



VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

A GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS

What Can I Expect?

How Does It Work?

What Part Do I Play?



VR services help people with disabilities prepare for, find and keep jobs.



What Is Vocational Rehabilitation?

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) services help people with disabilities prepare for, find and keep jobs. The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) is the state agency responsible for the delivery of the VR program in Texas. Within DARS is the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS). This division provides VR services. You may be eligible for services, depending upon how your disability interferes with work. VR Counselors will assist you to make informed choices of services, service providers and an employment goal to help you go to work.

How Do I Apply?

To apply for VR services, call, write or visit the DARS Division for Rehabilitation Services office nearest you and request an appointment to meet with a counselor. If you need help locating a DRS office in your area, you may call the DARS Inquiries Line at 1-800-628-5115. When you contact the local office, please let us know if you need translator services or other accommodations for your appointment. You may also find a list of local offices at www.dars.state.tx.us.

Do I Need to Bring Anything With Me When I Apply for Services?

When you meet with your counselor, it is helpful if you have photo identification (for example, driver's license, state-issued ID, school ID, passport or military ID) and your Social Security card. If you do not have these, you can still apply for services. However, you must provide documentation verifying that you can legally work in the United States before you can be determined eligible for VR services.

If you have any of the following additional information, bring it to your meeting:

- Your home address, as well as your mailing address
- Names and addresses of any doctors you have seen recently
- Names and addresses of any schools you have attended
- Information about any medical insurance you have
- A list of places you have worked, including type of job, dates, the reason you left and salary
- Proof of income for you and your spouse or your parents (if they claim you as a dependent on their income tax); (i.e. a copy of your latest pay stub, SSI/SSDI or VA award letter, workers compensation notice of payment or latest income tax return)
- Proof of expenses related to monthly mortgage/rental payments, debts imposed by



court order, personal medical costs, and other disability-related expenses

- Names, addresses and phone numbers of two people who will always know how to contact you
- Any reports of recent medical exams, school records or other information that you feel may help the counselor understand your disability

During your appointment, your counselor will explain DARS-DRS and VR services and will ask you:

- To explain how your disability makes it hard for you to work.
- How you think we can help you go to work.

All records and information are strictly confidential.

What Happens After I Have Finished the Application?

Your counselor will want to learn more about you through one or more of the following ways:

- Getting information from your doctors and schools
- Sending you to a new doctor to find out about your current medical condition
- Having you take tests to find out more about your interests, abilities and skills

As a consumer, you play a very important role in helping us to help you reach your goal.



Your counselor will make the appointments for you. You won't have to pay for these appointments.

It is very important that you keep all appointments. Please let your counselor know if you can't make it to one. If you miss an appointment, it may take much longer for you to get services.

Does Everyone Who Applies Receive Services?

No; in order to receive services, you must

- Be present in the state of Texas
- Have a physical and/or mental condition that affects your ability to work
- Need vocational rehabilitation services in order to help you get and/or keep a job
- Be able to get and keep a job after receiving services

If you receive Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance you are presumed eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

Who Decides if I Can Get Vocational Rehabilitation Services?

After reviewing all of the facts, your counselor will decide if you can be served in the vocational rehabilitation program. If you are determined eligible, you will become a VR consumer. As a consumer, you play a very important role in helping us to help you reach your goal.

However, if your counselor tells you that VR can't help, your case file will be closed and you will receive a letter telling you why and what actions you can take if you don't agree. You may be referred to other programs or agencies that may be able to help you.

What Kind of Services are Available?

Vocational rehabilitation services are provided to help bridge the gap between you and meaningful employment. Some examples of services are training, counseling, surgery, artificial arms and legs, hearing aids, transportation, sign language interpreters, on-the-job supports and help finding a job. You probably won't need all of these services and there may be other services that you need that are not on this list. You will get only those services that will help you reach your employment goal.

Your counselor will provide you with information about available options and alternatives in selecting the services you need for successful employment.



What is the Plan?

If you are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, the next step will be to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Your IPE will include your employment goal, the services you need to reach your employment goal, and your agreed participation in these services.

Your DARS-DRS counselor will help you complete your IPE. You will also be actively involved in developing your IPE and have the option of working:

- With your DRS counselor
- With a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor not employed by DARS-DRS
- With another resource outside of DARS-DRS

DARS-DRS will not pay to help develop the IPE. Whichever option you choose, the information for the IPE will be entered into DARS-DRS computer system, signed by you or your representative, and approved by your DARS-DRS counselor. You or your representative will receive a printed copy of the IPE for your records.



*Eligibility for DARS VR services
does not depend on your income.*



What are the Components of My IPE?

