



Consumer Handbook
for
Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

April 2014

Table Of Contents

Page

- 3 Overview
- 5 Evaluation Form

Eligibility

- 7 Will I Be Eligible for BRS Services?

The Individualized Plan for Employment - Going to Work

- 8 How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?
- 11 Career Exploration Form
- 13 How Do I Develop an Effective and Meaningful Individualized Plan for Employment?
- 17 Individualized Plan for Employment Worksheet
- 19 Who Will Pay for the Services I Need?
- 20 What Will Happen to My Benefits if I Go to Work?

Working Together with the BRS Program

- 23 What Can I Do to Make the BRS Program Work for Me?
- 25 What Is the SRC?
- 27 What Do I Do If I Disagree with BRS?

BRS Services

- 33 BRS Services (Overview)

Job Placement and Follow-Up Services

- 35 Job Placement Services
- 37 Work Evaluation
- 39 Job Coaching and Supported Employment
- 41 Self-Employment Services
- 43 Post-Employment Services

Education and Training Services

- 44 Employment Training
- 46 Financial Aid for Post-Secondary Education
- 49 On-the-Job Training
- 50 Transition from School to Work

Other BRS Services

- 52 Rehabilitation Technology
- 54 Home Modifications
- 56 Vehicle Modifications
- 59 Restoration Services

- 60 **BRS Office Phone Numbers**

Notes

Overview

This handbook is designed to provide general information about the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program offered through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). We hope this book will help you understand the VR program so that you will have a successful outcome in your desire for employment.

The public VR program is the result of the Rehabilitation Act. This federal law is founded on the belief that all individuals with disabilities can work. Under this law, each state operates a program in partnership with the federal government. The cost is shared by both the state and federal governments. The goal of the program is to help people with significant disabilities to prepare for, find, and keep good jobs.

You may be referred to the program by any source in the community or you may contact the program directly yourself. There are regional and local offices throughout the state to serve you. (See page 60 for locations and office phone numbers.)

Once you apply, you will work mostly with a vocational rehabilitation counselor who will determine your eligibility. This is generally a brief process but may sometimes require certain assessments or evaluations for which BRS can pay. If you are found (determined) eligible, you will have many options to explore and decisions to make. First, you will develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies your job goal and the services you will need to achieve that goal. Your counselor can provide information and assistance in developing the plan, or you may develop the plan on your own or with help from outside resources. Your IPE will also spell out responsibilities for both you and BRS to meet. Once you and your counselor agree to the details in the completed plan, services can begin. Your IPE can be changed over time, as long as both you and your counselor agree to the changes.

Your plan, the services you receive, and the time needed to achieve your employment goal will be different from others who are also receiving services. For some, the services may include job training or job coaching. Others may need special devices such as a hearing aid or modifications to a vehicle. The services included in your plan will depend on your job goal and your special needs.

BRS may pay for some of the services. We may also ask you to apply for other programs or benefits that can help pay for some of the costs of services you will need in your IPE. You will be encouraged to contribute to the cost of services in your plan if you are able to do so. You will also be expected to meet your responsibilities to make your plan successful such as keeping appointments, making calls, researching your employment options and staying in touch with your counselor.

The final goal of the BRS program is employment. If your IPE is successful, you will be able to obtain and keep a job that you can perform well and that you like. Generally, BRS will work with you until you have been placed or retained on a job and all services have been completed. We will monitor your progress for the first 90 days of employment. During this time, please tell your counselor of any concerns you may have about the job. If the job goes well during this time, we will then close your case. Please remember, you can apply to re-open your case if you have a problem on the job or circumstances change.

The information in this booklet is a detailed description of the application process and the specific services that are available. **Reading this handbook may help you achieve success toward your employment goal.** Please feel free to contact any staff member of BRS if you have questions or need any further information about services or BRS policy. You may also check our Web Site at www.ct.gov/brs to view our **Policy Manual** which explains the philosophical and legal guidelines that determine how we administer the vocational rehabilitation program.

BRS Consumer Handbook Evaluation Form

After you have had a chance to look at and use this book, we would appreciate you completing this evaluation form. Your feedback will help us learn if this handbook is useful and if there are ways we may improve it. Please complete this page, remove it from the book and, return it to your BRS counselor or to the BRS central office address below:

Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)
55 Farmington Avenue, 12th Floor (*effective June 1, 2014*)
Hartford, CT 06105-3702

Attention: Evelyn Oliver Knight, Public Affairs Consultant

Thank you for your assistance.

Who is the person completing this form? (*Check one*)

BRS Consumer Parent Other (*Explain*) _____

Which BRS office did you use? _____

How helpful was the information in this handbook to you? (*Check one*)

Very helpful Helpful Not very helpful

This handbook included: (*Check one*)

_____ Too much information.
_____ The right amount of information.
_____ Too little information. In this case, what information would you like included? _____

Was the information in the handbook written in a way that could be easily understood?

Yes No

If you answered "no", please explain: _____

This handbook included all of the important parts of the BRS program. Please check one of the following statements.

I appreciate having the handbook about the whole program.
 I would have preferred only getting information about the following:

Do you have any suggestions or comments to help improve this handbook?

*Use the back of this page or an additional sheet of paper, if needed.
Please remove this page and mail it in.*



Will I Be Eligible for BRS Services?

Once you decide to apply for services with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the next step is to work closely with your counselor to determine your eligibility. In general, you may be eligible for services if:

- you have a significant impairment that interferes with your ability to work; and
- you require vocational rehabilitation services to attain or maintain employment.

Your eligibility may be established immediately if you are receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and you plan to go to work. It may take several weeks to determine your eligibility if information concerning your disability must be verified from other sources such as your doctor.

When resources are limited, BRS is required to provide services to persons with the most significant disabilities. This is called the Order of Selection. If your disabilities are not found to be "significant" you may not be eligible for services. Staff assisting you with the application process can explain this in more detail.

Sometimes it may be necessary for BRS to arrange for tests or other assessments to determine your eligibility or priority under the Order of Selection. These tests would be given at no cost to you. You will be fully informed throughout each step of the process. You are encouraged to be involved in how these assessments are done, including the selection of providers who will perform these evaluations.

BRS assessments may include:

- Collecting information about your history and any records that document your disability;
- Situational assessment/job testing;
- Psychological assessment;
- Medical evaluations;
- Talking with you to determine how your disability may impact employment; and
- Other evaluations that you and your counselor determine are necessary.

Our goal is to determine the status of your eligibility as quickly as possible with the minimum amount of tests and paperwork. The law requires that this process be completed within 60 days. If it takes longer than 60 days due to insufficient information, we will ask you to sign an agreement to extend the period for eligibility determination.

How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?

Making a career choice involves matching your abilities, interests, values and personality with the demands of the real world of work. This is an active, ongoing process that includes activities designed to help you pick a job goal. Your BRS counselor is available to help you with this process.

There are Four Steps in Choosing a Career:

1. Know Yourself

The process begins with you conducting a detailed exploration of yourself. What motivates you? What are your interests? What do you enjoy doing? What skills do you have? What is your personality like? What disability-related issues impact your career choice? This exploration can be done through a variety of ways, including self-assessment, in-depth counseling interviews with your counselor, paper and pencil tests (such as interest or ability tests) and career groups.

