

New Jersey Division of
Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Consumer Handbook

A guide to explain
vocational rehabilitation



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Message from the Director

This handbook provides information about vocational rehabilitation and the services offered through the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). Keep this booklet handy so you can refer to it at any time.

Your rehabilitation counselor will also explain the vocational rehabilitation process and answer any questions that you or your family have. We look forward to assisting you on your career pathway.

About Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation is a federal/state program to help people who have a disability qualify for, find, or keep a job. In New Jersey the program is run by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). The professional staff at DVRS can help you get vocational rehabilitation services. If you are a student, you may also qualify for services to help you make the transition from school to work -- Pre-Employment Transition Services and Transition Services -- to become successful in your chosen career.

DVRS Mission Statement

The mission of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is to enable eligible individuals with disabilities to achieve an employment outcome consistent with their strengths, priorities, needs, abilities, and capabilities.

Nondiscrimination

In accordance with 34 CFR 76.500, no individual will, on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or disability, be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination by DVRS.

Accessibility

What if I need help getting services that are accessible to me?

All programs and services described in this handbook must be accessible to you based on your disability-related needs. Your DVRS counselor will work with you to get you the help you need to actively and fully participate in your vocational rehabilitation.

Your counselor can help you access offices and services by arranging for:

- sign language interpreters
- computer-assisted communication
- assistive listening or speech devices
- other technology or assistance you may need, or
- support for the involvement of your representative, if you request one.

Confidentiality

Are my records and conversations with my counselor private?

YES! The law requires that we keep all paperwork and information about you, and any conversations with you, private. With few exceptions*, DVRS is allowed to release information about you only when we get written permission from you (or your parent, guardian, or designated representative).

** Exceptions: DVRS may release personal information without a signed release:*

- in a medical emergency
- if required by federal or state law
- in connection with law enforcement, fraud, abuse, or judicial order
- when you (the applicant) request it in writing
- if there is a threat to your safety or the safety of others.

You may be asked to sign forms allowing us to collect information about you for the purposes of your vocational rehabilitation. These forms will show exactly who we are asking for information, and exactly what information we are requesting.

Your counselor will explain why they are asking for information about you, and why they are providing information to any other agency.

Services for Students and Youth

Which students can receive services?

If you are a student between ages 14 and 21, you can receive services to help you prepare for a career if you have

- an IEP (Individualized Education Program), or
- a 504 plan, or
- a medically documented disability that makes it difficult to get a job.

What services are available for students?

The first set of services that are available for students is called Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). These services include:

- job exploration counseling
- work-based learning experiences
- counseling about opportunities in education programs after high school
- training to prepare you for work (workplace readiness training)
- instruction in self-advocacy (how to tell people what you need)

Do students with disabilities need to apply to DVRS to receive Pre-ETS?

No. Students with disabilities do not need to apply to DVRS to receive Pre-Employment Transition Services. Students can just submit a completed online Pre-ETS student referral form (nj.gov/labor/PreETSForm). DVRS counselors will make sure that students get the pre-employment transition services they need.

Can I receive services if I am not in school?

Yes. Youth with disabilities, age 16 through 24 who are not in school, can get Out-of-School Youth Employment Services (OSYES). By developing your job skills and helping you plan a career path, Out-of-School Youth Employment Services can assist you on the path to self-sufficiency.

Can students receive additional services from DVRS?

If you need more career preparation assistance than the five pre-employment transition services listed above, you must apply with DVRS. The rest of this handbook describes how the vocational rehabilitation process works.

The Application Process

How do I apply for vocational rehabilitation services?

There are several ways to apply.

- You can fill out an online application: nj.gov/labor/DVRSapply
- You or your representative can call your local DVRS office and request an appointment
- You can write a letter to DVRS saying that you want to apply for services
- You can go to your local DVRS office and ask to meet with a counselor

We always aim to schedule appointments quickly. After you submit your application, a vocational rehabilitation counselor will be assigned to you. The counselor will meet with you to discuss your disability, how it affects your ability to find or keep a job, and explain how DVRS can assist you.

With your consent, your counselor will gather information about your disability as well as your needs, interests, abilities, education, work experience, family, and finances. If necessary, the counselor may arrange medical examinations or vocational assessments to determine the impact of your disability.

These services are offered at no cost to you. Services must be provided in a setting that is integrated to the extent possible (meaning that it includes people both with and without disabilities). You and your counselor must discuss and both agree to the services.

Eligibility

How do I know if I am eligible for vocational rehabilitation services from DVRS?

Your counselor reviews your information and any assessments to see if you meet the following requirements:

1. You must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially impedes employment.
2. You must require vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment.
3. You must be available for employment.

How long does this take?

