

204.00 Assessment Policy

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Description

For vocational rehabilitation, assessment is ongoing and person-centered occurring at critical decision points throughout the vocational rehabilitation process.

The assessment process begins when an individual with a disability applies for ACCES-VR services with the intent to reach an employment outcome. Relevant assessment information may be provided by the individual, family, advocate, and/or referring agency in accordance with confidentiality requirements.

The vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor engages the individual in the assessment process for the following purposes:

- To determine eligibility;
- To determine the significance of disability; (and to assign priority for order of selection if needed);
- To identify the scope of required services and supports to meet rehabilitation needs;
- To substantiate appropriateness for supported employment;
- To develop the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE);
- To determine progress during the implementation of the IPE; and
- To determine if the individual has achieved an employment outcome in an integrated setting consistent with the individual's employment factors.

The VR counselor must, to the extent possible, use existing information to establish eligibility and develop the IPE. When additional information is needed, a vocational evaluation or other assessment services may be authorized. These services must be conducted in the most integrated setting possible. An individual should also be able to participate in the assessment process using the most appropriate mode of

communication to enable the individual to comprehend and respond to information being communicated during the assessment process.

Role of the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

The VR counselor will:

- Collect, analyze, synthesize and interpret available information;
- Engage the individual with a disability in the assessment process; and
- Develop a positive counseling and guidance relationship by understanding the individual's priorities during the assessment process.

If additional information is needed, the VR counselor, along with the individual receiving services, should decide how to obtain the information and establish appropriate timeframes for completion. The decision to pursue any additional assessments will also be fully discussed and explained to the individual. The VR counselor must obtain only the information that is necessary for eligibility or service planning. The individual's active involvement should be documented in the record of services.

Individual's Participation in the Assessment Process

Assessment is a learning process that requires mutual cooperation between the VR counselor and the individual. From the beginning, the individual should be invited to actively participate in the assessment and decision - making process.

The individual is expected to:

- Work with the VR counselor to understand how the assessment process is used to determine eligibility, plan for services and identify an employment outcome;
- Be available for assessment services and complete any agreed upon assessment activities; and
- Participate in a discussion of the results and what they mean in terms of achieving an employment outcome.

The individual should have an opportunity to respond to assessment results and include a representative (e.g. family member or advocate) in any discussions. While the decision making process is a collaborative one, decisions must reflect the judgment of the VR counselor in accordance with vocational rehabilitation policy.

Focus on Functional Capacities and Employment Factors

Assessment should focus on the overall functional capacities of the individual, particularly the strengths related to pursuing employment.

Assessment should include a review of the individual's disability and its impact on one or more functional capacities: mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance and work skills. The results of the assessment process should then identify how one or more of these functional capacities impact the

individual's unique employment factors: strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

Assessment should also define what supports may be provided to the individual to enhance strengths and overcome or work around limitations. For some individuals, there may be a need to experiment with the potential supports, modifications and/or strategies that will enable the individual to meet the essential performance demands of the work situation.

Assessment for Eligibility

The VR counselor begins the eligibility process with the presumption that all persons can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services in terms of an employment outcome consistent with their employment factors. The VR counselor and the individual work together to identify and understand the individual's functional capacities, as they relate to the identified employment factors - to determine if there are substantial limitations (i.e. "*impediments*") to achieving an employment outcome.

Existing information is adequate for an eligibility determination if, in the VR counselor's judgment, it sufficiently documents the person's disability, the impediments to employment and significance of disability. If existing information is not available or sufficient for the eligibility determination, then additional assessment services may be obtained.

Trial Work Experience or Extended Evaluation is used to further assess an individual when eligibility cannot be determined because of the possibility that the individual cannot benefit from VR services due to the severity of the individual's disability. A written plan is developed for the services to be provided during a Trial Work Experience or Extended Evaluation.

Assessment for Developing the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

Whenever possible, the VR counselor and the individual should develop the IPE (i.e. employment goal and services) based on the assessment information gathered during the eligibility process. If existing information obtained during the eligibility process is not sufficient to identify the rehabilitation needs and develop the IPE, a comprehensive assessment of the eligible individual must be completed by the VR counselor.

Comprehensive Assessment for the Eligible Individual

A comprehensive assessment:

1. Is limited to information necessary to identify the rehabilitation needs of the eligible individual and to develop the individual's IPE;
2. Uses existing information as the primary source of information;
3. Relies on information provided by the individual and other sources, in accordance with confidentiality requirements;

4. May include an assessment of the personality, interests, interpersonal skills, intelligence and related functional capacities, educational achievements, work experience, vocational aptitudes, personal and social adjustments, and employment opportunities of the individual, and the medical, psychiatric, psychological, and other pertinent vocational, educational, cultural, social, recreational, and environmental factors that affect the employment and rehabilitation needs of the individual;
5. May include, to the degree needed, an appraisal of the patterns of work behavior of the individual and services needed for the individual to acquire occupational skills, and to develop work attitudes, work habits, work tolerance, and social and behavior patterns necessary for successful job performance, including the use of work in real job situations to assess and develop the capacities of the individual to perform adequately in a work environment (OJT/WTO Policy);
6. Includes referral, where appropriate, for rehabilitation (assistive) technology services to assess and develop the capacities of the individual to perform in a work environment; and
7. Is required prior to a referral for supported employment to substantiate that the individual meets all criteria for participation in the supported employment program.

Referral for Assessment Services

After a review of existing information, if additional information is needed, a referral for assessment services can be considered. All assessment services and related required supports necessary to complete the assessment are exempt from an economic need determination.

When referring for assessment services, the VR counselor should provide a written referral that focuses on the individual's unique vocational needs. The referral should include relevant background information about the individual's disability, previous education and work experience, available pertinent records and existing reports. The VR counselor should identify specific questions or issues to be addressed by the assessment. The VR counselor is encouraged to consult with the service provider if there are unusual circumstances that may impact the assessment process.

The VR counselor should prepare the individual for the assessment in advance. The assessment experience can be more meaningful, and the results more reliable, if the individual knows what to expect and is engaged as a full participant in the process from the onset.

The final report from an assessment service should:

- Respond to the VR counselor's initial referral questions and focus on the practical application of the results;
- Identify the abilities of the individual;
- Clarify the impact of the findings on the individual's ability to work; and
- Suggest any accommodations to improve the individual's capabilities related to employment.

The VR counselor should assist the individual in understanding the findings and develop a plan.

Resources

When seeking assessment services, consider existing community resources in addition to ACCES-VR vendors, such as peer run programs at an Independent Living Center (ILC) or other consumer organizations. Assessments are available at One-Stop Employment Centers and Department of Labor (DOL) on-line services such as Career Zone and Job Zone. The National Work Readiness Credential and Metrix System are other examples of valuable on-line information resources.

References

Rehabilitation Act:

- Section 7 (2) Definitions; Section 101; Section 102.

Federal Regulations:

- 361.41;
- 361.42;
- 361.45; and
- 361.50

Policy and Procedure:

- 202.00 Eligibility for Services Policy and 202.00P Eligibility Procedure
- 100.00 Consumer Involvement Policy and 100.00P Consumer Involvement Procedure
- 205.00 Significance of Disability Policy and 205.00P Significance of Disability Procedure
- 206.00 Individualized Plan for Employment Policy
- 1375.40 Work-Try-Out (WTO)/On-the-Job Training (OJT) Policy

30th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues: A New Paradigm For Vocational Evaluation: Empowering the VR Consumer Through Vocational Information. August 2003