# Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual Section A-400

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## Notes on the Manual

On October 1, 2017, Texas Workforce Commission’s Blind Services Division and Rehabilitation Services Division combined to create a single designated state unit (DSU) to administer the vocational rehabilitation program for Texans with disabilities.

The combined Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual (VRSM) was initially published on October 1, 2017. The latest update to this manual is reflected in the chapters below.

Please note that VRSM includes links to information that is intended to provide additional decision-making supports to VR staff. Some of this information may not be available to individuals who are accessing the VRSM outside of TWC's firewall. Copies of materials that cannot be accessed directly through links can be made available upon request.

Substantive revisions to the content are noted in the VRSM List of Revisions. Any printed versions may not contain the latest policy changes.

If you have any questions about VRSM content, please contact the TWC Vocational Rehabilitation Division Policy Team at state office by sending an email message to vrsm.support@twc.texas.gov.

## Manual Overview

The VR Services Manual:

* helps ensure VR customers receive quality services to assist them in achieving successful competitive integrated employment outcomes as a result of their participation in vocational rehabilitation services.;
* helps to ensure taxpayer funds are spent wisely and each purchase paid for with public funds represents full value to the taxpayer; and
* provides published policies and procedures for maintaining compliance with federal and state laws, statutes, and rules or regulations.

The latest update to this manual is reflected in the chapters below. Any printed versions may not contain the latest policy changes.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual A-400: Business Services**

**Introduction**

The employment of individuals with disabilities is directly related to the level of awareness that the business community has of the skills and abilities that individuals with disabilities possess, their ability to function in a specific job, and the possible accommodations that may be needed so they can perform essential job functions.

TWC continues to work toward full implementation of the integrated system envisioned by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Senate Bill 208, 84th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2015) by seeking opportunities to develop strategies to partner with Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and their contractors to serve employers.

**A-401: Business Relations Team**

The VR Business Relations Team is responsible for the delivery of all VR business services, including outreach, consultation, technical assistance, and training to support job placement and job retention for individuals with disabilities. Members of the VR Business Relations Team include state office program specialists, regional business relations coordinators, employment assistance specialists, and outreach service and coordination (OSC) teams.

For more information on the Business Relations Team and other employment related resources visit the Business Relations intranet page.

### A-401-1: Legal Authorization

The designated state unit may expend payments received under this part to educate and provide services to employers that have hired or are interested in hiring individuals with disabilities under the VR program, including:

(a) Providing training and technical assistance to employers regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities, including disability awareness, and the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC §12101 et seq.) and other employment-related laws;

(b) Working with employers to—

(1) Provide opportunities for work-based learning experiences (including internships, short-term employment, apprenticeships, and fellowships);

(2) Provide opportunities for pre-employment transition services, in accordance with the requirements under §361.48(a);

(3) Recruit qualified applicants who are individuals with disabilities;

(4) Train employees who are individuals with disabilities; and

(5) Promote awareness of disability-related obstacles to continued employment.

(c) Providing consultation, technical assistance, and support to employers on workplace accommodations, assistive technology, and facilities and workplace access through collaboration with community partners and employers, across states and nationally, to enable the employers to recruit, job match, hire, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities who are recipients of vocational rehabilitation services under this part, or who are applicants for such services; and

(d) Assisting employers with utilizing available financial support for hiring or accommodating individuals with disabilities.

CFR 34 §361.32, Provision of Training and Services for Employers

**A-401-2: Vocational Rehabilitation State Office Program Specialists**

TWC-VR state office program specialists coordinate VR Business Relations team activities and serve unique roles in the division.

**Program Specialist for Business Relations**

The program specialist for business relations:

* serves as the point of contact for TWC-VR leadership, VR Business Relations team members, the WeHireAbility mailbox, and employers seeking information about VR services through the VR Business Relations mailbox;
* provides information, training, and technical assistance to support full implementation of functions as outlined throughout this chapter;
* plans and facilitates VR Business Relations team meetings and training sessions;
* researches and identifies opportunities to improve services to businesses;
* conducts statewide outreach, consultation, technical assistance, and training to businesses to support competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities; and
* represents VR on the National Employment Team of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation.