Within 60 days of the date you apply for services, your counselor will determine if you are eligible, unless:

- you agree that DVRS cannot determine eligibility due to exceptional and unexpected circumstances, and you agree that an extension is justified, or
- an extended evaluation or trial work experience is required to determine your eligibility.

Is it possible for me to be eligible and not receive vocational rehabilitation services?

Unfortunately, this can happen if there is not enough federal or state funding available. In such a case, the agency must use its "Order of Selection for Services." This means that people with the most severe disabilities will receive services first. Those with less severe disabilities will be placed on a waiting list until funds become available. If this system is being used when you apply for services, your counselor will tell you, and explain where you stand in the priority for services at that time.

If you are receiving services before an Order of Selection for Services goes into effect, you will continue to receive services.

Developing an Individualized Plan for Employment

Will I have a written plan?

YES! In order to receive vocational rehabilitation services, you and your counselor must agree to and sign a written Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Your IPE must be developed as soon as possible, but no later than 90 days after you are determined to be eligible for services, unless:

- you and your counselor agree that an extension is needed, and
- the new deadline and reason for the extension are documented.

Your Opportunity for Input to Your IPE

You will be able to participate fully in your rehabilitation plan. This process is a partnership between you and your counselor. Your counselor will give you information and explain all your options to help you make the best, informed choices. Such information may include:

- the cost, and how much you may have to contribute, if applicable
- consumer satisfaction with potential services (if this information is available)
- the potential service provider's qualifications
- types of services offered by the potential provider
- degree to which services are provided in integrated settings, and
- outcomes achieved by others who have worked with service providers (if this information is available).

Your participation in developing this plan is very important. It ensures that you get the services you need. It also increases your chance for success by matching your skills, priorities, interests, and abilities with the kind of work you want to do.

Your counselor will frequently review your plan with you to see that your needs are being met. If you and your counselor decide that your job goal or services need to be changed, you will be asked to sign an amended or new plan.

Remember, you will be able to make informed choices and give input about the work you want to do, the services you will receive and who provides these services. When your individual plan is completed, your counselor will give you a copy.

The basic parts of the IPE are:

1. your job goal
2. the services you need to reach your job goal and be successful at work
3. the providers of your services
4. a process for review of your progress toward reaching your career goal
5. responsibilities of everyone involved, including the financial participation, if applicable.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

What vocational rehabilitation services might I be able to get?

DVRS offers vocational rehabilitation services to help eligible individuals get or keep a job. You and your counselor must agree that the service is necessary to achieve your vocational goal.

These services may include:

- evaluation of your vocational rehabilitation needs
- vocational counseling and guidance
- benefits counseling
- job placement services

- job coaching, supported employment, and long-term follow-along services
- vocational, technical and other training services with an emphasis on state, national, or industry-recognized credentials
- post-secondary education
- training for taking public transportation and other services to help overcome transportation barriers
- assistance getting services from other agencies
- interpreter services if you are deaf
- assistive and rehabilitation technology you need to get or keep a job
- services to help students transition from school to work
- assistance developing self-employment and small business plans
- follow-up to support your job success and satisfaction
- outreach to employers to provide training on disability etiquette and the benefits of hiring people with disabilities
- other goods and services to help prepare you to get and keep a job.

Can I select any service or service provider regardless of the cost?

NO. If we find that two or more services or service providers can similarly meet your needs, DVRS will provide financial support for the least expensive one. If you prefer a costlier alternative, you must pay the additional cost.

We cannot pay for any service you received before you applied for services from DVRS, or for a service that is not listed on a signed IPE.

Financial Participation

Do I have to pay for the services provided by DVRS?

DVRS has a financial needs test, but you NEVER have to pay for the following services:

- evaluation to determine whether or not you are eligible, and to determine your priority for services if DVRS is using an order for selection for services
- evaluation to determine the services you need
- rehabilitation counseling, advice, and referral services, and
- services to help you find and maintain a job.

For all other services, you may have to contribute financially and use any other available resources. We'll ask you to complete a "Financial Participation Form" to determine how much you may need to contribute. However, the financial needs test is not required if you receive supplemental security income (SSI) or Social Security disability insurance (SSDI); only proof of your status is required.

Appeal Procedure

What if my DVRS counselor and I do not agree?

The first step is to ask to meet with your counselor's supervisor or manager to try to resolve the matter quickly and informally. If the matter can't be resolved informally with managers of your local DVRS office, you may ask for a review, including an in-person meeting with an agency administrator, or you can go to a more formal appeal process. You can request mediation conducted by a qualified mediator, or you may choose to have a formal hearing by an impartial administrative law judge. If you are not satisfied with the administrative review, you may still go to mediation and/or a formal hearing. If you use mediation and are not satisfied with the results, you may still have a formal hearing by an administrative law judge.

