

REHABILITATION DIVISION: BVR / BSBVI
Participant Services Policy Manual
Subsection 12. 5, Title: Scope of VR Services: Post-Secondary Education and Training at Vocational Training Facilities



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I. Overview

VR may support post-secondary education and vocational training necessary to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE. The goal of VR sponsored training is employment rather than education alone.

The requirements in this section express the general rules that apply unless extenuating circumstances warrant an exception. Participants requesting exceptions must submit a written request that documents the extenuating circumstances and provides a detailed rationale for the exception. The counselor will submit exceptions to the agency representative who will decide on the exception.

The counselor may directly assist (e.g., write the rationale based on information reported by the participant) or provide services to assist a participant (e.g. transcription of a tape-recorded request) who is unable to independently complete a written request for exception due to their disability.

II. Post-Secondary Training

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A. Considerations

Participants are expected to participate in thorough career exploration activities prior to the provision of post-secondary training.

Comprehensive Transition and Post-Secondary (CTP) program: a program that offers a college experience to students with intellectual disabilities at an institution of higher education approved by the U.S. Department of Education. CTP programs are eligible for Financial Aid. Agency support will be determined on a case by case basis.

B. Funding for Post-Secondary Training

1. Overview and Requirements

It is the policy of the Division that:

Comparable Benefits: Utmost effort must be made by the participant to obtain comparable benefits.

Financial Needs: A financial needs test will be imposed. The family income will be counted when the participant is listed on an income tax return regardless of the age of the participant. In addition, parental income will be considered until age 24 unless the person has been determined "independent" under FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) rules after submitting a FAFSA application **or** the individual's Expected Family Contribution (EFC) under FAFSA is zero.

However, per federal regulation, a financial needs test will not be applied when considering the payment of tuition, books and supplies at an in-state public institution if the participant receives SSI for a disability or SSDI. SSI/SSDI recipients must still complete the FAFSA in order to determine the availability of comparable benefits.

Preference for In-State Public Institutions: VR has established a preference for in-state public institutions.

College Selection: Students must complete all available classes at the most cost effective local public college (such as a community college) or pay the cost difference between the most cost effective local public college and the more expensive program.

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VR's Contribution: Equals the post-secondary educational expenses consistent with agency requirements, minus the total of all applicable grant monies, comparable benefits, and the participant's financial participation amount (if any).

Payment Approval: VR written approval is required prior to services being provided and must be included in the IPE or assessment of VR needs. VR will not make payments on a loan the participant or their family has incurred.

Full-Time Attendance: Participants pursuing a degree program utilizing VR funding are expected to attend full-time.

Audited Classes: Nevada VR does not pay for classes that are audited. All classes taken that are VR-sponsored must be required to reach the vocational goal.

Change in Majors and Credit Limitations: Regardless of changes in the employment goal or major, the maximum number of credit hours a person may take and still receive VR funding is limited to 125% of the published rate required for a degree.

Changes in major emphasis, field of study or institution must be justified and supported by documentation such as transcript analysis, proposed degree plan, and labor market information; and requires VR approval. This is a collaborative process that includes the participant, school, and VR counselor.

Graduate Level Training: VR may support graduate level training in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, including computer science) and other fields under certain situations as stipulated below under "Advanced Degrees in Other Fields", if an individual demonstrates:

- Eligibility for VR Services.
- Previous completion of a bachelor's degree program at an institution of higher education or scheduled completion of such a degree program prior to matriculating in the program for which the individual proposes to use VR support.
- Completion of a minimum 120 hours related work experience prior to starting the advanced degree.
- Acceptance by a program at an institution of higher education in the United States, consistent with the State's policy and preference for In-State Public Institutions, that confers a master's degree; and
- Maximum effort has been expended to obtain comparable benefits.

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Graduate Level Training in Other Fields: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act places an emphasis on advanced training in STEM fields. However, the agency may assist with advanced degrees in other fields if the advanced training is a minimum qualification for the employment outcome or the employer requires it in order to advance in employment.

