

# IOWA DEPARTMENT FOR THE BLIND

## CLIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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### **What is Vocational Rehabilitation?**

As an individual who is blind or is experiencing significant vision loss, you may have experienced difficulties finding or keeping a job. Vocational rehabilitation is a partnership between you, your counselor, your vocational rehabilitation teachers, and your rehabilitation technology specialists designed to help you to overcome these difficulties.

### **What does my counselor do?**

When you apply for vocational rehabilitation services, your counselor will determine if you are eligible for the program. If you are eligible, your counselor will work with you to determine which career path you would like to follow and what you will need to do to be successful in that career.

### **What are the steps of Vocational Rehabilitation?**

The Vocational Rehabilitation process includes applying for services, being determined eligible for services, planning and preparing for the job you want, completing any training you need, and starting on your career path.

### **How do I apply for Vocational Rehabilitation Services?**

To begin the vocational rehabilitation process, you must complete and sign an application for services. The application asks for basic contact information. It also helps your counselor to gather information that he or she can use to determine your eligibility for services and to begin developing a plan for employment. The application asks only for information that is needed for the vocational rehabilitation process, such as information about your eye condition, your work history, and your work interests. It may be necessary to obtain medical information. Your help is needed in gathering this information. Without it, your counselor will not be able to determine eligibility and provide services.

The Department obtains personal information under the authority of Public Law 93–112, as amended. All information obtained is treated as confidential. You must provide written consent before information can be released. However, if information is important to your vocational rehabilitation, your information can be released to rehabilitation facilities, training institutions, physicians, and/or other persons and agencies without your written consent.

### **When am I eligible for vocational rehabilitation services?**

You are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services from the Iowa Department for the Blind if you:

- are blind or have a significant visual impairment
- want to work
- have major impediments in preparing for, obtaining or maintaining a job
- need vocational rehabilitation services in order to overcome these impediments

- are present in Iowa

Eligibility decisions are made as soon as possible. Sometimes, a delay in obtaining the necessary information occurs. If you and your counselor anticipate that it may take longer than 60 days to determine eligibility, your counselor will discuss this with you, and together you can determine a target date.

## **How do I plan for the job I want?**

Once you have been determined eligible for services, you will need to develop a comprehensive plan of action that will lead to the job of your choice. This plan is known as an Individual Plan for Employment(IPE). The IPE includes your employment goal, the date by which you expect to achieve your goal, the services you need to achieve your goal, and how these services will be provided. Your IPE will also include "Criteria for Review". The Criteria for Review specifies the ways you will make progress toward achieving your employment goal. Specifically listing the ways you will achieve your goal is important so that you and your counselor can measure and discuss how you are moving forward toward your goal. Both you and your counselor will need to agree to and sign your plan.

## **What choices do I have?**

Along the way, you will have many choices to make. Your counselor can help you obtain the information you need to make informed choices about:

- your interests, skills, and abilities
- your career goal
- the services you need to reach your goal and who can provide those services
- arrangements that are needed to receive the services

Your counselor will have helpful information about employment opportunities. If you are already employed, your counselor can assist with job accommodations so you can keep your job.

## **What vocational rehabilitation services are available to me?**

IDB is able to provide or assist you in obtaining a wide variety of services that can help you to prepare for employment, find employment, and be successful in employment. These services include, but are not necessarily limited to:

### **Disability Related Skills Training**

This includes training in how to use a white cane to safely and independently travel in any environment. It includes training in reading and writing braille, techniques for cooking, cleaning, and managing one's home, and training in using computers, tablets, phones, or other technology using screen readers, braille displays, and/or magnification. Clients who are interested in learning alternative techniques more quickly, building self-confidence, and working through their fears and frustrations in a positive, supportive environment choose to attend our training center in Des Moines. Skills training may also be provided in your community on an itinerant basis by vocational rehabilitation teachers and rehabilitation technology specialists.

### **Rehabilitation Technology**

This includes low-tech and high tech devices that can allow you to perform job and life tasks. This includes screen reading or magnification software, refreshable braille displays, a long white cane, devices for writing braille, and other devices necessary to complete work and life tasks. This also may include training on how to use these devices.

