

FAQ

How important is it for a client to maintain communication with his/her counselor?

Extremely! It is essential for successful vocational rehabilitation. It is helpful to remember an OVR counselor has on average about 150-160 clients. It is very helpful for each and every client to keep in contact with their counselor as to their progress.

What are some of the best ways for clients to maintain contact with their counselor?

It cannot be emphasized enough how important client/counselor contact is to the VR process. The method or style of contact is not as important as the actual act of communication. Any method that is comfortable, clear, consistent, and convenient for the client is good:

Phone (specify specific times of availability so phone tag and ongoing voicemail is not as frustrating), a phone appointment can even be arranged (I will be available to speak to you on this date/time, is this convenient for you, counselor.

Schedule a face-to-face meeting for more detailed discussion as needed.

And, of course, contact by e-mail.

It is sometimes difficult for clients to choose a specific realistic vocational goal, which must be consistent with the client's abilities and capabilities, and it must be available in today's labor market. What are some tips on researching information on a client's goal,

training required, job prospects, etc. so a client can make more of an informed choice?

This is a crucial step in the VR process. In this information age, there are a lot of options for investigating about your goal. The internet can provide some good information. A few helpful websites are: bls.gov, Bureau of Labor Statistics; Dictionary of Occupation Titles, dot; Occupational Outlook Handbook, ooh; and o'net. These websites will provide specific information on the choice of goal such as the job tasks, education required, and job potential. Also, it is helpful if the client takes some time to do a Labor Market Survey, which basically entails contacting potential employers in the client's chosen field and ask them some specifics about the job and the labor market potential.

Does a client need to be working before he/she receives any physical/mental restoration and/or assistive technology?

No, however, the First Step in receiving cost services is the development of their Individualized Plan for Employment, IPE. The client and counselor need to develop an IPE which specifies an agreed upon realistic vocational goal and details the services required for the client to achieve their goal. If a hearing aid, wheelchair, CCTV, etc. are necessary to allow the client to do his/her job search or be successful in their needed schooling, these types of services can be provided before the client actually finds a job.

Is a client permitted to attend school online and be funded by OVR?

Yes, as times have changed and computers are more and more of a common every day affair, online schooling can be a convenient and successful way for a client to go to school. However, the student should go through the same investigatory process of checking out the school, its

policies, its support services, its cost, its job placement services, etc. as they would if they were attending a traditional school. The client should still provide the counselor the same information on three schools offering their particular major. The least expensive school which has the client's major and provides the needed support will be the school OVR helps fund. A client should keep in mind that non traditional training should be used only after studying other options with their counselor and concluding it is the best alternative.

How does a client with serious vision/blindness issue receive services when their primary disability is not related to their vision (physical, mental health, etc.)?

If a client's primary disability is not related to their vision concern, they would apply to OVR for services. If found eligible, they should receive services based on their primary disability and their secondary (vision impairment) issue. The client must inform their counselor of any disabilities/limits they have that can affect their ability to work. A client can only receive services from either OVR or BVS, not both at the same time. It is helpful if the two VR agencies work together and share disability specific vendors/services so the client can be best served. Working together, in any context, is the key to successful vocational rehabilitation.

How does an individual receive VR services?

The VR agency assigns a VR counselor to each eligible individual.

The counselor gathers as much information as possible about the individual's work history, education and training, abilities and interests, rehabilitation needs, and possible career goals. In gathering the information, the counselor will first look to existing information so it is

important for an individual to bring copies of medical, educational and similar documentation.

If existing information is not sufficient to determine whether the individual is eligible for VR services, then VR will provide assessment services to gather the needed information.

Based on the information gathered in this assessment phase of the VR process, an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies the individual's desired employment outcome is developed. The IPE also lists, among other things, the steps necessary to achieve the individual employment outcome; the services needed to help the individual achieve the outcome, and evaluation criteria used to determine progress toward the employment outcome. The VR agency may only provide those services listed on the IPE.

Does the eligible individual have to pay for VR services?

Based on the individual's available financial resources, the State VR agency may require an eligible individual to help pay for services. However, the following services are available to all eligible individuals, regardless of their financial resources, without charge:

- Assessments to determine eligibility and VR needs;
- Vocational counseling, guidance, and referral services; and
- Job search and placement services.

What are comparable services and benefits?

“Comparable services and benefits” are those benefits or services that are: 1) paid for, in whole or part, by another Federal, State or local public agency or employee benefits; 2) available at the time the individual needs them; and 3) comparable to the services that the

individual would receive from the VR agency. Merit-based awards and scholarships are not considered “comparable services and benefits.” Before providing certain VR services, the counselor must determine whether another source, such as medical insurance or Medicaid, etc., can pay for the service. However, the counselor is not required to look for a “comparable service or benefit” if it would delay: 1) the individual’s progress toward achieving an employment outcome; 2) an immediate job placement; or 3) the provision of services to an eligible individual who is at extreme medical risk.

Who has the primary obligation to provide reasonable accommodations if an individual requires these to work, VR or the employer?