2. Gather Occupational and Educational Information

Because occupational and educational information is always changing, it is important that you gather information about the world of work, and determine where you best fit. If you need assistance, you may discuss this with your counselor. There are a number of resources for career information, such as the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), Department of Labor's *Connecticut Works/One-Stop Career Centers* and the Internet. There are also vocational activities that may help with this step such as visiting a job site and observing people doing the job in which you're interested or trying out the job yourself for a short period of time.

In addition, talking to employers or other people in the field in which you are interested is an excellent way to learn more about the career(s) you are considering. The Career Exploration Form on the following pages can help you gather some of the information that will be important for you to know. Your counselor may also have some of this information from talking to employers. The more job or employment information you can gather, the better your career decision is likely to be. In developing your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), it will be helpful to share any of the information you have gathered with your counselor.

3. Find the Right Career Match

Once you have gone through a good self-assessment process and completed the occupational information phase, you are ready to make a sound decision to match your skills, abilities, values and personality with the demands of your chosen occupation. Additionally, your counselor can help you evaluate the physical or mental demands required and any potential reasonable accommodations you might need to be successful.

4. Plan a Course of Action

Developing your IPE with a focused employment goal is essential to helping you follow a course of action. This plan will detail the services and supports you will need from BRS to help you reach your goal. It will also detail the steps you need to take towards achieving this employment goal. Your BRS counselor is available to help you develop this plan.

Notes

Career Exploration Form

(Questions to ask an employer, employee, human resource officer, friend or family member knowledgeable about the job you are researching.)

Job Title: _____

Name of Employer: _____

Address: _____

Contact Person: _____

Interview Date: _____ By: _____

Education/Training Needed: _____

What worker traits or skills are needed for this job?

What are the main job duties?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Does the job require:

Sitting

Standing

Walking

Lifting Light Medium Heavy

Job Conditions (check off all that apply):

Indoor Work mostly alone Full-time

Outdoor Work with people Part-time

Work with things Temporary

Close supervision Limited supervision

How is the job performance evaluated or reviewed? _____

Do you ever consider trainees or on-the-job training?

_____ Yes _____ No

Starting salary: \$ _____/hour

_____ Paid vacation

Highest salary: \$ _____/hour

_____ Paid sick leave

_____ Medical Insurance

Typical Hours

_____ Day Shift

_____ Afternoon

_____ Night

_____ Weekend

_____ Overtime

Can you recommend other businesses to be contacted about this occupation?

Notes:

How Do I Develop an Effective and Meaningful Individualized Plan for Employment?

What is an Individualized Plan for Employment?

An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is a written document that describes how vocational rehabilitation services will help you towards your employment goal. Both you and your counselor will agree to a realistic job goal for you and a plan for how you will reach that goal. This plan is developed after analyzing such things as your previous work experience (if any), how your disability impacts your ability to work, and the type of job in which you are interested and could be successful. It outlines how you will achieve employment with the assistance of vocational rehabilitation services. The IPE may be very simple and quick or it may require considerable time and care to develop, based on your particular circumstances. It will take into consideration your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests, and informed choice.

How or When is the Individualized Plan for Employment Developed?

Once your eligibility to receive vocational rehabilitation services has been determined, you may begin to develop your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The goal and services required in the plan are based on your input. It is also based on the information that you or others provide regarding your abilities and interests. You are welcome to involve any individuals of your choosing in this process. These may include family, friends, and members of your support network, advocates, or experts outside of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

You can work on your plan development in a number of ways:

- Work on your own or with support from any of the resources noted above. BRS can help you with information or guidance as you request. We will act as your consultant.
- Collaborate with a BRS counselor. You will meet regularly with your counselor who can support and guide you during this selection process.

In addition to information provided in this handbook, BRS has many books and resource information in each office that can help you to develop a meaningful plan. The public library and the Internet may also be a great source of information.

How Do I Develop an Individualized Plan for Employment That's Right for Me?

There are basically two steps to developing your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):

1. Decide on an employment goal; and
2. Identify the steps needed to reach that goal. Under the VR program, plans are developed based on your unique needs, with your choices being included as much as possible. Our job is to help you to be informed about your choices. You will need to understand what you want and how alternatives and consequences may impact the decisions you make. There are also some rules that BRS must follow.

BRS has an IPE form that must be completed; your counselor can provide you with a copy of that form. Your preparation to write your plan is even more important. The IPE Worksheet following this section of the handbook can help you with the planning process.

How Do I Decide on an Employment Goal?

There are many things you need to consider when deciding on an employment goal. First, what work experience and skills do you currently have? What type of job best fits you as a person, taking into consideration such things as your abilities, capabilities, and interests?

Next look at the job itself and consider these questions:

1. Is this a job where there are many opportunities for employment?
2. Where are the potential employers located and will transportation be an issue?
3. What opportunities will there be in the future for you in this field?
4. What will this job pay, and does that meet your needs?
5. Is there flexibility in working conditions?
6. How long will it take to get the skills necessary so that you can achieve this goal?
7. What resources will you need to reach the goal?
8. If the goal will require a lot of preparation time, can you afford to be unemployed for an extended period of time while you prepare for the goal?

Your BRS counselor can help you look for an employment goal that's right for you. He/she has information about different careers, may know other people or activities that can help you to get more information, and can help guide you through the process of making a decision. You may also choose to involve individuals outside of BRS in the development of your employment goal.

For additional information on choosing a job goal, see the section of this book called, ***“How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?”***

How Do I Develop a Plan for Reaching the Goal?

Your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) will describe the services that you will need in order to reach your goal, the time frames for the goal and services, and the responsibilities of everyone involved in your plan.

The services that are included in this plan should only be those that are necessary to achieve your employment goal. Please consider the following:

1. What will you need to reach the goal?
2. How long will it take you to achieve this goal?
3. What is the most efficient way of getting to the goal, both in terms of time and costs?
4. Who are the potential providers of services, and which one will be best for you?
5. Will you have any problems in accessing the services you need (due to such things as transportation, disability-related issues, etc.)?
6. Are there any BRS rules you need to consider when deciding on a plan for services?

Your BRS counselor can assist you with the process of developing an appropriate IPE. He or she will be able to help you find out what services you may need to reach your goal and can tell you what BRS rules may apply. For most services, the counselor will have information regarding who can provide the services you need. BRS encourages you to talk with the service providers and get more information from them before deciding which one to choose. You may also choose to involve any individuals or sources outside of BRS in the development of your IPE.

Once you and your counselor have agreed on your job goal and the services you require to achieve that goal, your plan can be written and services may begin.

How Will BRS Decide Whether or Not to Approve My Plan?

BRS will look at a number of factors in deciding whether or not to approve your IPE.

The following checklist includes the major points of consideration:

- Is the plan consistent with your strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice?
- Are the services requested essential toward reaching your goal?
- Does the plan have measurable goals to be monitored to ensure a successful outcome?
- Are the time frames realistic toward reaching your goal?

-
- Have other sources of funding been explored, when appropriate?
 - Are the sources of payment identified in the plan?
 - Is the cost of the service reasonable?
 - Are treatments or interventions that you need to be successful addressed in the plan?
 - Are the services consistent with BRS regulations and policies?