## **Educational Support**

IDB may assist clients in obtaining vocational, on the job, or apprenticeship training. IDB may also support clients in attending community, four-year, or graduate school if it is required to achieve your vocational goal. Please see our [Terms and Conditions for IDB Sponsorship of Post-Secondary Education & Training](#)

## **Counseling and Guidance**

When people lose significant amounts of vision or grow up with little or no vision, it is very common to feel alone, sad, angry, or afraid of what the future may hold. Society in general tends to see blind people as limited in opportunity and potential. Blind people are rarely represented in movies and TV, but when we are, we are most often shown as helpless, bumbling, or vulnerable. When you are very used to doing things visually, it is hard to imagine how you might do those same things without eyesight. However, once people learn how to do things without relying on eyesight, build their self-confidence, and come to understand that they can be independent and live a full and happy life, these feelings greatly diminish or disappear entirely. This isn't easy and it takes time. Your rehab counselor is there to talk with you about your fears, frustrations, and sadness's. Your counselor can help you to find positive solutions to challenges.

It is also commonly believed that blind people or people with very limited vision can only perform certain types of jobs. Actually there are blind doctors, lawyers, carpenters, teachers, scientists, business owners, and many, many other professions. Blindness shouldn't be a factor in choosing what career to pursue. Your counselor can help you figure out how you can use alternative techniques to complete job tasks and find blind people already working in the career you choose with whom you can talk about the techniques they use to do their jobs.

## **Career Exploration and Job Readiness Services**

Your counselor can help you to explore different career options. She or he may assist you with:

- skill and interest inventories
- labor market information
- informational interviews
- job shadows
- other resources designed to help you find the right career for you

In addition, you may choose to participate in training in time management, interpersonal communication, dressing for success, or other soft skills necessary for finding and keeping employment. We want to make sure that you have all the tools you need to be successful in your job search and able to thrive in your career.

## **Job Placement Services**

Your counselor can work with you or help you to work with local workforce center professionals to write resumes and cover letters, search for job openings, and prepare for interviews. Your counselor can help you to become comfortable sharing with employers how you will perform job duties and what accommodations you might require.

## **Benefits Counseling**

Your counselor can provide or arrange for assistance in understanding how working will impact any social security disability insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) you may be receiving. They can help you to understand ticket to work, PASS plans, trial work periods and other aspects of these programs that many people find confusing.

## **Support Services**

IDB may provide support services that can help you to access the career and training services you need. This might include things like readers, interpreters, or transportation. These services can only be provided when they are necessary to achieve your goal and cannot be provided through a comparable benefit.

## **How do I develop an IPE?**

Your counselor can help you design and write your IPE. Your counselor is a good source of information and is available to work with you. If you prefer, you can write it yourself or have someone else help you prepare it. Your counselor will provide you with the forms you need for this purpose. Your counselor must review the plan to make sure that your goal will lead to a job, that the services you request are necessary to reach your goal, and that your IPE is complete.

## **What if my plan needs to be changed?**

You will talk with your counselor about your plan as often as necessary, but at least once a year. You can change your plan if the services and/or the goal you selected are not right for you. Your plan may also need to be changed if funding or programs become limited. You and your counselor will sign an amended (changed) plan to show that you are in agreement.

## **Will I have to pay for services?**

You will never have to pay for any of the following services:

- evaluation to determine eligibility and your priority for services
- evaluation to help decide the services you need
- rehabilitation counseling, advice, and referral services
- rehabilitation teaching services
- services to help you find a job.

Together, you and your counselor can determine how the cost of other services will be covered. You are expected to apply for and use money from other programs, agencies, and organizations which can help with these costs. This is known as “comparable benefits” and we are required by federal regulations to ensure that clients utilize comparable benefits when feasible. Your counselor can give you information on a variety of resources and help you with this process. The Department will cover the cost of planned services when other resources are not available.

