources such as ARIZONA@WORK Job Centers and provide you with a list of local libraries and online job sites

- You are responsible for looking for jobs that match your job goal, applying for available positions, and accepting a job offer when appropriate.
- You must stay in contact with your VR Counselor. Provide your VR Counselor with updates regarding your progress and let them know of any challenges you are having with your job search.

If you require special assistance due to your disability to look for jobs, complete job applications, and prepare for interviews:

- Your VR Counselor will arrange for you to receive assistance from a VR service provider.
- VR service providers specialize in helping people with disabilities search and apply for jobs.
- You are responsible for meeting with your service provider, completing tasks that your service provider gives you, and accepting a job offer when appropriate.
- You must stay in contact with your VR Counselor and provider. Provide your VR Counselor and provider with updates regarding your progress and let them know of any challenges you are having with your job search.



STEP 8: EMPLOYED

I got hired, what happens now?

Tell your VR Counselor immediately!

- Your VR Counselor needs to know where you are working and the details of your job (employer, position, pay, hours, benefits).
- If you need help arranging accommodations with your new employer, assistance completing new hire paperwork, and/or job coaching to help you learn new job tasks, your VR Counselor will help you or they will arrange to have someone help you before, during, or after work, depending on your needs and preferences.

What happens with my VR case now that I am working?

Your VR Counselor will maintain contact with you for a minimum of 90 days after you are hired to make sure you are doing well and that any challenges you encounter can be addressed. During this time, you might receive job coaching or other services to help you learn your job and stabilize your employment.

Once you are feeling confident that you can do your job, your VR Counselor will prepare your case for closure. If you require ongoing employment support, they will help you make sure those supports are in place.





STEP 9: CASE CLOSURE

Once you are stable in your job and a minimum of 90 days has passed since you got hired, your VR counselor will send you a 15 day notification of case closure.

If you are experiencing any problems with your job, make sure to contact your VR Counselor prior to case closure and ask for help. Once the date identified in your notification of case closure has arrived, your case will be closed and you should consider yourself a success!

If you are an SSI/SSDI beneficiary you may be able to receive employment related services and supports after closure from VR by contacting an Employment Network (EN) provider and using your Ticket to Work. You can find a list of Employment Network providers (ENs) or learn more about Ticket to Work by visiting <https://choosework.ssa.gov> or by calling 1-866-968-7842.



VR APPEAL PROCESS



Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) strives to ensure your satisfaction with services. If you have questions or concerns about a decision that has been made regarding your services, we encourage you to speak with your VR Counselor.

If you cannot resolve your concerns with your counselor, you have the right to appeal the decision that is impacting your services.

When you request an appeal, you can choose any of the following options to resolve the issue:

Informal review: This is a review of the decision by the local office Supervisor or the Program Manager. The local office Supervisor will complete the review when a VR Counselor has made the decision. The Program Manager will complete the review when the local office Supervisor has made the decision, or when a potential solution will require a decision/action from the Program Manager.

Mediation: This is an informal, confidential meeting where an impartial, third-party Mediator leads a

discussion between you and your VR Counselor to clarify the issue and negotiate an agreement. The Mediator does not act as a judge and will not make any decisions.

Fair Hearing: This is a formal review by an impartial Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) from the DES Office of Appeals. An ALJ conducts a hearing and decides based on the facts of the case and law/policy. The ALJ will be selected on a random basis from a pool of persons qualified to be an impartial hearing officer. A hearing will be scheduled within 60 days of the appeal request unless a resolution is achieved prior to the 60th day, or you agree in writing to a specific extension of time. You may present additional evidence, information, or witnesses during the hearing. You may be represented by an attorney or other appropriate advocates at your own expense. VR will be represented by an attorney. You may examine all witnesses and other relevant sources of information and evidence.

To start the appeal process, submit either the Request for Appeal form (ask a VR team member for this form) or a written, signed and dated statement describing the decision you disagree with and which option (Informal Review, Mediation, or Fair Hearing) you choose to resolve the issue(s).

Your request for appeal must be received by VR within 15 calendar days from the date in which VR notified you of the decision.

If you have questions about a VR decision or how to submit an appeal, you can contact:

- VR Counselor and/or VR Supervisor
- RSA Ombudsman
Phone: 480-486-6995
Email: RSAOmbudsman@azdes.gov
- Client Assistance Program (CAP)
Phone: (602)274-6287 in Phoenix area or 1-800-927-2260 statewide



NOTES



CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a resource for applicants and clients of the VR program. CAP can assist you by:

- Informing you of all services and benefits available through VR programs;
- Advising you of your rights regarding services and about ways to solve problems with your VR Counselor;
- Providing training on VR applicant/client rights;
- As appropriate, assisting and advocating on your behalf regarding your concerns with VR; and
- Representing you in appeals with VR, which may include mediation or fair hearing.

CAP is a program within the AZ Center for Disability Law (ACDL).

Please contact CAP at 1-800-927-2260 or visit www.azdisabilitylaw.org for more information or to request services.



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