# PART C, CHAPTER 6.1.a:ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY BVI-PROVIDED SERVICES

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| **Policy Number** | **Authority** | **Scope**  | **Effective Date** |
| Part C, Chapter 6.1.a | 34 CFR [§361.48(b)(17)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/part-361#p-361.48(b)(17)), [§361.5(c)(45)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/part-361#p-361.5(c)(45)), [§361.5(c)(6)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/part-361#p-361.5(c)(6)), and TWC Rule [§856.56](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac%24ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=40&pt=20&ch=856&rl=56) | All TWC-VR staff, particularly BVI VR Counselors | 9/3/2024 |

## PURPOSE

In accordance with the authority (Federal and State) listed above, this policy is issued by the Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Division (TWC-VR). Adherence to these rules and regulations issued under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), supports Texans with disabilities in gaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment (CIE).

Specifically, the purpose of this policy and these procedures is to ensure adherence to the provision of assistive technology goods and services for blind and visually impaired customers.

## DEFINITIONS

Assistive Technology (AT): Equipment, devices, and software that help individuals who are blind or have visual impairments with everyday tasks, communication, and accessing information.

Assistive Technology Evaluation: A structured process that allows a customer to compare different AT products with the unbiased guidance of an AT evaluator.

Assistive Technology Purchase Plan (ATPP): A template Employment Assistance Services (EAS) uses to organize all the elements on the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) related to purchasing AT goods and services, including the consultation reports, AT evaluation report, products, price quotes, and vendors.

Basic Consultation: An interview the Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher (VRT) conducts with the customer to identify the product categories the AT Evaluator will demonstrate in an AT evaluation.

Best Value Purchasing: Purchasing the least expensive services that meet the customer's vocational needs. Also known as the acquisition cost. Determining the acquisition cost ensures that staff consider all factors that influence the total cost and value to both the customer and TWC-VR.

BVI Assistive Technology Workbook: EAS staff resource to assist in finding products for blind and visually impaired customers that have been tested by TWC-VR to meet the AT needs of BVI customers.

Informed Choice: The means by which a customer chooses their rehabilitation path, from options based on their needs and circumstances and the TWC-VR rules, as it relates to choosing AT services and the providers of those services.

Initial Consultation: An interview the EAS conducts with the customer to identify the product categories the AT Evaluator will demonstrate in an AT evaluation.

## POLICY

### General Overview

TWC-VR must ensure that customers who are blind or visually impaired (BVI) can access the AT devices and services they need. This is aimed at improving their independence, productivity, and ability to achieve their employment goals.

The key components of this policy are as follows:

* AT Evaluation: Required for most AT purchases to identify each customer's specific AT needs based on their disabilities, functional capacity, and job-related tasks. These evaluations are provided by TWC-VR (i.e. in-house service) through the Assistive Technology Unit (ATU), VRTs (when referred by EAS) or purchased from approved contract providers.
* AT Purchases: AT devices and services necessary to support BVI customers in achieving their educational and vocational goals; purchased by TWC-VR.
* AT Training: TWC-VR purchases AT training from approved contract providers to teach BVI customers how to effectively use AT for education, employment, communication, and daily activities.

By addressing these areas for customers who are blind and visually impaired, TWC-VR fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where BVI customers can access and use AT to pursue fulfilling careers.

### BVI-Provided Services

* Assistive Technology Unit (ATU) Services: ATU AT Evaluators provide AT evaluations at the ATU lab located in the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC) in Austin.
* Employment Assistance (EA) Services:
	+ Employment Assistance Specialists (EAS): EAS provide services including AT planning, computer skills assessment, equipment installation/troubleshooting, job retention, and initial consultations required for AT evaluations for customers who are employed. They also engage in business contacts and technology consultations including in-service training programs.
	+ Assistive Technology Support Specialists (ATSS):ATSS services include software compatibility testing, installation and troubleshooting for AT to businesses and customers, pre-employment equipment and AT software testing to assess compatibility with business systems, and on-site support to businesses for agency-provided technology.
* VR Teacher (VRT) Services: VRTs provide independent living and vocational assessment and training services. EAS may refer a customer who is unemployed and not engaged in postsecondary education to a VRT for a basic consultation, in which case, the basic consultation report meets the initial consultation requirement for AT evaluation.

### Standards for Providers (SFP)

The SFP manual focuses on the business practices, processes, and policies that TWC-VR and the contracted provider must follow. This VRSM chapter includes services that are provided by a contractor. For additional information regarding contractor responsibilities, service descriptions and costs, please refer to the SFP Chapter 9: Assistive Technology Services for Customers with Visual Impairments. Communication Access Services.