What Happens If I Want to Change My Plan or If I Need More Services?

It is important that you contact your counselor immediately to discuss any changes in your plan. When changes are agreed upon, an amendment to the IPE will be written.

You and your counselor will review and update your plan at least once a year, even if there are no major changes.

What If I Have Questions or Concerns About My IPE?

Your counselor is the key person you can go to for answers about your IPE.

Services are provided based on individual needs. If your counselor cannot answer your questions to your satisfaction, you should ask to speak to a BRS supervisor. If you still have questions or you disagree with BRS, there are other procedures that may help. For more information about this, see page 27 of this book called, **“What Do I Do If I Disagree With BRS?”**

Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Worksheet

(May be completed by consumer or BRS counselor to help determine details of your IPE.)

Name: _____

Person completing this form (if other than consumer): _____

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOME/JOB GOAL

What is the specific job goal you plan to achieve? _____

What are your reasons for choosing this goal?

Why is this a good choice for you, given your strengths, abilities, resources, interests and priorities? Describe any available evidence to show that this is a good choice.

What is the job market like for this goal? How did you learn about the current job market?

Qualifications To Achieve The Job Goal

What qualifications do you currently have for the job goal?

What qualifications do you need to develop further in order to reach this goal?

Intermediate Steps/Objectives

Please list any steps that must be accomplished before you can reach your job goal.

How will your progress toward achieving these steps be evaluated?

Concerns And Barriers To Achieving The Job Goal

List any concerns, barriers, or problems that must be resolved before you will be able to go to work (for example, losing Social Security or other benefits, finding transportation or child care, getting job accommodations, or other issues concerning your disability, etc.).

Describe services that you will need in order to resolve these concerns, barriers, or problems.

Resources To Pay For Services Needed

What are you able and willing to contribute to the cost of any services needed for your IPE?

What other resources may be helpful in paying for the services that you need? Describe the availability of these resources.

Who Will Pay for the Services I Need?

Every Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is different. It describes the employment goal, the services needed to reach that goal, and the agreement between you and BRS. Many resources may be used to cover the costs of services under the IPE, including your resources, your family, your insurance or benefits, other public programs and/or BRS. Each IPE should carefully spell out who is responsible to pay for what services.

- You will be asked to voluntarily contribute resources toward the cost of your IPE. Examples of how you might contribute resources include paying a vendor for a portion of the cost of the services you need or getting some of the services on your own. BRS strongly believes that the personal investment of each individual is an important ingredient in making the IPE meaningful and successful. You are not, however, required to provide a contribution and your plan cannot be held up if you are not able to contribute.
- Before BRS funds can be used, it is required by law to determine if there are other resources (such as other agencies, your health insurance, financial aid for post-secondary education, or employee benefits) that will pay for the services you need. You may be required to apply for these other resources. BRS will also use any other resources that are readily available toward the costs of your IPE.
- BRS may pay for services or goods that are not available from other sources and that are agreed upon in your IPE. These goods and services must be purchased in a way that agrees with state and BRS purchasing policies and terms. BRS is only able to use service providers who agree with these policies and terms.

If you have any questions about who is paying for services identified in your IPE, please ask your counselor. It is important that you know who is paying and what the costs are for services and goods in your IPE. This knowledge will help you make better decisions about the services that you receive.

What Will Happen to My Benefits If I Go to Work?

If you receive disability cash or medical benefits (such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, State Supplement, Medicare and/or Medicaid), you may qualify under rules that would allow you to work and still receive benefits. It is important that you get accurate information, so that you can make good decisions about your vocational goals, your potential earnings and your health insurance needs.

You will need to report your earnings to Social Security if you receive a benefit from them. If you have a state benefit like Medicaid or State Supplement, you need to report your earnings to the Department of Social Services. If you receive benefits from both of these programs, you will need to report your earnings to both.

Work Incentives Work Incentives

Social Security has work incentives that may allow you to work and still receive benefits.

If you receive **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)** benefits:

- You can work for a trial period and still receive your benefits. After that trial period is over, Social Security will decide if your level of earnings allows you to keep receiving benefits or if benefits should stop.
- There are situations where you can earn over \$1,070 gross per month (2014) after your trial work period and continue to receive your full SSDI monthly benefit amount.
- SSDI cash benefits can be reactivated for an extended period of time if earnings fall below \$1,070 per month.
- Medicare can continue for an extended period of time even if SSDI cash benefits have stopped.

If you receive **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**:

- When you work, your check will be reduced gradually, depending on your earnings. Social Security counts less than half of your earnings when figuring how much SSI you would receive.

If you have a disability and receive **Medicaid (Title XIX)**:

- For SSI or State Supplement recipients, your cash benefits may stop due to earnings. In most cases, you can continue to be insured by Medicaid until you earn \$68,340 per year or \$5,695.08 per month (*limit for 2014*) without paying any premium for Medicaid coverage.

-
- If you work and have a disability, and your income goes over \$68,340 per year or \$5,695.08 per month (*limit for 2014*), you may be eligible for **MED-CONNECT**. With MED-CONNECT, you may have income up to \$75,000 per year (not counting spousal income), and have \$10,000 in liquid assets (\$15,000 if married) and retirement accounts. You may have to pay a monthly premium, based on your annual income (and your spouse's income, if you are married).
 - If you are receiving SSDI, you may be eligible for MED-CONNECT. The income and asset limits are the same as the ones described above. The Department of Social Services (DSS) usually calls this SO5.
 - If Social Security determines that your disability has improved but is chronic, you may be able to keep your MED-CONNECT benefits as long as you continue to work.
 - Even if you are not receiving Social Security Benefits, you may be able to obtain MED-CONNECT if you meet Social Security's disability standards. The Department of Social Services can have your disability evaluated to determine your eligibility in this situation.

How Do I Get the Information That I Need on Benefits So That I Can Make Good Vocational Choices?

- A Benefits Specialist (also known as a Community Work Incentive Coordinator or CWIC) at BRS understands how work and earnings will affect your benefits.
- Please see information below on how to contact a Benefits Specialist in your area. Simple questions can be answered by phone. You will probably need to meet with a Benefits Specialist if you have a number of questions or a complicated situation.
- Ask for fact sheets on Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income and State Supplement as well as a brochure on MED-CONNECT that are available at all BRS offices.
- Request information and assistance concerning your benefits from other reliable programs or agencies that you know will give accurate information.

Finding A Benefits Counselor

Local Contacts

Please call the office closest to where you live and ask to be connected with the Benefits Specialist:

Greater Hartford and Willimantic: 860-723-1400;

Greater New Britain and Meriden 860-612-3569;

Greater New Haven and Middletown 203-974-3000;

Greater New London and Norwich 860-439-7686;

Fairfield County and Danbury 203-551-5500;

Greater Waterbury and Torrington 203-578-4550.

Spanish-speaking Benefits Specialists are available.

Connect-to-Work Project Director

You may contact the Director in the BRS Central Office: Joyce Armstrong, 860-424-4849 or toll free at 1-800-773-4636 or by e-mail joyce.armstrong@ct.gov.

What Can I Do to Make the BRS Program Work for Me?