**Program Specialist for Employment Assistance and Assistive Technology Support**

The program specialist for employment assistance and assistive technology support provides advanced technical support services necessary for TWC-VR customers who are blind or visually impaired to obtain and maintain competitive integrated employment. These support services may be provided directly to TWC-VR customers and/or in cooperation with a business’s human resources (HR) and information technology (IT) staff.

The program specialist for employment assistance and assistive technology support:

* evaluates the compatibility and effectiveness of assistive technologies in employment environments;
* performs hardware and software installations;
* performs advanced hardware/software troubleshooting and resolves system performance issues;
* makes recommendations to resolve hardware/software problems; and
* provides presentations and demonstrations regarding assistive technology and its impact on employment outcomes.

**A-401-3: Business Relations Coordinators**

VR business relations coordinators (BRCs) work through VR regional management to connect with local business communities to better understand their hiring needs and share general information about VR services and customers.

BRCs work in collaboration with Workforce Solutions Business Services Units. Their combined knowledge of labor market trends and a workforce area's talent pool enhance the services provided to customers and the business community.

BRCs are responsible for:

* recruiting and screening qualified applicants with disabilities for employment opportunities;
* conducting worksite assessments or job analysis worksheets for job candidates;
* assisting with job retention services to help employers retain an employee with a disability;
* providing information and referral about tax incentives;
* conducting disability awareness and sensitivity presentations;
* referring businesses to other Workforce Solutions services;
* consulting with employers about customized training programs, such as on-the-job training (OJT) opportunities;
* partnering to develop work-based learning trainings for VR customers;
* coordinating, facilitating, and participating in career, job fairs and other networking events;
* referring VR customers and employers to appropriate partners regarding workplace compliance issues;
* providing training and support to VR field staff around business engagement; and
* consulting with businesses on diversity strategy planning to promote workplace inclusion.

**A-401-4: Employment Assistance Specialist**

The Employment Assistance Specialist (EAS) provides consultation and assessment services for VR customers who are blind and visually impaired related to employability, assistive technology needs, and potential accommodations. The EAS provides direct consultation to the VR customer, the business, and the VR caseload carrying staff.

EAS services may include:

* consultation with a VR customer related to accommodations and assistive technology needs for academic and employment success;
* completion of the customer’s Initial Consultation Report required for participation in an assistive technology evaluation;
* assisting VR caseload carrying staff with review and understanding of an assistive technology evaluation report and recommendations regarding necessary assistive technology for the customer; and
* partnering with the Assistive Technology Support Specialists and staff in the Assistive Technology Unit to maintain current knowledge of trends in technology and assistive technologies.

Each activity provided to a business by the above mentioned staff must be recorded in [WorkInTexas](https://www.workintexas.com/vosnet/default.aspx) to allow for joint reporting of services to employers, per [WIOA](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/performance-indicators) requirements.

**A-401-5: Regional Outreach Services and Coordination Teams**

The regional OSC teams are the primary points of contact in developing business partnerships at the local and regional levels. OSC teams are established at regional levels by the BRCs and regional leadership. These teams include managers, employment assistance specialists, counselors, teachers, support staff, and other VR staff members who work directly with businesses in their communities to enhance employment opportunities for customers. OSC teams identify, implement, and monitor the progress of business outreach activities across VR regions, and disseminate this information to the BRCs to develop a comprehensive statewide network for business relations.

Regional OSC teams also work in partnership with businesses to:

* establish local resources to assist in developing a referral base and providing support services to sustain customers after they are employed;
* work with management to conduct outreach events;
* promote and coordinate VR Business Services deliverables to businesses;
* identify businesses to target jobs in the workforce area served; and
* provide business name, contact information, and service provided to BRC for reporting into WorkInTexas.