Requests for an administrative review, mediation, or formal hearing must be submitted in writing. As you go through the appeals process, you will receive timelines for filing requests, scheduling meetings, decisions, and further appeals.

Your services cannot be stopped during this time without a request from you or your representative, unless there is evidence that that you obtained the services illegally or by misrepresenting yourself.

Hearings will be held at a time and place convenient for you. During any hearing, you will have the opportunity to present your position along with any evidence, information, or witnesses that you have.

If you wish, an attorney or your advocate may represent you for all levels of an appeal process, including an administrative review, mediation and fair hearing. You may also request assistance from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at Disability Rights New Jersey, which can provide legal or non-legal representation to help you through the appeals process.

Disability Rights NJ provide legal representation in accordance with its priorities and may offer legal services ranging from counsel and advice through representation at an impartial hearing. You should discuss the scope of representation with your Disability Rights NJ attorney or advocate. If the Client Assistance Program cannot support your complaint, CAP will communicate with you directly to explain the reason.

What is the Client Assistance Program?

The New Jersey Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a federally funded program that advocates for and protects the rights of people with disabilities who need or are receiving rehabilitation services. CAP provides individual legal representation and non-legal individual and system advocacy, as well as information and referral services, outreach, and education. Disability Rights NJ is the designated CAP for New Jersey, and its attorneys and advocates use legal strategies including informal advocacy and negotiation, and is authorized to pursue legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies.

You can contact the CAP program at Disability Rights NJ when:

- you are recently disabled and wondering how to apply for services through DVRS
- you are turned down for vocational rehabilitation services
- you believe the process is taking too long
- you are having trouble with your vocational rehabilitation counselor
- you aren't getting the employment -related services you need
- your vocational rehabilitation case was closed without your consent
- you are a student or youth with disabilities and are not getting needed vocational rehabilitation services.

How you can contact CAP at Disability Rights NJ:

Phone: 1-800-922-7233 or 609-292-9742 (voice)

TTY: 609-633-7106 Fax: 609-777-0187

Email: advocate@disabilityrightsnj.org

Mail: Disability Rights New Jersey
210 South Broad Street, 3rd Floor
Trenton, New Jersey 08608

Web: disabilityrightsnj.org

Case Closure and Post-Employment Services

After you have started working, you and your counselor will stay in contact to ensure that things are going well and that you are comfortable with your job. This follow-up period will last at least 90 days. At that time, if you have adjusted to the job and do not need additional services, your counselor will discuss closing your case.

If you experience any problems on the job after your case is closed, you may contact your DVRS counselor for assistance without re-opening your case.

If you lose your job, if your disability worsens, or your needs arise again, you may reapply for additional DVRS services at that time.

Helping the System Work for You Tips to Get the Best Service

Referral for Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Initial Interview

- If you can, schedule an appointment before you go to the office. This way we can let you know if you should have certain information handy, and we can prepare any accommodations you need for your appointment.
- When you call for an appointment, ask for directions and parking instructions. If you do not drive, ask for information about public transportation or other transportation that meets the needs of people with disabilities.

- Make a list of all of your questions.
- On your first visit, bring your Social Security card, your Immigration papers (if you are not a United States citizen), and any disability-related documents listed on your appointment letter.
- Be prepared to discuss how your disability interferes with your work. Think about possible solutions.
- Be prepared to discuss your work history.
- Learn as much as you can about DVRS and our services.
- Document your communication and next steps with your counselor.
- Keep this handbook handy. Write your counselor's name and contact information on the Table of Contents page so you can find it easily.

Eligibility and Rehabilitation Program

- Be available to provide information your counselor needs to establish your eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services.
- Advocate for yourself. Let your counselor know what you want and why you think it is reasonable.
- Participate when it comes time to plan the services you will receive.
- Keep asking questions until you have all the information you need to make good decisions about your job goal, services, service providers, and location of services.
- Be sure your job goal matches your abilities, desires, interests, priorities and job market demands.
- When you are considering services or programs, ask about their success rate.
- If you think services are being delayed, notify your counselor.
- Make an appointment before your visit to ensure that your counselor will be available.
- When you schedule an appointment, give the reason so your counselor can prepare for your visit.
- At the end of any visit with your counselor, make sure you understand what both you and your counselor must do next.
- Anything you are asked to sign may be signed by your authorized representative.

Case Closure

- Be sure you are successful and comfortable in your job before agreeing to close your case.
- Before your case is closed, discuss with your counselor any service you think you might need in the future to keep your job.
- After your case is closed, remember that you can request additional services that you might need to keep your job, regain your job, advance in your job, or move to a better job.

Complete this information so you can find it quickly when you need it.

NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Counselor:

Phone Number:

Email:

