# PART C, CHAPTER 6.7:VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION TEACHER SERVICES

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Policy Number** | **Authority** | **Scope**  | **Effective Date** |
| Part C, Chapter 6.7 | 34 CFR [§361.48(b)(11)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/part-361#p-361.48(b)(11)) | All TWC-VR staff | 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 VR Teacher services.

## DEFINITIONS

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.

Blind: A visual acuity with best correction of 20/200 or less in the better eye; a visual field of 20 degrees or less; or a combination of both.

Braille: Tactile writing system used by people who are visually impaired.

Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC): Vocational training center that serves Texans who are blind and visually impaired. Customers can participate as residential or day students.

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 VRT services and the providers of those services.

Low Vision: A visual acuity with best correction of 20/70 or less in the better eye; a visual field of 30 degrees or less in the better eye; or a combination of both.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Services: Evaluation and training services delivered by a certified O&M specialist that promotes independent travel skills for individuals who are blind.

Significant Visual Impairment:A disease or condition of the eye that does not meet the definitions of Blind or Low Vision but does create a significant impediment to employment and cannot be corrected with glasses or contact lenses.

White Cane: A long, rigid, non-folding, fiberglass white cane with a metal tip used in Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services.

## POLICY

### General Overview

TWC-VR helps Texans who are blind or visually impaired to live as independently as possible and to acquire and maintain employment. VR Teacher (VRT) services empower BVI customers by teaching them the independent living and vocational skills they need to succeed in their personal and professional lives.

TWC-VR uses the Texas Confidence Builders philosophy with supporting techniques for creating the foundation for how staff members work with blind and visually impaired customers and how to deliver services. This model incorporates the belief that with proper training and a positive attitude, individuals with disabilities can live productive, independent lives and become successfully employed in a field of their choice.

The VRT in partnership with the customer—

* Encourages emotional adjustment to blindness and visual impairments;
* Teaches alternative and nonvisual techniques as well as prevocational and job readiness skills; and
* Demonstrates how to apply these skills to a vocational goal to achieve an employment outcome and live an independent lifestyle.

The VRT may work with—

* Employers;
* VR Counselors and other TWC-VR staff members;
* Families;
* Educators;
* Community providers; and
* Others who are supportive of the customer's work and employment lifestyle goals.

### VRT Services

* Adjustment to Blindness and Visual Impairments: The VRT assists the customer to be—
	+ Able to comfortably advocate to identify themselves as blind or visually impaired;
	+ Able to blend into society and cope with negative stereotypes of blind or visually impaired people; and
	+ Knowledgeable about their specific eye condition and related blindness or visual impairment issues.
* Employment Lifestyle Skills for Daily Activities: The VRT helps the customer to master the alternative and nonvisual daily activity skills that they need to function independently at work, in the community, and at home.
* Travel Skills: The VRT—
	+ Provides recommendations for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) services;
	+ Provides instruction in basic orientation, applying the customer's knowledge of current cane skills;
	+ Provides training, which may include, but is not limited to—
		- Cane storage;
		- Protective techniques; and
		- Trailing and guiding techniques (in the customer's home environment only); and
	+ Helps the customer identify employment transportation options and resources.

All other O&M training needs should be addressed by an O&M Specialist. O&M services promote independent travel skills for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. O&M training prepares customers to travel independently with competence and confidence.

* Communication Skills: The VRT helps the customer to develop—
	+ Skills to communicate with others using braille and assistive technology;
	+ Effective note-taking methods for employment purposes;
	+ Ability to access and record phone numbers;
	+ Methods for planning and accessing schedules and appointments;
	+ Keyboarding skills; and
	+ Basic computer skills, if the customer has proficient keyboarding skills.
* Braille Training:Braille is an essential skill for most customers who are blind. The VRT and VR Counselor are responsible for encouraging customers who cannot access print efficiently and effectively to learn braille. To make an informed choice regarding braille training, customers are given a braille assessment using nonvisual techniques.
* Basic Consultation: The basic consultation is an interview the VRT conducts with the customer to identify the product categories the Assistive Technology (AT) Evaluator will demonstrate in an AT evaluation by assessing the customer’s potential technology needs based on skills, interests, abilities, and probable work tasks. This is specifically for unemployed customers not pursuing postsecondary education.
* Support Systems: The VRT helps the customer gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence to access available and appropriate resources, including advocacy groups, support groups, mentors, and community resources to maintain an employment lifestyle.
* Vocational Services: The VRT—
	+ Shares information with the VR Counselor about the customer's emotional adjustment to blindness and visual impairment; motivation; and problem solving, organizational, and employment lifestyle skills;
	+ Provides training to help the customer develop and use an ability statement, disclosure strategy, and personal data sheet to complete job applications;
	+ Provides training to help the customer organize and identify a wardrobe for work and provides alternative techniques related to personal appearance and hygiene, if needed;
	+ Goes with the VR Counselor to meet employers and/or tour work sites;
	+ Helps with job analyses;
	+ Provides alternative skills training based on known or anticipated job duties;
	+ Provides training, together with the VR Counselor, for interviewing skills, résumé development, and career exploration;
	+ Role-plays with the customer for job interviews;
	+ Orients the customer to the workplace, if needed; and
	+ Helps the customer to develop work site skills and/or to obtain needed modifications.

### Additional Policy Considerations

* Comparable Services and Benefits: VRT services do not have comparable services and benefits; however, any additional TWC-VR services required for a participant must follow their respective policies and procedures.
* Customer Participation in the Cost of Services: VRT 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

### Determining the Need for VRT Services

* Determination of TWC-VR Eligibility: VRT services contribute to the determination of eligibility by assisting with assessing the customer's employability and identifying the customer's independent living (IL) and work-related needs. VRT services are only for customers who are blind or visually impaired.
* Trial Work Experiences (TWE): VRT services contribute to the determination of eligibility, particularly when there is a question of the customers’ ability to benefit from TWC-VR services, in terms of an employment outcome.

When Pre-Eligibility TWE is determined necessary, VRT services include the following:

* + Assessment;
	+ Evaluative training;
	+ Documentation of difficulties noted during training;
	+ Follow-up on the ability to learn and use new skills;
	+ Customer follow-through on assignments; and
	+ Consideration of the impact of any secondary disabilities on VRT services.

The VRT has the option to—

* + Provide all services as an assessment; or
	+ Complete training recommendations and provide training included in the customer's Trial Work Plan.

A customer's case can be closed due to the severity of the customer's disability only if there is clear and convincing evidence that they are not capable of finding employment, including supported employment. The information documented by the VRT is vital to this process.

* VRT Assessment: The VRT's assessment provides recommendations and critical information to the VR Counselor and customer in the development of the customer's IPE. This information can be used to determine—
	+ An appropriate employment outcome; and
	+ Training needs to develop skills that support a successful employment outcome.

The VRT's assessment focuses on the following three primary areas of VRT services—

* + The customer's emotional adjustment to blindness and visual impairment;
	+ The alternative skills the customer needs to live a successful employment lifestyle; and
	+ The prevocational and job readiness skills the customer needs to obtain or maintain employment.

### Referrals for VRT Services

VR Counselors must make referrals to a VRT to assess the customer's ability to participate in training and to identify VRT services needed to assist the customer in achieving their employment goal.

* Referrals*:* Customers who are blind or visually impaired and who have been identified as having significant functional limitations should be referred to the VRT for services. If customers are not referred, all exceptions must be documented in a case note by the VR Counselor.

Customers who plan to receive surgery or treatment that is expected to improve their vision above legal blindness and that is more than 90 days in the future must not be referred to a VRT unless the customer demonstrates critical needs before surgery.

Customers who are unemployed or pursuing postsecondary education are referred by an Employment Assistance Specialist (EAS) for a basic consultation or to a VRT trained to provide basic consultation services.

A service record is created for the referral, reason for the referral, and any special instructions. This can also be discussed during the staffing session.