2. Funding: Educational Expenses

VR funded educational expenses must be necessary for the participant to meet the IPE vocational goal.

Tuition: VR's tuition assistance will be limited to classes needed to meet the degree or certificate requirements.

Books: VR may fund required books. Participants will be expected to purchase used books whenever possible, and any refunds will be applied to future books.

Supplies: Participants may require special supplies to participate in a required class. For example, science courses requiring labs and lab materials. VR does not fund general supplies.

Fees: VR may fund mandatory fees required of students to register for training at a post-secondary institution at a public supported in-state institution.

Computers: Purchase of a standard computer for academic purposes is subject to economic need and comparable benefits (e.g., Pell and other financial aid). VR generally will not purchase computers for students who are: attending a trial semester; are only taking a few classes; or who are not enrolled in a degree or certificate program.

Tutoring: If a comparable benefit is not available, VR may fund tutoring that is needed as a support service to regular classroom instruction.

Transportation: VR may provide bus passes or gas cards for participants to attend training when attending a public in-state institution within commuting distance of their home. Commuting distance is defined as 50 miles one way from the participant's home address.

Maintenance: VR does not fund normal living expenses that an individual would otherwise have incurred if not participating in the VR program.

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3. Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State Institutions not within Commuting Distance

Overview and Requirements:

VR may fund training at private or out-of-state institutions or in-state training not within commuting distance of the participant's residence at the same level of funding that VR would provide at the most cost effective in-state publicly supported institution that is within commuting distance of the participant's residence.

As the State has established a preference for public in-state training, any additional expenses associated with private or out-of-area training such as room and board, increased tuition or fees, and travel costs become the responsibility of the participant unless an exception is warranted and approved by the agency.

Transportation and Maintenance for Training Not Within Commuting Distance

Overview:

VR does not fund normal living expenses that an individual would otherwise have incurred if not participating in the VR program. VR does not fund maintenance or travel for out-of-area training unless an exception is warranted and approved by the agency. VR does not fund maintenance or travel for out of area training unless the participant meets either criteria A) or B) above.

Any government assistance an individual receives toward the cost of housing, food or transportation will be considered a comparable benefit.

Transportation:

Long distance travel expenses are limited to one round trip per semester for participants not within commuting distance. VR generally doesn't fund local transportation to and from campus when VR is also funding housing for participants who choose to live off campus.

Maintenance:

Participants receiving VR funding for maintenance or meals will attend the educational institution on a full- time basis.

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SNAP and other similar government assistance as a comparable benefit: SNAP and other similar government assistance are considered a comparable benefit when it comes to paying for living expenses and must be taken into consideration and appropriately utilized before VR pays living expenses.

Housing: VR has established a preference for on-campus housing at the rate of double occupancy.

Meals: Meals should be provided per the most cost effective methods that will meet the participant's needs.

4. Funding: Comparable Benefits

A. Overview:

Federal Regulations [CFR 361.48 \(b\) \(6\) Scope of VR services for individuals with disabilities- Vocational and other training services](#) require maximum effort by the state and the individual to secure grant assistance from other sources before paying for training or training services in an institution of higher education (universities, colleges, community or junior colleges, vocational schools, technical institutes, or hospital schools of nursing).

B. Allowed Exceptions:

Scholarships: Monetary awards or scholarships to participants based on merit are not considered as grants or comparable benefits as long as no restrictions are placed by the organization on the use of the money. Scholarships and grants based on financial need are considered comparable benefits.

Loans: Student loans or any aid that must be monetarily repaid will not be counted as a comparable benefit. While a participant may choose to accept a student loan, the participant should understand the impact of and requirements for repaying the loan and make an educated and informed choice regarding this decision. Visit the Department of Education's free publication for more information: [Your Federal Student Loans: Learn the Basics and Manage Your Debt](#) or visit [U.S. Department Education website](#).

