# Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual C-400: Training Services

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## C-422: Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is an international initiative that supports partnerships among businesses (employers), local school districts, VR agencies, and other entities that serve individuals with developmental disabilities. Project SEARCH promotes successful long-term employment of VR customers in jobs that are stable, meaningful, integrated, and competitively compensated.

The program takes place in business settings where immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as well as the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills. Project SEARCH customers participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths. The customers work with a team that includes family and partnering agencies to create an employment goal and support the customers during this important transition from school to work.

Project SEARCH services are provided through a collaborative process in which the Project SEARCH team—the VR provider, host business, school district, long-term support organization, and VR counselor—work together to help the customer achieve the goals of the internship and placement. The use of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Project SEARCH team members may be used to outline the roles and responsibilities.

#### Legal Authorization

"…to heighten emphasis on the provision of services to students and youth with disabilities to ensure that they have meaningful opportunities to receive the training and other services they need to achieve employment outcomes in competitive integrated employment. WIOA expands not only the population of students with disabilities who may receive services but also the kinds of services that the VR agencies may provide to youth and students with disabilities who are transitioning from school to postsecondary education and employment." —Title I of the Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (29 USC §720 et seq.)

#### Project SEARCH Requirements

To start a Project SEARCH site, a onetime fee is paid to the National Project SEARCH office. Either the school district covers the fee, or local community partners raise the funds. These funds pay for the team's training on the Project SEARCH model.

Project SEARCH service authorizations to the Employment Services Provider (ESP) should be issued using Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) funds for those eligible customers until they have obtained employment. Regular VR funds must be used to purchase Benchmarks A–C.

Planning is important to ensure that the appropriate amount of money is budgeted for each benchmark.

For the fee structure provided to ESPs, refer to [VR-SFP Chapter 16: Project SEARCH Services, 16.5.4 Project SEARCH Services Fees](https://www.twc.texas.gov/standards-manual/vr-sfp-chapter-16#s1654).

#### IPE Requirements

Project SEARCH customers must have an IPE that states their participation in the program and all additional services that the VR counselor approves for participation (for example, transportation assistance and purchase of work uniforms).

### C-422-1: Steps to Establish a Project SEARCH Site

To start a Project SEARCH program, the VR counselor contacts Project SEARCH Statewide Coordinator by sending an email to the VR Pre-ETS mailbox. After contact with the Project SEARCH Statewide Coordinator, VR staff members ensure the following partners agree to start a program:

* Education: the local independent school district (ISD)
* Long-term support: the local intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) authority.

The team, comprising VR, the ISD, and local authorities, and possibly the host business if it has already been identified, can begin without an identified host business or Employment Services Provider (ESP). The team, not VR, selects the ESP based on interviews with all team members. VR schedules interviews for interested ESPs that have a current VR Project SEARCH contract.

The national Project SEARCH office is contacted with a request to start a program by the Project SEARCH Statewide Coordinator . Project SEARCH requires that a local partner hold a licensing agreement with its office, stating that the team will follow its model. The ISD typically holds the license; VR does not hold this license.

Once the national Project SEARCH office approves the license, it schedules training for the team. After the formal training from the national office begins, the office supports the team by setting up monthly meetings for planning and maintaining the program. While the ISD and the ESP are involved in the daily operations of the program, VR staff members assigned to the team must maintain regular, at least monthly, communication through emails or conference calls in addition to the monthly planning meetings.

### C-422-2: Intern Selection Process

The Project SEARCH team interviews applicants through an assessment day. A rubric system is used to determine whom will be offered acceptance into Project SEARCH for the upcoming school year at the host business. When VR has not yet determined a student's eligibility for VR services, the student may be selected for Project SEARCH, pending a VR eligibility decision.

### C-422-3: Asset Discovery

VR customers must have been determined eligible for VR services before they begin Asset Discovery.

The service authorization for the Asset Discovery phase should be issued before the school year ends to allow the ESP time to meet with all the customers. This service must be completed prior to Skills Training beginning.

### C-422-4: Skills Training

Since each Project SEARCH team determines the length of the rotations at the host business (eight–12 weeks), it is important that the team create a calendar showing when rotations begin and end. This ensures that VR staff members know when to issue service authorizations for skills training to the ESP.

Project SEARCH Skills Training is based on experiential learning at a host business with support from the business and Project SEARCH team and is most effective when provided in person. When a host business will not allow interns or staff onsite for safety or other reasons, the Project SEARCH team can develop an alternate training method and the VR counselor authorizes the training method on the referral form. Remote services must follow [VR-SFP 3.6.4.1 Remote Service Delivery](https://www.twc.texas.gov/standards-manual/vr-sfp-chapter-03#s3-6-4).

### C-422-5: Job Placement

[VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan](https://www.twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html), must be developed by the end of the third rotation or at any time during the rotations that the team determines job placement opportunities are available to the customer because of skills gained in the internships. Once the VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan is complete, the VR counselor issues Benchmark A service authorization for job placement services.

More than one service authorization may be open at the same time for internship rotations and job placement. The VR counselor attends the monthly steering committee meetings and the employment planning meetings each rotation to ensure that he or she is in regular communication with the Project SEARCH team and knows when service authorizations are needed.

If the customer needs job coaching to be successful in his or her employment, the ESP must provide the service and may not bill separately.

Customers must work a minimum of 30 cumulative calendar days before achieving Benchmark C when the customer accepts a new position with employer or obtains employment with another employer before achieving Benchmark C.

For additional information on Asset Discovery, Skills Training, and Project SEARCH Job Placement, see [VR-SFP Chapter 16: Project SEARCH](https://www.twc.texas.gov/standards-manual/vr-sfp-chapter-16).

### C-422-6: Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) Related to Project SEARCH

For an MSG to be recognized for customers that participate in Project SEARCH, the customer must:

* Be enrolled in school
* Have an IPE goal that matches the training areas of their rotations
* Have Project SEARCH documented on the IPE as a service
* Receive a [VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report](https://www.twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html)

#### Documenting Project SEARCH in RHW

The customer’s training information must be documented in ReHabWorks (RHW) and the [VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report](https://www.twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html), must be in the paper case file to ensure adequate reporting of Measurable Skill Gains (MSG). Refer to [VRSM A-505: Documenting Measurable Skill Gains](https://www.twc.texas.gov/vr-services-manual/vrsm-a-500#a505) for additional information.

For each Project SEARCH rotation, a Semester/Grading Period record must be entered identifying the rotation completed.

For additional information on entering training information in RHW, please see the ReHabWorks User Guide B-300.