* VRT Assessment Process:The VRT must start the assessment and identification of the customer's needs when the initial contact is made with the customer. The Basic Skills Assessment (BSA) provides information about the customer’s—
	+ Adjustment to blindness or visual impairment, and their acceptance of alternative and nonvisual techniques;
	+ Current level of employment lifestyle skills;
	+ Ability to learn skills and benefit from training;
	+ Specific training needs;
	+ Employment goal;
	+ Interest in touring or attending CCRC; and
	+ Potential benefit from VRT training.
* Assessment Focus and Employment Outcome Process: Although the VRT does not determine the customer's employment outcome, the assessment must be focused on an employment outcome. If the assessment occurs before an employment outcome is known, the assessment must focus on the customer's—
	+ Emotional adjustment to blindness and visual impairment;
	+ Employment lifestyle skills; and
	+ Vocational skills such as ability statement, personal data sheet, strategy for disclosure of disability, soft skills, and job search skills.

Consumable rehabilitation VRT supplies may be provided during assessment for evaluative purposes. When VRT supplies are provided during assessment, the documentation should describe in detail what skill or ability is being assessed and how the provided item, device, or equipment aided in the assessment.

Teaching equipment and supplies that must be purchased by the VR Counselor cannot be purchased or provided before included in the customer's IPE and in the Active phase.

* Assessment Documentation:The VRT must write an assessment case note for each contact using the six core areas as headings. If no training needs are identified in a core area, the absence of training needs should be stated rather than omitted from the assessment.

The six core areas are as follows:

* + Adjustment to Blindness and Visual Impairments;
	+ Employment Lifestyle Skills;
	+ Travel Skills;
	+ Communication Skills;
	+ Support Systems; and
	+ Vocational Skills.
* Recommending Training Services Before VRT Assessment Completion: If the need becomes apparent, the VRT may recommend VRT services at any time before the VRT assessment is completed. This allows the VR Counselor to move forward in developing the customer's IPE by adding VRT services.

To recommend VRT services before the VRT assessment is complete, the VRT—

* + Writes the recommendation in a VRT assessment case note and communicates this action in writing to the VR Counselor through email, at a staffing session, or by other means; and
	+ Completes the assessment in a timely manner.
* VRT Assessment Completion Process: When the assessment is complete, the VRT must write a Blindness Skills Assessment Final Report using the six core areas as headings.
* VRT Training Recommendations Documentation: After the BSA Final Report is completed, the VRT must document training recommendations in a case note. The VRT must—
	+ Write recommendations using all six core areas as headings;
	+ Write recommendations of training goals that are based on and support the customer's anticipated employment outcome;
	+ Write a recommendation if the customer expresses an interest in touring or attending CCRC;
	+ Provide an estimated time frame for completing VRT services; and
	+ Update the service record from Assessment to Active status if the IPE has been implemented.

### Staffing Sessions

The VRT and the VR Counselor must work together to—

* Develop a team approach for services with each customer;
* Exchange frequent and regular communication during the provision of VRT services; and
* Ensure that comprehensive VRT services are provided in a timely manner.

Session Focus: The session is focused on mutual cases, including—

* New referrals and training recommendations on new customers;
* The customer's training progress;
* Any customer issues requiring immediate attention;
* Updates regarding customer employment and expected closure date;
* Discussion of VRT service record closure; and
* Changes to the VRT's training recommendations or the customer's IPE.

Frequency:The VR Counselor and the VRT must decide together how often they should meet to review the status of the case.

### VRT Training Process

Based on individual customer needs and VR Counselor input, the range of VRT training services may include—

* Activities to evaluate the customer's ability to learn skills and benefit from training;
* Supportive guidance on adjusting emotionally to blindness and visual impairments;
* Training in the use of alternative and nonvisual skills to perform employment and lifestyle daily activities;
* Training in communication skills, including braille training, keyboard training, and limited assistive technology training;
* Limited Training in travel and transportation skills;
* VRT employment-assistance training;
* Information, referral, and advocacy; and
* Adaptive supplies and equipment.