**A-401-6: Regional and Field Vocational Rehabilitation Staff**

All VR staff members have a role in cultivating relationships with businesses.

Regional management and program specialists:

* coordinate with VR Managers to identify members of the regional outreach service and coordination (OSC) teams;
* provide additional resources and support when requested by OSC teams for business development;
* help to replicate successful business relationships to encourage stronger business development among OSC teams; and
* support the overall importance of engaged and active OSC teams.

VR Managers:

* develop and monitor staff member responsibilities for outreach and services to businesses;
* ensure that staff provides the business name, contact information, and service to BRC for reporting into WorkInTexas; and
* report to regional management about collaborative efforts within VR and with other community partners for business development and field initiatives.

Field staff:

* works with OSC teams to contact and cultivate relationships with federal contractors, businesses, and community partnerships that support customer employment outcomes;
* works with OSC teams on outreach events, business development activities, and Business Services deliverables to business customers;
* requests OSC teams' assistance, when necessary, to enhance business or community relationships; and
* provides accurate and timely information to OSC teams about qualified candidates looking for employment.

**A-402: Training and Tools for Working with Businesses**

**A-402-1: Training**

Training opportunities are available through the TWC Training and Development Dual Customer Training for VR staff to increase their knowledge, awareness, and understanding of serving the business community as another VR customer. The training helps staff learn how to develop effective business relations, conduct outreach and marketing activities, and recommend appropriate accommodations for customers. VR staff may also work alongside their Regional BRC to build their awareness and confidence in this area.

**A-402-2: Labor Market and Business Needs**

For VR customers to gain competitive, integrated employment, VR counselors must understand the labor market and the needs and expectations of business. This understanding is critical to the vocational planning process; it helps VR and its customers build solid plans to achieve high-quality employment outcomes.

Before contacting a business, staff must:

* match businesses to the needs and interests of job seekers;
* know basic information about the business, including:
	+ the business's location and whether transportation is available;
	+ the type of business and the products it makes and/or sells;
	+ the business's prospects and stability; and
	+ whether the business is hiring.

When working with a business, staff must remember that:

* the business is a VR customer;
* VR has a responsibility to understand the business's needs;
* VR must adjust its services when possible to meet the business needs;
* businesses are not:
	+ rehabilitation facilities (avoid the use of rehabilitation language, use business terminology);
	+ a funding source for special initiatives; or
	+ obligated to hire from any one system or organization; and
* businesses need qualified candidates—they do not hire based on disability or out of charity.

To better understand the local labor market, available employment outcomes, and the population of potential VR customers, staff will conduct labor market analyses using community resources and [Labor Market and Career Information department tools](http://intra.twc.state.tx.us/intranet/lmci/html/index.html).

The analysis includes:

* labor market analysis of job trends and other factors to promote strategic employment outcomes and business development; and
* caseload statistical analysis of specific caseloads or offices to identify job-ready customers, vocational goals, and historical placement trends.

For VR caseload carrying staff, please visit the Business Services intranet page to take the mandatory Labor Market Intelligence (LMI) training.

**A-403: Employment Resources**

VR provides key services to businesses and uses other partners to streamline and enhance those services.

**A-403-1: Local Workforce Development Boards and Workforce Solutions Offices**

The 28 Workforce [Boards](https://twc.texas.gov/partners/workforce-development-boards) across the state and over 170 Workforce Solutions Offices in Texas offer a single point of contact for both the business community and those seeking employment. Services provided by Boards and Workforce Solutions Offices include:

* employer services;
* WIOA youth and adult services;
* veteran services;
* job seeker resources and training; and
* labor market information.

VR and Workforce Solutions Office staff are strongly encouraged to partner to expand training and opportunities for job seekers and employers. By leveraging services and programs together, the customer, the VR program, and the workforce system wins.

**A-403-2: Referrals to Workforce Solutions Offices**

A service record must be created for all referrals to Workforce Solutions Offices. When creating a service record in ReHabWorks, staff must use "Arranged" as the payment method.