ADA indicates the employer should provide auxiliary aids and services.

- 1) Auxiliary aids and services. –The term “auxiliary aids and services” includes (A) qualified interpreters or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments; (B) qualified readers, taped texts, or other effective methods of making visually delivered materials available to individuals with visual impairments;
- (C) Acquisition or modification of equipment or devices; and (D) other similar services and actions.

If the provision of accommodations to an employee may cause undue hardship, “any accommodation that would be unduly costly, extensive, or disruptive, or would fundamentally alter the nature or operations of the business”, the employer must provide documentation of the “overall financial resources” of the employer, and the effect of this accommodation on the expenses and resources.

If the employer provides needed financial documentation, the burden shifts to OVR to provide the accommodations.

Where can an OVR find information stating what training is required in today's labor market for their specific vocational goal?

The client has the responsibility to do some research to provide OVR clear, supporting documentation of the training that is necessary to meet the training requirements for their chosen goal. Some websites that may help a client in gathering this information are Occupational Outlook Handbook, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Dictionary of Occupational Titles.

Is an OVR client allowed to attend school part-time?

Although OVR encourages full-time status, exceptions may be made if a client's functional limitations are such that part-time is necessary to accommodate the student's disability.

What G.P.A. must a client maintain in order to continue with OVR funding?

A client must maintain at least a "C" (2.0) cumulative average. However, a client must maintain a higher average if required by the school or course major. This should be written on the client's IPE.

How will a client's federal financial aid be affected if they have a poor G.P.A.?

Students must maintain federal academic progress to be eligible for federal and OVR aid. This is determined by the school.

Will OVR pay for a client to attend summer school?

OVR may pay for summer school if it will allow a student to graduate earlier or if course work is unavailable at any other time. The client must provide evidence of these circumstances.

Is a client required to seek out merit scholarships?

No, however if the client receives a scholarship, the financial aid office may report it and the counselor will use it in calculating OVR's contribution. CAP has some resources on financial aid for students with disabilities.

How can a client find out about financial aid/grants resources?

A CAP advocate may be able to provide you with some financial aid resources for students with disabilities. The financial aid office at the school may also be a good place to visit.

Who has the responsibility to seek out/apply for financial aid information?

It is the client's responsibility to seek out/apply for financial aid and to notify his/her counselor he/she has done so.

If a client is in default status, can they receive financial aid?

Students in default must produce written evidence from the lender that they have attempted to resolve their default status before OVR can

provide financial assistance for training. If a client agrees to repayment terms, he/she must not default on such repayments.

Is a client required to attend an in-state college?

No, a client may choose training out-of-state once the client and VR counselor verify with that state's vocational rehabilitation agency that the school has appropriate state accreditations

Out-of-state training is a choice that will be considered if an in-state training program does not provide the specific program and/or disability services the client requires to achieve his/her vocational goal.

What is the Financial Needs Test (FNT)?

The financial needs test is used to determine financial eligibility for VR cost services and any family contribution toward those services. Not all VR services are subject to a financial needs test. For example, diagnostic testing is not. If you have a question about whether the FNT applies to your services, contact CAP.

Does the FNT apply if I am an SSI/SSDI recipient?

No, the FNT cannot be applied to those receiving SSI/SSDI benefits. It is necessary to complete an OVR FNT if you are a non SSI/SSDI client. In those instances the family contribution towards training shall be applied to and deducted from any FNT contribution.

What is FAFSA? (This came up with one of my clients recently)

FAFSA stands for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. The results of filing this application will help determine OVR's contributions to your academic training.

Is it necessary to file a FAFSA?

If you are interested in receiving assistance from OVR for training it is necessary to file a FAFSA. The FAFSA may also determine that you are eligible for other grants.

Please refer to www.fafsa.ed.gov for further questions.

Can I have “homemaker” as my vocational goal?

If you are a client of the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services homemaker is a viable goal to perform the majority of activities of household management, so that another family member may work outside the home.

What if I do not reside with a primary wage earner?

Then independent homemaker may be considered if the individual is the sole caregiver for his/her minor children or if the individual is the primary caregiver for other family members who require care in the home due to illness or disability.

How can I be eligible for CAP services?

You are eligible for all CAP services if you are applying for or receiving services from programs funded under the Act such as the Office of

Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) and the Centers for Independent Living (CIL).

Is there a fee for CAP services?

No. All CAP services are free.

What is “systemic advocacy”?

CAP can help solve problems that affect many individuals through “systemic advocacy”. This often involves making changes to state rules and policies and participating on councils such as the State Rehabilitation Council.

When is it appropriate to contact CAP?

You should contact CAP whenever you have a question about your rights/responsibilities under the Act or if you are unhappy about the services you are receiving from a program funded under the act.

What is the difference between the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973?

The section of the ADA that the Center for Disability Law and Policy handles is Title 1- Employment Discrimination. CAP handles Title I and VI of the Rehabilitation Act which focuses on Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Services.

What is the Workforce Investment Act?

The Workforce Investment Act is a federal law that deals with employment. The Rehabilitation Act falls under it.