### Providing VRT Training

Once VRT training is included in the IPE, the case is moved to Active phase and the VRT service record is updated to Active.

### Interruption of VRT Services

When VRT services are interrupted, the VRT—

* Updates the service record status to Interruption;
* Enters a case note titled "VRT Interrupted" status, documenting the reason for the interruption, and when services are expected to resume; and
* Periodically checks on the customer to determine when services should resume. Interruption status must only be used for short-term interruptions in service provision.
* Interruption status is not appropriate if no identified services remain to be provided; instead, the service record should be closed.

### Completion of VRT Services

VRT services are completed when—

* All goals on the VRT Training Recommendations have been completed;
* The VR Counselor and the VRT agree that all VRT services needed by the customer have been provided;
* The VRT writes a "VRT Blindness Skills Training Summary" case note; and
* The VRT service record is closed as “Services Provided or Successful."

If VRT services were not provided or completed, the service record is closed as "Services Not Provided or Unsuccessful."

### VRT Case Management Procedures

The VRT must document all customer contacts, including all attempts to contact and other pertinent information in case notes using the six core skill headings as needed to document VRT services provided and customer progress.

* Case Note Topics: "VRT" is the title in RHW for VRT case notes. The case note title can be edited by beginning with "VRT" and choosing "Add to Topic" to enter additional information.
* Case Transfer Process: For transfers within TWC-VR—
	+ The VRT service record is closed as either "Services Provided or Successful" or "Services Not Provided or Unsuccessful."
	+ If VRT services are still needed, the receiving VR Counselor must create a new service record and refer to the appropriate VRT in that area.
* Transfers to CCRC: When a customer is transferred to CCRC, the VRT service record may be closed or put into Interruption status by the VRT.
* TWC-VR Provided Service Records: The VRT who provided the training updates the service record status regularly to reflect progress in the in-house service. One service record at a time is used for VRT services. Duplicate service records are closed as "Not Accepted."

### VRT Supplies and Adaptive Equipment

* VRT Supplies: VRT supplies are "consumable supplies," including high-usage, low-cost supplies such as braille and voice labelers, bold-line paper, writing guides, and timers. These supplies—
	+ Are ordered from commercial sources;
	+ Do not require assignment to a specific customer;
	+ Exclude items that cost over $100 per single item;
	+ Are ordered by and shipped to VR offices; and
	+ Are stored at the local office for distribution to customers for demonstration, assessment or training purposes.
* Maintaining Inventory Levels in the Local Office: VRTs must follow the steps below to maintain inventory levels in the local office:
	+ Order smaller quantities regularly to maintain stock levels rather than ordering large quantities to restock depleted items;
	+ If large quantities of rehabilitation supplies are needed for such special events as group classes or awareness presentations, a service authorization must be submitted in advance to ensure delivery.
* VRT Supply Accountability Procedures: Accountability for adaptive supplies and equipment issued to customers is verified by—
	+ Documentation in the VRT case notes;
	+ Review of the case file by the VR Manager; and
	+ Maintenance of an established inventory level of supplies in the local office.
* Adaptive Equipment:Adaptive equipment is defined as durable items or devices ordered for a customer (e.g., braillewriters, PenFriends, Electronic Book Readers).
	+ Adaptive equipment is Purchased per customer in RHW.
	+ Adaptive equipment may be recommended by the VRT during training and is documented in case notes.
	+ All purchases must be coordinated with the VR Counselor. VRT services (including consumable supplies) are not subject to required customer participation in the cost of services. However, some purchases are subject to income criteria, and this determination is made by the VR Counselor.
	+ The VR Counselor must document the justification for purchase of an item before it is ordered.
* Adaptive Demonstration Equipment: Adaptive demonstration equipment is agency-owned equipment lent to customers for demonstration and/or training purposes only (e.g., video magnifiers, electronic book readers, and braillewriters). The equipment is added to the office inventory account, and a State inventory tag is attached.

## APPROVALS & CONSULTATIONS

There are no approvals or consultations for this policy and these procedures.

**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.

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