

# Chapter 2: Individualized Plan for Employment

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Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
Policy and Procedures Manual

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## Section I. Definitions

- A. **"Amendment"** to an Individualized Plan for Employment means a substantive change in the employment outcome, the services to be provided, or the providers of services.
- B. **"Competitive integrated employment"** means work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis in an integrated setting. The individual is compensated at or above the minimum wage, but not less than the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals who are not disabled. The individual is at a location where the employee with a disability interacts with other employees, other persons, customers and vendors, to the same extent as other employees who are not individuals with disabilities, and who have similar positions.
- C. **"Customized employment"** means competitive integrated employment for an individual with a significant disability that is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual and business needs of the employer.
- D. **"Self-employment"** is competitive integrated employment that yields an income that is comparable to the income that is received by other individuals without disabilities who are self-employed in similar occupations or tasks, and who have similar training, experience and skills.
- E. **"Employment outcome"** means, with respect to an individual entering, advancing in, or retaining full-time or, if appropriate, part-time competitive integrated employment including customized employment, self-employment, telecommuting, business ownership, or supported employment that is consistent with an individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.
- F. **"Individualized Plan for Employment"** (IPE) means the written plan of services developed with an eligible individual to result in an employment outcome.

## Section II. Development and 90-Day Deadline for Completion

- A. As soon as possible after determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs, the individual shall be provided in writing and in an appropriate mode of communication the following information on options for developing the IPE:
  - 1. An explanation that the individual, or, if appropriate, an individual's representative, may develop all or part of the IPE:
    - a) without assistance from the State unit or other entity; or
    - b) with assistance from a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor employed by the State unit; or
    - c) with assistance from a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor who is not employed by the State unit; or
    - d) with the assistance of a disability advocacy organization; or
    - e) with assistance from resources other than those listed above.

2. A description of the full range of components that shall be included in an IPE;
  3. As appropriate —
    - a) an explanation of the Division’s guidelines and criteria regarding financial commitments concerning an IPE;
    - b) information about the availability of assistance in completing State IPE and related forms;
    - c) additional information the person requests or the Division determines to be needed;
  4. A description of the —
    - a) rights and remedies available including administrative review, mediation, and fair hearing; and
    - b) availability of the Client Assistance Program;
  5. For individuals who receive SSI or SSDI benefits and wish to enter the workforce, a description of —
    - a) general information on additional supports (SSI and SSDI work incentives) for beneficiaries; and
    - b) the availability of benefits counseling services.
- B. The IPE shall be developed and implemented in a manner that affords eligible persons the opportunity to exercise informed choice in selecting an employment outcome, the specific vocational rehabilitation services to be provided, the entity that will provide them, and the methods used to procure them.
- C. **The IPE must be developed as soon as possible, but no later than 90 days after the date of the determination of eligibility.** The only exception to the 90-day requirement is if the counselor and the consumer agree to an extension of that deadline to a specific date by which the IPE must be completed. The counselor **must** document the reason for the extension, the specific date the IPE will be completed and the consumer’s agreement.

### Section III. Content

Every IPE shall contain, at a minimum, the following components:

- A. A description of the specific employment outcome chosen by the person; consistent with the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of the eligible person, and, to the maximum extent appropriate, results in employment in an integrated setting;

#### **Guidance — Setting appropriate employment goals; right to refuse goal.**

*When a consumer presents with prior behavior, or a condition that is not congruent with the employment goal, we have the right to refuse to sign the IPE. We should work with the consumer to develop an employment goal that is appropriate and acceptable to both parties and is suitable based upon or supported by medical and/or other professional evidence.*

Examples of employment goals that the DBVI counselor may refuse to sign off on are as follows:

- A consumer with a severe anxiety disorder who wants to work in a high stress sales environment.
- A consumer with a history of prescription medication substance abuse who wants to work in a pharmacy.
- A consumer with a history of child molestation who wants to work in a day care center.

An employment goal can be very broad or very specific depending on the needs and interests of the consumer. Early in the rehab process, a consumer may not know a specific job title, but might know the general area of work they are interested in pursuing. As the consumer engages in continuous assessment and a more specific goal is identified the IPE may be amended.

If the employment goal changes entirely, then the IPE must be amended to reflect the change and a rationale provided in a case note.