While going through the BRS program may take time or may be confusing, there are steps you can take to make it easier. You and your BRS counselor are partners and your active participation will help to speed up the process to achieve your goal more quickly. Here is a list of suggestions to help make the process successful:

- ***Think about your employment plans*** prior to meeting with your BRS counselor. Carefully think about what are your likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. Consider long-term career goals and how you can achieve them. Having ideas to discuss with your counselor can help you get to know each other. Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) that are thoroughly developed are more likely to succeed.
- ***Take responsibility for your program.*** You determine your future. Your counselor is there to assist and guide you, but there will be things you need to accomplish for yourself.
- When possible, ***keep scheduled appointments.*** Missing appointments may delay your progress. If you must cancel, call ahead of time to reschedule.
- ***Ask if you should bring anything to your appointments.*** When possible, obtain medical or educational records that will be needed by BRS. Your counselor will tell you what is necessary to determine your eligibility or to do employment planning.
- ***Record important information*** or ask that it be put in writing for you. Keep your own BRS file with all the papers you receive.
- ***Plan ahead*** when making vocational or educational plans. You may be disappointed if you wait until the last minute before applying for services or contacting your counselor.

-
- ***Keep in touch with your counselor.*** You can call your counselor at any time; you don't have to wait for your counselor to call you. If the counselor is not available, leave your name and how you can be reached.

 - ***Be aware of any communications from BRS.*** BRS may contact you about your application or on-going case by phone, e-mail, or United States Postal Service. Respond to phone calls and e-mails. Read all mail that BRS sends to you. BRS may send you a document for your records; notify you of a change in your case or your status as a consumer; or invite you to attend special events like the BRS Public Meeting or Prep Rallies. Contact your counselor as soon as possible if you don't understand any communications sent to you.

 - ***Ask questions when you are unsure about information or the process.*** The BRS program may be confusing and your counselor can provide answers. For additional advice or assistance, you may call the **Client Assistance Program (CAP)** at 1-800-842-7303.

 - ***Share your views*** with the **State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**, a group of consumers, family members, service providers and advocates who are appointed by the Governor to assess, advise and recommend policy for BRS regarding the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. You may attend one of the Council's bi-monthly meetings or the BRS public meeting. Announcements about BRS public meetings will be mailed to you or you may ask your counselor when the next public meeting will be held. See more details about the SRC in the next section. If you would like to attend a meeting or volunteer to participate, contact your counselor or call the BRS toll-free line at 1-800-537-2549 and ask for the Liaison to the SRC.

What is the SRC?

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is an important partner with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, mandates how employment services for people with disabilities are administered through the Title I - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Title VI - Supported Employment programs. This act requires each designated state unit (*BRS in Connecticut*) to work closely with its SRC in conducting needs assessments and evaluations and in developing the State Plan, strategic plans, reports, and state goals and priorities.

Mission

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) provides assessment, advice and recommendations to the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and others regarding coordination and effectiveness of programs and strategies which promote community-based competitive employment for persons with disabilities.

Goals

The State Rehabilitation Council will:

- ◆ assess the effectiveness and delivery of vocational services provided by BRS to individuals with disabilities;
- ◆ strive to improve the coordination of vocational services among BRS, the state agencies and public and private entities for the benefit of consumers of BRS.
- ◆ make recommendations to the Governor, BRS and others for developing and improving strategies for the employment and vocational services for individuals with disabilities.

Membership

The SRC is comprised of a variety of people including consumers, family members, advocates, business leaders, community representatives, and professionals who support BRS employment endeavors. A majority of the members have a disability. These Governor-appointed SRC members serve as the voice of consumers to assist BRS plan and implement VR services. Any individual willing to serve in this capacity may seek an appointment to become a part of the SRC. Members are appointed to a three-year term following an application process; they may be appointed to a second three-year term.

Per the Rehab Act, the SRC needs to have specific representatives of the following groups:

- ◆ at least one representative of
 - 1. the Statewide Independent Living Council,**
 - 2. the Parent Training and Information Center,**
 - 3. the Client Assistance Program - CAP (Section 112),**

-
4. a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor,
 5. Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP),
 6. the State Education Department,
 7. the State Workforce Investment Board, and
 8. Section 121 (VR for native Americans);

- ◆ four representatives of **business, industry and labor**;
- ◆ representatives of **disability advocacy groups representing physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities and individuals who have difficulty representing themselves**; and
- ◆ current or former **applicants or recipients of VR services**.

Meetings

The SRC rotates meetings around the state six times per year. Members are provided with accommodations for meetings and are reimbursed for travel expenses to and from meetings and other SRC activities. When needed, expenses for the use of personal care attendants that enable member participation in the meetings may also be reimbursed.

Members are asked to join at least one subcommittee that will meet as needed to achieve committee goals. Members conduct their work through the following standing subcommittees: Business Partnership; Consumer Satisfaction; Inter-council Coordination/Nominations; and Legislation, Policy, and Planning. **SRC members are also required to attend at least one public meeting per year and are invited to the BRS Annual Meeting.** They may attend other BRS activities or programs as they become available.

Recruitment of New Members

The SRC always seeks new members who have a strong interest in the VR program and/or employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Having the time and willingness to do the work is essential. If you are interested in becoming a member, ask your counselor or contact the SRC Liaison listed below.

Evelyn Oliver Knight, SRC Liaison:

860-424-4871 (direct line);

1-800-537-2549 (toll-free);

860-920-7163 (Video Phone);

860-424-4850 (Fax);

evelyn.knight@ct.gov (E-mail);

www.ct.gov/brs (Web Site).

What Do I Do If I Disagree with BRS?

BRS encourages you, as the consumer, and BRS staff to try to work out problems informally whenever possible. You and your BRS counselor should consult with a supervisor, a District Director, or a Central Office staff person when there is a disagreement about services or some other program concern.

If you are not able to resolve a problem through informal methods, you have the right to request a more formal resolution to any difference of opinion, disagreement about services, or disagreement with any decision made by BRS. You may also contact the Client Assistance Program (“CAP” – see contact information at the end of this section) for help in resolving disagreements with BRS, or for help in preparing for the more formal review process described below.

BRS should provide you with a written statement of the decision that BRS is making and that you disagree with. You should be prepared to make a written request to BRS to ask to have the decision changed. The request needs to be specific. **You need to tell us what is the decision made by BRS that you want to have reviewed or overturned.**

What happens when I disagree with a decision made by BRS and I request a formal review of that decision?

It is important for you to understand the timeframes and the proceedings that will take place when you request a review of a decision.

When you make a request to review a determination made by BRS staff, BRS is required to *“...hold a formal due process hearing for the matter within 60 days of the consumer’s request, unless informal resolution or a mediation agreement is reached prior to the 60th day, or the parties agree to a specific extension of time.”* This means that as soon as you make the request to review the decision, BRS will begin to arrange for the formal due process hearing, called an “Administrative Hearing.” This Hearing must take place within 60 days, unless you agree to extend the time beyond 60 days. For example, you may agree to postpone scheduling this formal Administrative Hearing until you finish an informal resolution process with BRS. This informal resolution is called an “Informal Review.” BRS staff will ask you whether you want to proceed with the Administrative Hearing within 60 days, or whether you want to “hold” on scheduling the Hearing until an Informal Review has been held. This decision is up to you. You may also decide to request Mediation.