How do I find the OVR office that is the closest to me?

You can find the closest OVR office by looking in the blue pages of your telephone directory. It will be listed under the disability section

Can I receive vocational rehabilitation services if I am not eligible for Social Security Disability (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?

Yes, in order to receive vocational rehabilitation services in Pennsylvania under the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, you must have a “most significant disability”.

What does it mean to have a “most significant disability”?

Under OVR policy in Pennsylvania, you meet the definition of a person with a “most significant disability” if you fit within three or more “functional capacities” because of your disability, and will require services for a “lengthy” period of time. “Functional capacities” are things like physical tolerance, personal behaviors and environmental interaction. You should contact your OVR counselor if you have questions about functional capacities.

Must I have more than one disability in order to receive VR services?

No, you must fit within 3 or more “functional capacities”. “Functional capacities” are explained more above.

What is the maximum amount that OVR will contribute toward my college education per semester?

OVR policy currently provides for up to \$1,750.00 per semester. However, if you have special circumstances such as medical expenses, you may be eligible for a waiver that will allow you to receive additional financial assistance. You can ask your VR counselor how to apply for a waiver.

Can I go to college outside of my home state and still receive financial assistance from OVR, and other supports to help me with college?

Yes.

What is an individual Plan for Employment?

An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is a document developed by you and your VR counselor. It states your vocational or job goal and lists the vocational rehabilitation services you will receive, as well as who will provide each service. It is signed by you and your counselor

What can I do if I need a vocational Rehabilitation service that is not listed on my IPE?

You should tell your VR counselor that you need the service so that your IPE can be amended or changed to include it. You have a right to review and amend your IPE, if needed, at least once per year.

What can I do if my VR counselor and I do not agree on the vocational goal to be written on my IPE?

You can contact CAP and we will assist you in resolving your disagreement. You have a right to choose a vocational goal that is consistent with your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice

Is every person with a disability Eligible for VR services?

No. In order to be eligible for OVR services you must have a substantial impediment to employment and be able to benefit from services in terms of an employment outcome.

Do I have to be unemployed in order to receive OVR services?

No. You can receive post employment services as a follow up to your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). You may also receive OVR services if you are underemployed.

Is OVR part of Workforce?

Yes. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 brought together several funding streams into one unified system. Vocational Rehabilitation is a partner in this federal effort to consolidate, coordinate, and improve employment, training, and literacy in the United States.

What is the purpose of OVR?

The purpose of OVR is to assist individuals with disabilities to get and keep a job that is consistent with each individual's unique abilities, capabilities and informed choice.

Where can I find resources that will assist me in choosing my vocational goals?

You can visit your local library or your local Careerlink. You can also contact the Client Assistance Program if you need assistance finding additional resources.

When can OVR close my case?

Once you have been employed in your chosen job for 90 days, your counselor can close your case. If your situation changes, you may reapply to OVR.

What are some of the vocational rehabilitation services that OVR offers?

Depending on your individual needs, OVR may provide the following:

- An assessment for determining eligibility and VR needs
- Vocational counseling
- Physical and mental restoration
- vocational and other training, including on-the-job training.
- interpreter services for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

- reader services for individuals who are blind and visually impaired.
- assist students with disabilities to transition from school to work.
- rehabilitation technology services and devices.
- supported employment services, and
- job placement services

What can I do if I disagree with my counselor's decision?

You should discuss your concerns with your counselor's supervisor. You can also call the Client Assistance Program. The sooner you contact CAP, the more likely CAP will be able to help you.

What if my concerns are still not resolved after talking to my counselor's supervisor?

You can file an appeal within 30 days of the counselor's decision by writing a letter to OVR's Bureau of Program Operations requesting a hearing. In your letter you should explain why you disagree with your counselor's decision and how the requested service will help you achieve your vocational goal. You can call the Client Assistance Program and we will help you with the appeal process.

What is the Client Assistance program (CAP)?

CAP is the state-wide advocate for individuals with disabilities seeking or receiving services from OVR and other programs, projects or facilities funded under the Rehabilitation Act. CAP can provide you information about the rehabilitation system in Pennsylvania and advocate on your behalf to receive those services that you need to become gainfully employed.

If I am determined eligible by OVR do I automatically receive VR services?

No. The Rehabilitation Act requires VR to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities first. If you are found to be most significantly disabled you will receive services. If you are found to be significantly disabled you will be put on a waiting list and will only receive services after it is determined that funds are available. You can, however, receive non-cost services such as counseling, guidance and job placement.

Once I apply for OVR services, how long does OVR have to determine if I am eligible?

OVR has 60 days to determine your eligibility for services. This 60 day period may be extended if you and your VR counselor agree that more time is necessary to make the eligibility determination.

How do I develop my advocacy skills?

The Client Assistance Program has put together a step-by-step guide to vocational rehabilitation services and your rights and responsibilities.

Is CAP a part of OVR?

No. CAP is a federally funded program administered by the Center for Disability Law and Policy. The Center is a public interest law center that has advocated on behalf of the individuals with disabilities since it was established in 1976.