### Additional Policy Considerations

* Comparable Services and Benefits: AT services are exempt from the requirement to secure comparable services and benefits prior to TWC-VR expending funds.
* Customer Participation in the Cost of Services: AT services are exempt from applying Basic Living Requirements (BLR) and, therefore, the customer is not required to participate in the cost of services.
* Recipients of Social Security Disability Benefits: Recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), due to the customer’s disability, are exempt from the requirement to participate in the cost of TWC-VR services regardless of income.
* Exceptions to Policy: When necessary to meet the VR needs of a customer, TWC-VR staff members may request exceptions to policies and procedures through their chain of management up to the Deputy Division Director of Field Services Delivery, or designee. However, exceptions to policies and procedures based on Federal and State laws, statutes, and rules or regulations are not allowable.

## PROCEDURES

### AT Evaluations

* Employment Assistance Specialist (EAS): The VR Counselor must contact the EAS assigned to their region to discuss the needs of the customer and create a service record.

An initial consultation report is required for an AT evaluation. The EAS provides initial consultations for blind or visually impaired customers who are job-seeking, employed, or pursuing post-secondary education. An initial consultation identifies suitable AT product categories based on the customer's disabilities, functional capacity, and employment/educational goals. The decision to conduct a basic consultation is made by EAS, who may delegate this task to a VRT following discussions with the VR Counselor.

The EAS accepts the service record for the initial consultation and meets with the customer to complete the consultation and consultation report.

* VR Teacher (VRT): A basic consultation report can be substituted for an initial consultation for an AT evaluation when delegated by the EAS. The EAS contacts the VRT assigned to the VR Counselor's region to discuss the needs of the customer and create a service record. The VRT provides basic consultations for blind or visually impaired customers who are job-seeking and not pursuing postsecondary education.

A basic consultation identifies suitable AT product categories based on the customer's disabilities, functional capacity, and employment/educational goals.

The VRT accepts the service record for the basic consultation and meets with the customer to complete the consultation and consultation report. The EAS reviews the basic consultation report and contacts the VR Counselor to discuss the evaluation recommendations.

The VR Counselor must then create the service record for the AT evaluation with the Assistive Technology Unit (ATU) or an approved contract provider. ATU provides AT evaluations based on initial or basic consultation reports. AT evaluations help customers identify suitable AT products that support their educational and vocational goals. During the evaluation process, AT Evaluators demonstrate products only from categories specified in the consultation report.

* ATSS: The EAS contacts the ATSS assigned to the VR Counselor's region to discuss the needs of the customer and create a service record. The EAS sends a complete ATSS Request to the ATSS.

The ATSS accepts the service record for the requested service and meets with the customer to complete the necessary testing and a report.

### ATPP Request

When the VR Counselor and customer determine that an ATPP is necessary, the VR Counselor must contact the EAS assigned to their region to discuss the needs of the customer and create a service record.

The EAS accepts the service record for the ATPP and meets with the customer to complete the plan and provides it to the VR Counselor.

### IPE Requirements

BVI services can be provided before and after a customer is receiving services in an IPE. Once the customer has an IPE, all BVI services must be included in the IPE.

### AT Purchasing

An AT evaluation is required for AT purchases except standard stock equipment and software recommended by the EAS, and AT product replacement or upgrades. The following resources assist in determining the appropriate AT and ensure best value purchasing requirements are met.

* Assistive Technology Purchasing Plan (ATPP): The ATPP assists the VR counselor to ensure that all the required documentation is in place to make purchases.
* Customer Technology Specialist (CTS) Services: The CTS Unit is an in-house service that supports VR Office of Blind Services by purchasing and processing technology stock inventory products for customers who are blind or visually impaired.
* Products Under Contract with Department of Information Resources (DIR): DIR is the State’s information technology (IT) and telecommunications agency. DIR leverages the State's buying power for technology.

## APPROVALS & CONSULTATIONS

TWC-VR staff must follow the following approvals and consultations:

* *Program Specialist for Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology (PSART) consultation is required for AT purchases with a cumulative cost greater than $10,000, except for those recommended in an AT evaluation report from the Assistive Technology Unit (ATU).*

**REVIEW**

The Policy Planning and Statewide Initiatives Team, or designee, is responsible for reviewing this policy and these procedures and will update the Document History log if necessary.

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| **Date** | **Type** | **Change Description** |
| 9/3/2024 | New | VRSM Policy and Procedure Rewrite |