Before you go forward with the formal Administrative Hearing, you should understand the steps and the process clearly. Please look at the information below, to help you to understand what will happen.

What is an “Informal Review”?

The Informal Review is a meeting with you and with a member or members of the staff of BRS (usually your counselor, sometimes the counselor’s supervisor, and usually the BRS District Director for your area). You will explain your request to change a BRS decision, and why you believe BRS should change the decision. You may present additional information (evidence) to support your request. You also have the right to have representation by legal counsel (lawyer), advocate, relative or other spokesperson at the Informal Review, though any fee for this will be your responsibility.

How do I request an Informal Review?

- A request for an Informal Review must be in writing, and sent to the District Director of the Regional BRS office where you are receiving services.
- BRS must receive your request within 30 days after the date that BRS notifies you of the decision that you disagree with.
- The Informal Review must be scheduled in a timely manner (usually within 2-3 weeks).
- If you do not appear at the scheduled Informal Review, you waive your right to an Informal Review.

How do I prepare for an Informal Review?

- You may contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) for help in preparing for the Informal Review. Most of the time CAP will agree to represent you, but occasionally they may not agree to do this.
- You should be prepared to explain why you believe the decision that BRS made is incorrect and should be changed.
- You may bring additional evidence to the Review to support your argument. (Evidence includes more information to explain your point of view, such as reports from your doctor or grade reports from your training program).

What can I expect when I request an Informal Review?

- When you request the Informal Review, a BRS staff person (usually the District Director for your area) will contact you to schedule the review.
- It will be held at an accessible location during work hours or at a time and place agreed upon by you and BRS, usually in the BRS office where you receive services.

-
- Information in your case file must be made available to you or your representative (*note: medical, psychological or other information which BRS determines may be harmful to you cannot be released directly to you but must be provided to your designated representative*).
 - Unless you make the request, until the person who is doing the Review makes a decision, BRS cannot suspend, reduce or terminate services being provided for you, unless those services have been obtained through "...misrepresentation, fraud, collusion, or criminal conduct..." by you or your representative.
 - After the Informal Review, the District Director will send the written decision to you in a timely manner (usually within 2-3 weeks).
 - If the decision is not in your favor, you may then request an Administrative Hearing to review the decision, if you have not already scheduled one.

What is "Mediation"?

Mediation is a process used to come to agreement or compromise when two parties disagree. If you request mediation, it cannot take place unless BRS agrees to enter mediation with you. It is voluntary for you, and for BRS. A neutral person, a "mediator" is selected from a list of mediators by agreement between you and BRS. The mediator meets with you and BRS and tries to spell out a written agreement to settle the disagreement.

Mediation is a very different experience than an Informal Review or Administrative Hearing with BRS. The mediator does not "make a decision" and send it out in writing. You and BRS develop an agreement with the help of the mediator. Then the decision is written down, and signed by you and by BRS.

How do I request Mediation?

- A request for mediation must be in writing, and sent to the District Director of the BRS Regional office where you are receiving services.
- The request must be received by BRS within 30 days after the date that BRS notifies you of the decision that you disagree with, or, within 30 days of the mailing of the Informal Review decision.
- BRS may deny the request for mediation in cases where it is not likely that mediation will settle the disagreement. In such cases, you may still request to have an Administrative Hearing.
- Mediation must be scheduled in a timely manner.

How do I prepare for Mediation?

- You may contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) for help in preparing for the mediation.
- You may bring additional evidence or information to the mediation process.
- You should be prepared to come to a compromise with BRS.

What can I expect when I request Mediation?

- When you and BRS agree on mediation, a BRS staff person (usually the District Director from your area) will contact you to schedule the mediation.
- It will be held at an accessible location during work hours or at a time and place agreed upon by you and BRS, usually in the BRS office where you receive services.
- Information in your case file must be made available to you or your representative (*note: medical, psychological or other information which BRS determines may be harmful to you cannot be released directly to you, but must be provided to your designated representative*).
- Unless you make the request, until the mediator makes a decision, BRS cannot suspend, reduce or terminate services being provided for you, unless those services have been obtained through "...misrepresentation, fraud, collusion, or criminal conduct..." by you or your representative.
- You should be prepared for the mediator to separate you and BRS into two different rooms. The mediator then meets with you and BRS separately to try to "mediate" or bring you and BRS to agreement on the problem or issue. The mediator speaks for you when meeting with BRS, and then comes back to you to share the BRS response.
- An agreement reached by you and BRS must be described in a written mediation agreement that is developed with the assistance of the mediator; copies of the agreement must be sent to both parties.
- The written agreement does not always get you exactly what you want. It lays out a process or steps that will help you and BRS arrive at a solution to your disagreement. Please remember that mediation is successful when there is compromise.
- Discussions that occur during mediation must be kept confidential and may not be used as evidence in a later hearing or litigation.
- BRS is not bound by terms in the mediation agreement if the issues resolved in a mediation agreement are later appealed in an Administrative Hearing or court.
- At any point in the mediation process, either party or the mediator may elect to stop the mediation; if this occurs, either party may pursue an Administrative Hearing.

What is an “Administrative Hearing”?

An Administrative Hearing is a formal, legal procedure. A “court reporter” will attend to keep a formal record of the Hearing. The Hearing is run by an impartial Hearing Officer, who must make a decision that is based on the requirements in:

- ◆ The State Plan for BRS,
- ◆ The Federal Rehabilitation Act, and Federal regulations, and
- ◆ The State statutes, regulations and policy governing the BRS program.

In an Administrative Hearing, you have the burden of proving by “a preponderance of the evidence” (formal legal definition) that the decision made by BRS that you disagree with does not comply with state or federal law or is clearly “erroneous” (incorrect).

In an Administrative Hearing, you will be given the opportunity to present additional evidence, information and witnesses to the impartial Hearing Officer. You also have the right to representation by legal counsel (lawyer), or other appropriate advocate of your choice, though any fee for this counselor or advocate is your sole responsibility.

You should know that BRS would be represented at the Administrative Hearing by legal counsel (lawyer) from the Attorney General’s office of the State of Connecticut.

How do I request an Administrative Hearing?

- A request for an Administrative Hearing must be in writing, and sent to the BRS Director at the BRS administrative offices in Hartford.
- The request must be received by BRS within 30 days of -
 - ◆ the date of notification of the BRS decision that you disagree with, **OR**
 - ◆ the mailing of the Informal Review decision, **OR**
 - ◆ Completion of mediation (mediation is considered “completed” when an agreement is signed or mediation is formally terminated; when there is neither an agreement or formal termination, it is considered completed at the last mediation session held).
- The Administrative Hearing must be held within 60 days of your request to review a BRS decision, unless you and BRS agree to an extension.

How do I prepare for an Administrative Hearing?

- You may request representation and legal counsel from CAP for the Administrative Hearing. CAP may decide they are not able to support your request, based on the subject matter or issue of your disagreement with BRS. You still have the option of getting your own counsel (lawyer, or advocate), and you will be responsible for any fee for this.