Sometimes consumers are requesting assistance with obtaining immediate employment that may or may not be a step beyond where they are at the point of application. Other times consumers are pursuing initial and intermediate goals as they work their way to their most hoped for employment goal. This can create a dilemma in how to move forward with selecting an appropriate employment goal. The examples below illustrate how to discern which goal is appropriate for the plan based on the consumer's stated goals, current skill level, and employment experience in the field of interest.

- A person with no work history or experience in the vocation they are pursuing (this includes those who are changing vocational fields completely due to the onset of a disabling condition).
  - ⊕ **Example:** A consumer wants to become a Registered Nurse but has never worked in the medical or health field. Her prior work history consists of cashiering at the local convenience store. She would like to start with her LNA and work at a local hospital as a way to move her toward her goal to be a Registered Nurse.
  - ⊕ **Conclusion:** In this case, setting the initial employment goal of LNA makes sense as it is a step beyond where she is at application. If she is successful as an LNA and would like to continue to work with DBVI after a successful closure related to this employment goal, she could open a new case with the next goal of LPN or RN.
- A person has limited work experience in a particular field and would like to move up to a higher paying or more advanced position. To do so they will need to increase their skills to achieve the goal.
  - ⊕ **Example:** A person has an interest in being an Office Manager for a small office and comes to the counselor unemployed. He/She has had several years of experience as an Administrative Assistant

*working under Office Managers but needs additional education and opportunities to be competitive for that vocational goal.*

- ⊕ **Conclusion:** *It is appropriate to set the employment goal as Office Manager rather than Administrative Assistant as they could likely obtain that level of employment on their own and are looking to DBVI for assistance with the next step.*
- *A person applies for DBVI services, needs a job quickly and also has a vocational goal that will require investment of time and resources to achieve.*
  - ⊕ **Example:** *An unemployed person has a history of working at convenience/retail stores and is interested in becoming a radiologist.*
  - ⊕ **Conclusion:** *Setting the initial employment goal of cashier/retail would be inappropriate as it does not help them achieve employment that advances their goal. While a counselor may assist with providing leads and counseling and guidance to support an immediate job in the retail field, it would not be the person's IPE goal or result in a successful closure. The counselor may work with the person to set an initial goal of Radiology Technician or even a more entry level job in the health sector. Achieving that goal could be considered a success and the case closed in adherence with policy. A new case could be opened if that person then wants to pursue the next level of employment leading to their ultimate goal of Radiologist.*

### **End Guidance.**

- B. A description of the specific vocational rehabilitation services that are needed to achieve the employment outcome, including, as appropriate, the provision of assistive technology devices and assistive technology services, and personal assistance services, including training in the management of such services. For students and youth with disabilities, a description of the specific transition services and supports needed to achieve an employment outcome (see Chapter 14, "Transition Services");
- C. Services that are provided in the most integrated setting appropriate for the service involved, and that are consistent with the informed choice of the eligible individual;
- D. Timelines for the achievement of the employment outcome and for the initiation of the services;

### **Guidance — Setting the timeline for goal achievement.**

*The date of achievement of the employment outcome should be at least 6 months after the IPE is created and signed for individuals. There is flexibility in deciding how long it will take to reach the employment outcome and projecting a date does not create a requirement or hard deadline. However, it is important to note the AWARE case management system will require a full*

*amendment to change the IPE goal achievement date. Therefore, it is recommended that counselors not underestimate the amount of time the consumer might need to achieve the employment goal.*

**End Guidance.**

- E. A description of the entity chosen by the person that will provide the services, and the methods used to obtain such services; the services should always directly relate to the achievement of the specific employment goal;

**Guidance – Completing specific items in the plan.**

**Service Date:**

*The date that the IPE has been signed is the date to use for beginning of services moving forward even though services listed here may have started previously or may also be ongoing.*

*There may be times where it might be best practice to have a later start date for a service, especially if a service is contingent on another activity being completed.*

**Provider:**

*The person or organization that will be providing the actual service must be listed.*

**Cost/Source:**

*Distinguish where funding is coming from: DBVI, VSAC, etc.*

*Job development, placement, and referral services will often be provided through contractual agreements. These services must be identified on the IPE and be labeled as “contract funded”.*

**End Guidance**

- F. A description of the criteria to evaluate progress toward achievement of the employment outcome;
- G. The terms and conditions of the IPE, including, as appropriate, information describing –
1. The responsibilities of the Division;
  2. The responsibilities of the person, including those
    - a) In relation to his/her employment outcome;
    - b) In relation to, if applicable, his/her participation in paying for the costs of the plan; and
    - c) With regard to applying for and securing comparable benefits and services.
  3. The responsibilities of other entities in accordance with the Division’s policies (see Chapter 19, “Comparable Services and Benefits”).