C. Required Exploration:

WIOA Funded Partners: Participants will be expected to explore comparable benefits from funding sources, such as WIOA partners for assistance with training costs.

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Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): All participants attending post-secondary education must apply for financial aid by completing and submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) unless an exception is warranted and approved by the agency. Participants are to provide copies of FAFSA documentation to the agency.

It is the participant's responsibility to meet all deadline requirements when applying for FAFSA. Grants, financial aid provided by government agencies, and other aid will be the primary funder of educational expenses and will be subtracted from any amount that VR would otherwise pay.

Denials of the Pell Grant:

1. **Defaulted Student Loans or Grant Repayment:** No post-secondary training funds will be authorized for a student who owes a refund on a previous grant or is in default on any student loan, unless it has been documented that the student has made maximum effort to work out a satisfactory repayment agreement or other action has been taken to restore the participant's eligibility for Title IV federal assistance.

Visit the Department of Education's Federal Financial Aid website at [Understanding Delinquency and Default](#) to obtain additional information on discharge of debt.

The Department of Education's Federal Financial Aid website at [Debt Resolution \(myeddebt.ed.gov\)](#) explains the U.S. Department of Education's Default Resolution Group's commitment to assisting in making debt repayment a simple process and provides information on restoring eligibility for federal financial aid.

2. **Grant Repayment:** As with defaulted student loans, participants must make maximum effort to restore eligibility for Title IV federal funds before VR funding of educational expenses. Visit the Department of Education's Federal Financial Aid office at: [Grants and Scholarships- Repay Grants](#) to obtain information on grant repayment and restoring eligibility for Title IV services.
3. **Drug Conviction:** No training funds may be authorized for a person who is currently ineligible for federal financial aid due to committing a drug offense.

The Department of Education's student aid provides information on related to drug convictions at [Students With Criminal Convictions](#).

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Participants who are denied federal financial assistance based on this criterion must provide proof from the U.S. Department of Education that they have met its requirements and restored eligibility for Title IV funds before VR funds can be authorized for educational expenses. Participants should call The Federal Student Aid Information Center (1-800-433-3243) to obtain additional details on restoring eligibility for Title IV funds.

4. **Failure to Make Reasonable Progress:** VR funds will not replace grant funds or pay educational expenses that would have otherwise been paid by grant funds if the funds are lost due to a participant's failure to make reasonable progress (as defined by the school). A participant may fund their own educational expenses until they have met the school's requirement for reasonable progress and restored eligibility for Title IV funds.

D. Distance Learning: Post-Secondary

This section applies to programs that are primarily correspondence, technology or web-based distance education programs. It does not apply to an individual correspondence course that is taken as part of a traditional campus based program.

VR may authorize the provision of correspondence or technology assisted training (e.g., web-based, distance learning etc.) if necessary and appropriate to reach the participant's employment goal.

VR's funding of correspondence and distance education courses will not exceed the rate for in-state public institutions if the training is available at an in-state public institution unless an exception is approved.

III. Training at a Vocational Training Center or Facility

A. Overview and Considerations

When vocational training is offered at an in-state public post-secondary institution within commuting distance of the participant, the requirements regarding funding for post-secondary education will apply even when the participant chooses to attend a private vocational school. The participant will be responsible for additional costs associated with attending the vocational school.

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B. Funding Requirements

General requirements regarding post-secondary education also apply to training at vocational training centers or facilities.

C. Distance Learning Through Vocational Schools

This section applies to programs that are primarily technology or web-based distance education programs at facilities that do not accept federal financial aid.

VR may authorize the provision of technology assisted training (e.g. web-based, distance learning etc.) if necessary and appropriate to reach the participant's employment goal.

IV. Continuing Education Units or Credits (CEU's/CEC's)

Courses taken for CEU's, or CEC's should be taken at the local public institution if available, unless an exception is approved.