-
- You should be aware that you might be more comfortable obtaining counsel, or support from an advocate, to attend an Administrative Hearing (it may feel overwhelming or upsetting to be there without support).
 - You should be prepared to present evidence and information to support your disagreement with BRS.

What can I expect when I request an Administrative Hearing?

- The BRS Central Office staff will schedule the Administrative Hearing. You will receive formal notification of the Administrative Hearing, including date, time and place. The Hearing will be scheduled at an accessible location during work hours or at a time and place agreed upon by you and BRS, usually in the BRS office where you receive services.
- Information in your case file must be made available to you or your representative (*note: medical, psychological or other information which BRS determines may be harmful to you cannot be released directly to you, but must be provided to your designated representative*).
- You will be given the opportunity to present witnesses during the Hearing and to ask questions of all witnesses. You will also be able to examine other sources of information and evidence brought to the Hearing by BRS.
- Unless you make the request, until the Hearing officer makes a decision, BRS cannot suspend, reduce or terminate services being provided you, unless those services have been obtained through "...misrepresentation, fraud, collusion, or criminal conduct..." by you or your representative.
- The Hearing Officer will provide a written decision, containing a full report of the findings and the grounds (reasons) for the decision, to you or your representative and to the Director of BRS not more than 30 calendar days after the completion of the Hearing.
- Either you or BRS may request a review by the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services of the decision made by the impartial Hearing Officer. BRS must receive your request for this review within 20 days after the mailing of the impartial Hearing Officer's decision.
- Either you or BRS may appeal the Commissioner's decision (or Hearing Officer's decision if there was no review by the Commissioner) to state or federal court.

Other Resources that may help you with this process:

- ◆ Client Assistance Program (CAP) - 1-800-842-7303 or 1-860-297-4326.
- ◆ Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut - www.slscct.org or 1-800-453-3320 (1-860-344-0380, Middletown and Hartford areas).

BRS Services (Overview)

The vocational rehabilitation program offers a wide range of services to individuals who are eligible. The plan for services is developed based on the individual needs of each person that BRS serves. Therefore, the services provided to one person may be very different than services provided for another person.

As a general rule, in order for BRS to provide a service:

- 1. You must require the service in order for you to succeed in achieving your employment goal; and**
- 2. The service must be unavailable to you through other resources.**

You are encouraged to ask your counselor or other BRS staff if you have questions about the availability or need for any particular service. The following list includes the types of services that BRS may provide, if needed:

- Evaluation services to determine eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs. Depending on your situation, this may include such things as opportunities to work at a job on a trial basis, medical or psychological tests, or other ways to learn more about your disability and vocational rehabilitation need;
- Counseling, guidance, and information about career and employment decisions. (*See page 8 for “How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?”*);
- Referral to other service providers for services not available through this program;
- *Job placement services (see page 35)*;
- *Employment training (see page 44)* and other training services;
- *Physical and mental restoration services (see page 59)*;
- Expenses for additional costs that occur while participating in a BRS evaluation or an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE);
- Transportation services;

-
- Personal assistance services may be needed to assist the consumer in performing daily living activities as a result of the disability, which are necessary in order for the individual to achieve the job goal;
 - Interpreter or reader services;
 - Occupational licenses, tools, equipment, and initial stocks and supplies;
 - *Self-employment services* including technical assistance and consultation for the establishment of small business operations (*see page 41*);
 - *Rehabilitation technology* (*see page 52*);
 - *Transition planning from school to work* (*see page 50*);
 - *Job coaching and supported employment services* (*see page 39*);
 - Services to family members, if needed for the individual with a disability to achieve the employment goal; and
 - *Post-employment services* to assist individuals to keep their job, to get a new job, or to advance in their job (*see page 43*).

Job Placement Services

What Are Job Placement Services?

When you and your counselor decide that you are ready to find a job, your counselor will work with you to find employment or arrange for other services, if necessary to help you get a job.

Looking for work requires a full-time effort. To be successful in finding the job you want, it will be important for you to do your part. The more job-hunting you do, the better your chances of finding work. Be sure to ask family and friends whether they know of any job openings, contact the nearest Department of Labor's *Connecticut Works/One-Stop Career Center*, and check the "Help Wanted" section of the newspaper and Internet.

There are a number of services that BRS may provide to assist you with placement, depending on your needs. These services may be provided directly by BRS staff or through other agencies.

- **Interview Preparedness Training** - This training assists with interviewing skills, resume writing and application techniques to help you prepare for your job search. Interview preparedness training may be individual assistance or provided as part of a class.
- **Individual Placement Assistance** - Your counselor or another agency may help you identify local employers who might have job openings in your area of interest or advise you on interviewing and resume writing. If needed, arrangements can be made for someone to accompany you to interviews.
- **Job Clubs** - Job clubs are group sessions which provide information on current local job openings, follow-up with employers and ongoing support.

-
- **Work Evaluation-** A work evaluation is an opportunity for you to try out a real job to determine if you are suited to a particular type of work. A trained evaluator will go with you to assist you in understanding the job and to observe your performance. The assessment usually lasts no more than 40 hours. The employer may offer you a job if you perform well during the assessment.

Can BRS Continue to Provide Assistance after I'm Working?

- Your BRS counselor will maintain contact with you during your first 90 days on the job or longer, if necessary, to make sure your job is satisfactory. With your permission, your counselor may contact your supervisor to discuss your progress on the job.
- BRS can provide technical assistance to you and your employer to identify ways to modify the job site so you can perform better. This may include special equipment or rearranging the work site.
- BRS can provide post-employment services that assist you in retaining the job or finding another job in the same or related field. Usually these services are offered if you have a problem, caused by your disability, that affects your work.

Work Evaluation

What Is a Work Evaluation?

A work evaluation is an opportunity for you to try one or more real jobs, to see how those jobs match your interests and availability of job opportunities. The choice of jobs will be based on your interests, abilities, and needs. Evaluations may vary in length, depending on your particular situation, but usually last for 40 hours over a two-week period. You may be paid for the work you do during the evaluation, usually at the minimum wage.

Most of the time during this assessment, an evaluator will be with you, to see how you do on the job. He or she will look at many aspects of your job performance, such as your work skills, behaviors, relationships with the boss and co-workers, attendance, and work tolerance. From the experience, you will have the chance to see how you like the job and how well you perform the duties. Sometimes, a work evaluation may be set up with an employer who has a job opening, and if they are satisfied with your work, you may be offered a job. After the evaluation is finished, you and your counselor will get a report from the evaluator explaining how you did, whether the job seems suitable for you, and whether you will need other services to be successful.

What Is Important for Me to Know and Do?

When it is agreed that you need a work evaluation, your counselor can help you select a community agency who can set up an evaluation that will best meet your needs. Before this assessment begins, you need to be involved with the decision about the type of job you will do during the evaluation. It is important that you let your BRS counselor and the evaluator know about anything that will help them find the right place to do the work evaluation. You need to let them know about your interests and abilities, as well as any concerns or preferences you may have about your work schedule, transportation, pay requirements, government benefits you may receive, disability-related needs, work environment, location of the job, or any other information that will help in finding an evaluation site that will best suit you. If you know of particular places you would like to work, share this with your counselor.