- The employment goal
- A list of steps needed to achieve the employment goal; for example, complete training
- A schedule of how often you and your counselor will contact each other; for example, every 60 days
- Criteria that will be used to evaluate your progress; for example, medical reports
- A description of services you need to achieve your employment goal, including the start and end dates of each service, the service providers and how services will be obtained
- A statement about how you were involved in choosing the employment goal, services, service providers and methods for providing the services
- Your responsibilities in achieving the employment goal; for example, applying for financial aid
- A list of other organizations that you will be responsible for applying to, and for using their services; for example, a VA hospital

- The amount that you may be required to contribute toward the cost of services if your net income and/or assets exceed DARS-DRS basic living requirements
- Statements about the terms and conditions for services from DARS-DRS and your right to appeal decisions made by your counselor
- Signatures from you or your representative and your DARS-DRS counselor

I'll Need to Participate in Paying for Service, Won't I?

Eligibility for DARS VR services does not depend on your income or liquid assets. However, if your net income or liquid assets exceed DARS-DRS basic living requirements, you must help pay for some services, unless an exception has been granted by DARS-DRS. Also, if you are receiving Social Security disability benefits, you are not required to help pay for any services.

Your counselor will request proof of income and expenses from you and/or your parents (if they claim you on their income taxes). You must disclose income, liquid assets and expenses. Failure to provide complete and accurate financial information is a violation of Texas law and may result in a denial or delay of services.




All services are subject to required participation except:

- Services paid or reimbursed by a source other than DARS-DRS
- Assessments for determining eligibility and determining vocational rehabilitation needs, including any associated maintenance and transportation
- Counseling, guidance and referral provided by DARS-DRS
- Job-related services
- Personal assistant services
- Auxiliary aids or services; for example, interpreter services, reader services and translator services

How is My Participation Determined?

If you are asked help pay for VR services, it is because your monthly income (plus any of the allowable additions listed below) or liquid assets exceed the DARS-DRS Basic Living Requirement (BLR). BLR is based on the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/>), and changes annually when the FPG is adjusted for inflation. You may request a copy of the current BLR table from your counselor.



You are an important part of the workforce and can be proud.



To determine how your income and liquid assets compare with BLR limits, your counselor will review the net income and liquid assets of you and your spouse and your parents (or foster parents, legal guardian or conservator), if they claim you as a dependent on their income taxes.

If your *liquid assets* are greater than the BLR level in the table, plus any allowable additions, then you must pay an amount equal to the excess each month that DARS-DRS pays for goods and/or services.

If your *monthly income* is greater than the amount listed in the BLR table, plus any allowable additions, then you must pay an amount equal to that excess each month that DARS-DRS pays for goods and/or services.

Your portion of the cost of services may be paid in kind. For example, you may pay the additional cost associated with transportation to receive services or pay for needed uniforms, or textbooks.

Allowable additions to BLR:

- Monthly home mortgage or rental payments
- Prescribed diets and medicines for you
- Your personal medical costs and disability related expenses
- Debts imposed by court order

After I Reach My Employment Goal— Then What?

When you have been working for a while and you and your counselor agree that things are going well, you will receive a letter letting you know that your case has been closed. You are an important part of the workforce and can be proud of what you have accomplished. If you run into any problems after your case has been closed, let your counselor know.

But What if I Have a Problem?

If you have trouble at work, let your counselor know immediately so that he or she can help you work it out.

There may be times when you don't understand or agree with the decisions your counselor makes about your case. If you have a concern about the types of services that you are getting or think you should be able to get services when you've been told that you can't, the best thing to do is to discuss your concerns with your counselor.



What Can I Do if I Disagree with My Counselor's Decision?

If you talk with your counselor and you still don't agree, you may ask to talk to the area manager, who is the counselor's supervisor.

We hope you will attempt to resolve your disagreement with DARS-DRS through your counselor. However, if you have talked to your counselor and are still not satisfied, you may request a review by a hearing officer or a mediator to help reach an agreement. You can get a copy of the brochure "*Can We Talk? Appeal Procedures for Consumers*" which explains the appeal process, from your counselor.

Are There Other Places I Can Go to Ask Questions About DARS-DRS?

You can call the DARS Inquiries Line at 1-800-628-5115 to speak with a member of the DARS Inquiries Unit or, if you would like to speak to someone outside the agency, you may contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) of Disability Rights Texas (DRTX) at 1-800-252-9108 or visit Disability Rights Texas online at www.disabilityrightstexas.org.

CAP can help you

- Understand VR services
- Communicate better with your VR counselor
- Mediate disagreements
- Take administrative or legal steps
- Refer you to other services and benefits



NOTES

If you believe that you have been discriminated against because of your disability, feel free to contact the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's 504 Coordinator for assistance at

**Texas Health and Human Services Commission
Civil Rights Office
4900 N. Lamar Blvd.
Austin, Texas 78751-2399
1-888-388-6332**

Does DARS-DRS Have Other Programs?

The DARS Division for Rehabilitation Services has a variety of options for people with significant disabilities, including Supported Employment, Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services, Independent Living Services, Independent Living Centers, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services. Contact your local DARS-DRS office for more information.

Consistent with the primary purpose of the program, DARS-DRS vocational rehabilitation services also help people with disabilities in the community, and support their movement from nursing homes and institutions to community-based settings.



The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.

For questions, compliments or complaints call

1-800-628-5115

www.dars.state.tx.us