

Frequently Asked Questions Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

FAQs

What is vocational rehabilitation?

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federal and state funded program that works with people who have physical or mental disabilities to prepare for, gain or retain employment. VR is committed to helping people with disabilities find meaningful careers.

Why is VR needed?

Work contributes to how people identify themselves and are identified by others. Work increases self-esteem and improves social, economic and community participation. Being able to work at a job that matches a person's abilities and interests enhances feelings of self-worth and productivity.

State VR programs are the only government programs whose primary responsibility is to help individuals with disabilities find meaningful employment. Traditionally, employment rates for people with disabilities are significantly lower than the employment rate of the general population.

Who is VR for?

VR is an eligibility program, not an entitlement program. This means people must meet certain criteria to be found eligible, as required by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Three main criteria are used:

1. the person must have a disability;
2. the disability must significantly affect their ability to work; and
3. it is likely that vocational rehabilitation services will be needed to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment.

Be an Advocate!

Tips for getting the most out of your VR services:

Be Active! Participate and make informed choices during the vocational rehabilitation process.

Be Enthusiastic! Choose a career path you are excited about and comfortable with.

Be Honest! Your counselor needs to know the whole story to develop a plan that will best assist you.

Be Responsible! This is your career and you are in the driver's seat.

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The Paths to Employment Resource Center (PERC) is a partnership that provides training and technical assistance to promote employment and full community participation for people with disabilities through cutting edge technologies, evidence based practice and research.

www.percthinkwork.org

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How does it work?

VR employment services assist an eligible person with a disability in preparing for, securing, retaining or regaining an employment. The employment outcome is based on the strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice of the consumer. These steps may vary from state to state.

Step 1: Determine Eligibility

First, the individual applies and is found eligible or ineligible based on the criteria we just discussed: the person must have a disability that affects their ability to be employed and benefit from VR services.

Step 2: Functional Assessment

A Functional Assessment Rating System is used to determine the person's level of functioning and priority category. VR agencies are required to serve people with the most significant disabilities first. Some people may be placed on a waiting list.

Step 3: Comprehensive Assessment

A comprehensive assessment involves discussing the individual's interests, limitations, accommodation needs, and anything else relevant to the person and/or their vocational goal.

Step 4: Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)

An Individual Plan for Employment or IPE is a written plan that identifies a person's employment goal and the steps to achieve it. The IPE includes the services and timeframes necessary to accomplish the goal. When the plan is set, the identified services are set in motion to help the individual achieve his or her goal. The plan can change and evolve as the process moves along.

Step 5: Employment Goal Achieved

When the individual achieves his or her employment goal, it is considered a successful outcome. But other criteria are needed for the employment outcome to be considered successful: the person must be paid the standard wage for that position or at least minimum wage and the majority of his/her co-workers should be people who do not have disabilities--in the same proportion as society at large.

Step 6: Follow-along Services

Follow-along services are provided for 90 days, or longer if needed, to ensure that the job is a good match for the person and that both the employer and employee are finding the arrangement suitable. After the appropriate follow-along period, which is usually 90 days, the individual's case would be closed.

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After I complete an application, how long does it take to find out if I'm eligible for services?

By law, DVR is required to determine whether an applicant is eligible within 60 days from the date the application is signed. In the majority of cases, DVR is able to get the information needed to make an eligibility determination within this time frame. If there is going to be a delay in eligibility because information about your disability is not readily available, DVR will contact you to explain the delay and get your approval to extend the eligibility period.

Who pays for DVR services?

Some services, like counseling and guidance, are provided at no cost. Other services such as training or education are provided based on financial need. If you receive SSI, SSDI or DSHS public assistance, or if you meet DVR financial need criteria, you are not asked to pay for DVR services. Before finalizing a plan, DVR will ask for information to verify your income and works with you to look for other resources, such as financial aid or other public programs, to pay for DVR services.

Will I lose my Social Security benefits if I go to work?

DVR's goal is to help you earn enough to become self-sufficient and free of public benefits; however, they will help you achieve the level of employment that best meets your overall needs. As part of your VR services you have access to a Benefits Specialist to help you understand how earning wages could impact on the benefits you receive. Using this information, you can make an informed decision about working.

Where can I access services?

Each state has their own Vocational Rehabilitation program. It should be noted that certain services and differences exist between state VR agencies and how they implement the Rehabilitation Act.

Wisconsin has 11 different workforce development areas, which consist of multiple counties. The DVR website provides a map to help locate the DVR office in your area. It also contains a list of counties, so you can click on the name of your county to find the contact for that area.

Resources

Find your state VR:

Job Accommodation Network (JAN):

<http://askjan.org/cgi-win/TypeQuery.exe?902>

Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

<http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/>

PERC Related Materials

Materials related to this topic can be found on the PERC website - these materials include free trainings, resources, and the latest research.

www.percthinkwork.org

Comments? Suggestions?

Email us at
contact@percthinkwork.org

Content Contributors

Kathleen Enders

Suzanne Lee

Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/

Mary Beck

PERC Project Manager

www.percthinkwork.org