Before and during the evaluation, it is important for you to understand what is expected of you. Good attendance at planning meetings and at work, arriving on time, proper clothing and getting along with the boss and co-workers will always be important. In addition, the particular job where you are assessed will probably have other requirements that you will need to know.

Finally, it is important for you to ask any questions that you may have and to provide feedback during the process.

Job Coaching and Supported Employment

What Is Job Coaching?

A job coach is a person who provides the support you need to keep a job in the community. You may need the job coach only for a limited period of time or you may need support from a job coach on an ongoing basis (which BRS calls “supported employment”).

A job coach may provide the following services:

- help your employer train you on the skills needed for the job;
- help you work with supervisors and co-workers;
- help you learn how to use transportation for going to work;
- help you to know what is expected of you on the job; and
- provide assistance if the work becomes too difficult for you or if other problems arise that affect your work.

Sometimes the job coach may work with your employer to teach him/her how to provide support to you. A job coach will usually meet with you at work, but may meet with you off the job, if that is appropriate and more comfortable for you.

What Is Supported Employment?

Supported employment is a regular job in the community with the supports (usually job coaching) to help you keep the job. It is designed for persons who, because of a significant disability, are expected to need supports for as long as they remain employed. The amount of support you would receive on a daily or weekly basis will depend on your particular needs.

BRS is able to provide these services only on a time-limited basis. Because people who are in supported employment will need long-term supports, plans must be made for who will provide the job coaching or other supports after BRS services are finished. In fact, the law requires that these plans be made *before* someone starts in supported employment. Therefore, it is very important that you work with your counselor to apply for other services that may be available to provide the ongoing support after the BRS services are completed. Examples of resources that may be available to provide these ongoing supports are the Department of Developmental Services (DDS - formerly the Department of Mental Retardation), the

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), Employment Opportunities Program (EOP), Social Security Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE), natural supports from an employer and family support.

What Else Is Important for Me to Know?

Job coaching and supported employment should be designed to meet your individual needs for keeping your job. The way BRS can set up job coaching is quite flexible. Some people may need more or different kinds of support than others. Some people work better with certain job coaches than others (for example, you may feel much more comfortable working with a female or male job coach). It is important that you let your BRS counselor know if you have specific needs in the amount or type of services that you receive. If you have any problems or concerns in working with your job coach, you should inform the BRS counselor.

Self-Employment Services

What Is Self-Employment?

Self-employment is a type of work where you own and operate your own business. It may be a business that you operate out of your home. It may also be called a small business enterprise or a micro-business enterprise.

Do I Qualify for Self-Employment Services?

If your employment goal is to be self-employed or to establish a small business enterprise, BRS may be able to assist you with establishing or maintaining the business.

In general, setting up your own business will require a significant commitment of your time and resources to be a success. The Bureau may be able to help you in the development of self-employment or a small business enterprise under the following conditions:

- You must develop a business plan, and it must be approved by the Connecticut Small Business Development Center (CSBDC) as an economically viable proposal. An alternate small business resource acceptable to both you and your counselor may be used instead of the CSBDC.
- Prior to providing services under an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with a goal of self-employment, the Bureau must agree to both the goal and the business plan. It will be important for you and your counselor to discuss how you will decide what defines a successful business.
- The Bureau generally limits its contribution toward establishing a small business (excluding training costs and disability-related vehicle and/or work site modifications) to \$10,000 for businesses that are expected to have a net income at or above the amount recognized by the Social Security Administration as

substantial gainful activity (SGA) after two years in operation. For those businesses that are expected to have a lower income, the limit is \$5,000. **Check with your counselor to verify the SGA amount as it may vary each year.**

- You will be required to make a contribution toward the business, valued at 10% of the Bureau's assistance. Your contribution may be in cash, in-kind labor, and/or materials.
- Self-employment services provided by BRS are limited to start-up services and goods. Examples of start-up services might include business consultants, bookkeeping, advertising, initial stock, insurance, permits, fees, equipment, supplies, rent, utilities, transportation, telephone and postage.

Once the small business enterprise is operating:

- Your counselor will visit the business site and/or be in contact with you to see how the business is going. Before BRS closes your case with the agency, you and your counselor will need to decide whether you still agree that the business is or will be successful.
- If you need additional assistance with your business, the Small Business Development Counseling Center offers ongoing counseling and workshops. *For more information, call toll free: 855-428-7232 or go to www.ctsbdc.org.*

Post-Employment Services

What Are Post-Employment Services?

Post-employment services may be provided to you after your case has been closed to help you retain or advance in your current job, or find another job in the same or related field. Usually services are offered if you have a problem related to your disability that affects your work.

When Am I Eligible for Post-Employment Services?

If you have received services from BRS and your case has been closed recently because you were working, you might be eligible. If you find you are having trouble with your job, are unable to advance in your job, or have lost your job, and you think it is because of your disability, you should contact your BRS counselor to inquire about post-employment services.

Will I Have to Go Through Exams or Tests Again?

In general, you will not have to redo exams or tests if you are being considered for post-employment services. You are still considered eligible to receive services from BRS based on the information already in your case record. That information can usually be used to determine what services you need.

However, if your disability has changed, or if your circumstances and job goals have significantly changed, you may need to reapply for services. At that time, additional exams or tests may be necessary.

Employment Training

What Is Employment Training?

Employment Training is the means by which a person learns the skills needed to do a particular job or type of work. Examples include:

- work evaluations;
- on-the-job training;
- short-term specific skill training;
- internships;
- volunteer work;
- vocational/technical school; and
- college training.

Can BRS Help with Employment Training?

BRS may help, if training is needed for you to achieve the job goal, and if BRS has agreed to help you with this as part of your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The type of training BRS will support depends on your abilities and interests, information about the job market and research on how most people start the kind of work you want to do.

What Is Expected of Me?

1. You and your counselor must agree on your employment goal and whether training is needed to achieve it.
2. You need to be accepted for admission into the training program or school you will attend.
3. If you are applying to a college or other post-secondary institution, you must apply for financial aid and follow the school's procedures and timetables. Please go to the section entitled "*Financial Aid for Post-Secondary Education*" in this booklet for further details.

-
4. You need to advise BRS of any disability-related needs that you will have in attending the program.
 5. You must maintain the performance requirements of the school or program to remain in good standing.
 6. You need to discuss any significant changes with your BRS counselor *beforehand* as your IPE may need to be revised.
 7. You must provide BRS with copies of your grades or progress reports.

Financial Aid for Post-Secondary Education

Why Apply for Financial Aid?

In order for BRS to determine any possible financial contribution to your post secondary training, you must apply for financial aid. By law, BRS may not contribute its funds toward your program until other available resources, as identified by the financial aid office of your school, are applied.

What Are the Steps in Applying?