## **What are my counselor’s responsibilities?**

Your counselor wants you to succeed and will work with you to achieve your goal as agreed in your plan. In addition, your counselor will:

- consult with you on a regular basis;
- help you get the information you need to make informed choices
- tell you if a different counselor is assigned to you
- help you plan how costs of services will be covered
- arrange to pay for the costs of services that will be covered by the Department
- help you receive the services you need in a timely manner
- review and talk with you about how you are progressing toward your employment goal
- assist you in your job search

- discuss case closure with you and inform you in writing when your case is closed

## **What are my responsibilities?**

In addition to meeting the specific goals and obligations outlined in your individual plan for employment (IPE), you will need to:

- help your counselor to obtain information needed to determine if you are eligible for services
- inform your counselor of any change in your address, phone number, e-mail address, or methods for contacting you
- keep appointments or notify your counselor, teacher, or rehabilitation technology specialist when you must cancel an appointment due to unforeseen circumstances
- commit to putting forth the time and energy needed to practice any skills you are learning between meetings with instructors and completing agreed upon homework
- help your counselor to obtain reports, grades, or other necessary information
- tell your counselor about any changes in your income or needs
- apply for and use money from any source that will help cover the costs of services listed in your plan
- tell your counselor about major changes in your health or general situation that could affect your ability to obtain employment as outlined on your plan
- when you are participating in an educational or job training program, attend classes regularly and maintain the required grade point average
- actively participate in an annual review of your IPE
- actively seek employment which aligns with your IPE goal
- inform your counselor when you have obtained employment

## **What if I don't meet my responsibilities?**

Vocational rehabilitation services exist to help you get or keep a job and are most successful when you and your counselor maintain a partnership. If you don't participate actively to achieve the goals as stated in your plan and if you fail to meet your responsibilities, then it is likely that you will not succeed in getting, not to mention keeping, a job. If you are not serious about getting a job, vocational rehabilitation services are not for you, and you may not be eligible for further services. Your counselor, teachers, and rehabilitation technology specialists will work with you and provide support, but success is ultimately up to you!

## **What if my counselor and I disagree?**

If you and your counselor disagree about the provision of services, your plan, or other issues, you have a number of options to address the disagreement. The following steps are recommended to resolve issues as soon as possible:

### **Step 1: Talk to your counselor to see whether you can resolve the disagreement.**

Many times, disagreements can be solved by calling your counselor and having a conversation about the issue. If you proceed to Step 2, the supervisor will ask you if you have discussed the issue with your counselor. Unless your concern involves inappropriate or unethical behavior by the counselor or other IDB staff, if you have not talked to your counselor about the issue, you will be asked to do so.

### **Step 2: Talk to the person who supervises your counselor.**

This is Keri Osterhaus and she can be reached at 515-281-1281; or [keri.osterhaus@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:keri.osterhaus@blind.state.ia.us)

Please allow two business days for a response. If you do not receive a response or out-of-office message within two business days, please proceed to Step 3.

### **Step 3: Contact the Agency Director.**

This is Emily Wharton and she can be reached at 515–281–1334 or [emily.wharton@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:emily.wharton@blind.state.ia.us). If you do not agree with the response from the program supervisor, you may wish to contact the agency director. Please allow two business days for a response. If you do not receive a response or out-of-office message within two business days, please proceed to Step 4.

### **Step 4: Seek assistance through the Client Assistance Program (CAP).**

You can reach CAP at

Client Assistance Program,  
Office of Persons with Disabilities,  
Lucas State Office Building,  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319;  
voice and TTY 1–800–652–4298.

While you have the right to seek assistance from the CAP at any time, going directly to the counselor if at all possible and then escalating the issue to the supervisor if unsatisfied does tend to solve problems more quickly. To learn more about the Client Assistance Project, visit their website at <https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cas/pd/client-assistance-program>

You may also use the following methods for resolving a dispute:

- ask for mediation. In mediation, an impartial third person works with you and your counselor to resolve the issue
- ask for a formal hearing before an impartial hearing officer You have 120 days after your counselor or other Department staff inform you about a decision to ask for a formal hearing.

For more information about the above options or to request mediation or a formal hearing, contact the Program Administrator, Keri Osterhaus at 515–281–1281; or [keri.osterhaus@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:keri.osterhaus@blind.state.ia.us)

Programs administered by the Iowa Department for the Blind are provided in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Iowa statutes on civil rights and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The Department serves all eligible applicants regardless of race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identification, national origin, disability, or age. For further information, contact the Director of the Iowa Department for the Blind, 524 Fourth Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309–2364; phone: 1–800–362–2587 or 515–281–1333.

We at the Department for the Blind look forward to working with you