- H. For an eligible consumer for whom an employment outcome in a supported employment setting has been determined to be appropriate, information identifying –
  - 1. The extended services needed by the person; and
  - 2. The source of extended services or, to the extent that the source cannot be identified at the time of development of the IPE, a description of the basis for concluding that there is a reasonable expectation that such source will become available (see Chapter 15, Supported Employment);
- I. A statement of the projected need for post-employment services; and
- J. Signatures of both the person seeking services (or his/her representative) and his/her vocational rehabilitation counselor.

#### **Section IV. Post-Employment Services**

The IPE for each person must contain statements concerning:

- A. An assessment of the need for post-employment services prior to the determination that the person has achieved an employment outcome; and
- B. If post-employment services are needed, the IPE must contain a description of them and the other criteria listed in Section III.

#### **Section V. Coordination of Services for Students with Disabilities Who Are Receiving Special Education Services**

The IPE for a student with a disability who is receiving special education services must be coordinated with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 services, as applicable, for that person in terms of the goals, objectives, and services identified in the education program (see Chapter 14, “Transition Services”, for more information).

#### **Section VI. Copy**

A written copy of the IPE, including any amendments, shall be provided to the person or, as appropriate, to the person’s representative and in the native language or mode of communication of the person or the representative.

#### **Section VII. Review and Amendment**

- A. The IPE shall be reviewed at least annually by the vocational rehabilitation counselor and the person or, as appropriate, the person’s representative. The case record must show that the annual review of the IPE was conducted with the person’s or his/her representative’s participation. The case record must report on the progress made, and must include, on IPE form(s), amendments made, if any.

**Guidance – Best practices for IPE review and amendment.**

- *This is an opportunity for the consumer and counselor to review what is and/or isn't working, what progress has been made toward their goals and if any services need to be added or changed. Ideally this would be a face to face meeting, but it could take place over the phone.*
- *Counselors may informally review the IPE more often with consumers. The IPE document may be beneficial to reference more frequently during meetings with consumers as a tool to check in around. Counselors may find this helpful in creating talking points around progress and accomplishments.*
- *If it is expected that it will take longer for the consumer to achieve an employment outcome, then it is recommended that the counselor and consumer amend the IPE during the review to reflect the new projected completion date.*

**End Guidance.**

B. The IPE must be amended if there are substantive changes:

1. In the planned employment outcome;
2. In the vocational rehabilitation services to be provided; or
3. In who will provide the planned services.

A full amendment requires both a counselor and a consumer signature. The counselor must print out or write up the new IPE amendment including all the changes. The IPE amendment does not go into effect until both the counselor and consumer have signed the amended plan.

**Guidance – Examples of changes that require a full IPE amendment.**

*It is not always apparent what would be considered a change requiring a full amendment in an IPE. The following are examples to help guide counselors as to when a full amendment is needed.*

**Examples of changes requiring a full amendment**

- *When the employment outcome goal changes to the extent that a new two-digit SOC code is required. In the AWARE case management system counselors will not be able to close a case as employed if the two-digit SOC code for the job at closure does not match the two-digit code on the IPE.*
- *When a new service does not match the original IPE employment outcome goal. For example, the original employment goal is to become a CDL Driver and the new service is culinary arts training. The new service is not consistent with the employment outcome goal, and therefore a full amendment is required.*

- *When the projected completion date for the employment outcome goal in the IPE needs to be extended.*

**Examples of changes not requiring a full amendment**

- *When the cost of a planned service is increased.*
- *When a new service is added that is consistent with the original employment outcome goal or completion date.*
- *When comparable services or benefits are being added to the plan that are not funded by DVR. For example, if a consumer becomes eligible for another program that will support his/her employment plan such as Community Rehabilitation and Treatment.*
- *When a change in service provider is inconsequential. For example, if the vendor for work clothing changes from J.C. Penney to Walmart.*

**End Guidance.**