Staff then selects the following specifications to create a service record for referrals:

* Level 1—Support Services for VR customers
* Level 2—Arranged Services at Workforce Solutions Offices
* Level 3—Referrals to and services from Workforce Solutions Offices
* Level 4—Appropriate service from drop-down list

**A-403-3: The National Employment Team**

In addition to the VR Business Relations team, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) works with businesses and state VR agencies to develop a national VR business network, the NET (National Employment Team). The purpose allows for a coordinated approach to serving business customers through a national VR network that specializes in employer development, business consulting, and corporate relations. The TWC-VR program specialist is the point of contact for CSAVR's NET. They pass along job leads and information to the business relations team.

For additional information, see the [CSAVR Business Relations](https://www.csavr.org/the-net) page.

**A-403-4: Job Readiness**

Throughout the vocational rehabilitation (VR) process, VR services are uniquely designed to help the customer become "job ready."

VR customers are job ready when they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities needed, with or without supports, to begin seeking employment that is consistent with the employment goal on the customer's individualized plan for employment (IPE) or IPE amendment.

**Job Ready Procedures**

The Job Ready Worksheet is available for VR counselors as a guide in determining whether the customer is job ready. The Job Ready Worksheet is not a required form; however, if this worksheet is used in the decision-making process, a copy is filed in the customer's case file. The Job Ready Worksheet is located on the VR Business Relations intranet page.

When the VR counselor determines that the customer is job ready, the VR counselor:

1. updates the job ready status in ReHabWorks (RHW) (The Job Ready button is in the Personal Information section of the RHW case and is available only after the customer has a signed IPE in RHW.);
2. documents the job ready decision in a case note in RHW; and
3. identifies next steps for pursuing employment.

When the VR counselor determines that the customer is no longer ready for employment, the VR counselor repeats the previous steps and selects NO for Job Ready.

For more information on documenting Job Ready in RHW, refer to VRSM E-300: Case Note Requirements.

When a case is identified as job ready, VR staff may pull a query that includes all job ready customers by region, management unit, or caseload. The results of this query may be used to assist VR staff with direct placement activities, service record to the BRT, and/or job leads shared through the Outreach Service Coordination Team.

**A-404: Business Relations Coordinator Services to Customer**

The BRC provides valuable assistance to the field related to the job search process for customers. Not all customers need BRC assistance. Some customers connect to employment opportunities in their chosen vocation on their own and others are working with Employment Service Providers (ESPs). Counselors should staff cases with the Regional BRC before a service record is created to ensure the BRC’s assistance is best suited for that customer’s needs.

Examples of services to customers include:

* resume development;
* preparing applicants for interviews;
* job club;
* screening applicants for job postings;
* referral for employment opportunities;
* assistance with job fair preparation;
* assistance with work-based learning opportunities; and
* assistance with customized trainings and OJT development

Once the counselor and BRC have staffed the case, a service record must be created by the VR staff or BRC. If the IPE is being amended, the service can be added to the amendment. If not, a service justification case note is entered in RHW by the VRC.

**A-404-1: Creating a Service Record**

Service Records (SRs) in a case are an essential part of the customer’s service delivery process for purchasing, providing, and arranging goods and services. Each case should document the full array of services which may then be captured at case closure.

Staff use the following specifications for BRC assistance:

* Level 1—In House Services
* Level 2—Business Relations Services
* Level 3—Business Relations Coordinator Services
* Level 4—Job Consultation and Referral to Employers or Other Services

The VR counselor stays engaged with the customer and BRC during the employment preparation and search.

**A-404-2: Confidentiality and Job Search**

TWC-VR strictly prohibits sharing a customer's personal identifiable information (PII) without a valid release. When sharing information such as a customer's name, résumé, or any other PII with a potential employer, a signed VR1517-2, Authorization for Release of Confidential Customer Records and Information, must be in the customer's case file. VR staff can view a sample VR1517-2 on the VR Business Relations intranet page. VR staff can also consult with the regional business relations coordinator or employment assistance specialist.