1. Check with the financial aid office (FAO) of the school to which you are applying, to find out what the procedure is for that school. **Make sure that you submit your financial aid forms by the deadline of your FAO.**
 - A. **New Students:** Obtain and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and mail it to the Federal Student Aid Center. The FAFSA can be completed on line at www.fafsa.ed.gov/. The FAFSA should be available from your high school guidance office, or your college financial aid office.
 - B. **Continuing Students:** You should receive a FAFSA renewal form each year directly from the Federal Student Aid Center in December or early January. Fill it out and return it as quickly as possible. If you do not receive the update form by mid-January, contact you school's FAO.
 - C. Fill out and submit any other forms required by the school's FAO.
2. In about four weeks, you will receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) from the Federal Student Aid Center. If any errors are noted, consult with the school FAO before returning the corrected version to the center.
3. Fill out the student section of the SAR and submit it to the school FAO and meet with the financial aid officer or one of the assistants. Let them know about any special circumstances, costs, or needs you may have. Also, let the financial aid

officer know that you are a consumer with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and that they can expect to receive a BRS Client-Student Financial Information Exchange Form (VR-21) from your counselor.

The VR-21 is the form used by BRS and the FAO to share information to determine the amount of your school expenses and your resources. Any amount of financial assistance provided by the Bureau will be based on the information included on this form. Your BRS counselor will ask you to sign the form at the time that you mutually agree upon an employment plan that requires post-secondary training. You must sign a new VR-21 each year that you are in school or if you change schools.

4. The FAO officer will review all data received and send you an award letter. Review all figures, including the amount of your student/family contribution. If you do not agree with the figures, contact the FAO for reconsideration. Note that BRS does not require that you take out student loans to be considered for financial sponsorship, even when the FAO identifies them as part of your financial package. However, if you have defaulted on a prior student loan, this may affect your award and BRS sponsorship. You should discuss defaulted student loans with the FAO officer and your BRS counselor as soon as possible.
5. Your completed VR-21 is mailed to the BRS counselor by the FAO.
6. Generally, the contribution that BRS will offer toward education expenses will be limited to no more than the costs of attending a commensurate program in the State Community College system (SCC). For those in baccalaureate programs, that limit will generally apply for the first two years unless the SCC cannot offer full time transferable pre-requisites. In such cases, once the SCC can no longer offer commensurate training the contribution that BRS will offer toward general education expenses will be no greater than the cost of attending a commensurate program in the State University System.
7. The BRS counselor will meet with you to discuss your award package and how BRS may assist in helping to meet the costs of attending school. If you do not agree with the need and resource figures as presented on the VR-21, you may

request a review of the BRS contribution. If you have evidence that you (or your family) are unable to meet the student/family contribution, you should bring this to the attention of your counselor.

8. Disability-related expenses are looked at separately from general educational expenses. It will be helpful if you can identify, as much as possible, whatever disability-related services you will need and their estimated costs. BRS will not require you to apply the family or student contribution identified by the FAO to separate disability-related educational expenses.

What Can I Do to Help Make this Process Work?

1. Keep copies of all forms and correspondence related to your financial aid application.
2. It is your responsibility to meet the deadlines established by the school for financial aid. If you miss the deadline because of your inaction, BRS may not be responsible for assisting you with schooling costs.
3. If you have any questions, call your BRS counselor immediately.

For further information about the federal student financial aid program, you may contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center, U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-433-3243.

On-the-Job Training

Can BRS Help Me to Find a Job Where I Can Also Learn a Skill or a Trade?

Yes, if training is necessary for you to achieve the job goal that you and your counselor have agreed to in your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), BRS will assist you to obtain the skills you require to be successful in employment. An alternative to formal classroom training is to learn the skills you need while working at the job you desire. This is called on-the-job training (OJT). You and your counselor will need to fully discuss the pros and cons of you learning the required skills in this manner.

How Do I Know If an OJT Will Work For Me?

Once a job goal has been agreed upon and it is determined that you require training to obtain the skills you need to be successful in that job, you and your counselor will begin the discussion of how you can best learn the skills. If your job goal is one that does not require formal education, you and your counselor can explore the possibility of developing an on-the-job training site.

How Does an OJT Work?

It is not always easy to find an employer who is willing to train workers on the job. Therefore, locating a job site may take considerable effort for you, your counselor, and/or other job development professionals.

Once it is agreed that this employer can offer you the skills you need to be successful at your job goal, a written contract will be developed between you, the employer, and BRS. Included in this contract will be the hourly wages you will receive from the employer, the hours of training you will receive, and the length of time it will take for you to obtain entry-level skills. In an OJT, BRS could reimburse the employer for the following: the time he/she spends with you to teach you the job; your wages during the contract period; or a combination of both.

Transition from School to Work

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services can help students who are eligible for BRS transition from school to work.

What Can BRS Do While I Am Still in High School?

BRS can help with your transition out of high school. We prefer to work with you in your next to last year of school, but in some cases, we can start as early as age 14. Your parents or legal guardian will have to help if you are younger than 18. BRS can provide the following services:

- Initiate and complete the BRS referral process to determine your eligibility for services, prior to graduation;
- Get to know you and your family so you are comfortable in maintaining a relationship with your BRS counselor while you are still in high school. After graduation, your counselor will help you and your family understand how the services available from BRS differ from the the services your school was required to provide;
- Consult on curricula (course content) that will help you prepare for employment, post-secondary education and/or independent living;
- Participate in Planning and Placement Team meetings during the last few years of high school to assist in developing appropriate transition goals and objectives. If you are interested in having your counselor attend any of these meetings, it will be important to give your counselor sufficient notice of the meeting time to ensure that she or he is available;
- Consult with you, your family and school staff to help promote employment experiences while you are still in school;
- Help you and your family become familiar with planning for and accessing needed employment-related adult service programs;

-
- Help you and your family learn more about your disability and what jobs you may be able to pursue:
 - Help you and your family learn about Assistive Technology (AT);
 - Refer you and your family to advocacy organizations which can help you to advocate effectively for needed services; and
 - Develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that specifies what services and supports BRS will provide for you. The IPE also outlines your responsibilities as you take steps towards achieving a successful employment outcome.

How Do I Start to Work with BRS?

You may call the BRS office nearest to your home (*see the list on page 60*) and ask to speak to a vocational rehabilitation counselor. If you feel more comfortable, your teacher, guidance counselor, parent or other adult can call for you.

Please review the **School to Work** section on the BRS Website at www.ct.gov/brs. It provides detailed information for students, parents, and teachers to help you through the process so that you will have an effective transition from school to work.

Rehabilitation Technology

What Is Rehabilitation Technology?

Rehabilitation technology is the evaluation and use of devices that assist individuals with disabilities to maintain or improve their ability to function. The term also includes any services needed to test, try, or learn the use of the devices. In vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitation technology is used for the purpose of assisting individuals to work more independently or to participate more independently in an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) leading to competitive employment. There are many different kinds of technology devices. Some are simple and easy to use, such as a wide grip pencil, a telephone with large buttons, a calculator with large keys, a writing guide for a sheet of paper, a magnifier, or an adapted keyboard. Others are more complex and may require training to use. Examples of complex items include a computer with voice recognition software and other communication devices, a power wheelchair or scooter, prosthetic and orthotic devices (artificial limbs, braces), and motor vehicle modifications.

Your BRS counselor will work with you to determine whether you need any rehabilitation technology devices or services. An evaluation by a technology specialist (an expert outside of BRS) may be provided to assist you in learning what technology is available and how it might improve your functioning as you think about your career plans and goals, or how specific job functions can be accommodated.

What Is the Process to Get Rehabilitation Technology Services?

1. In your IPE, you and your counselor agree that you need technology. If you need a simple device, your counselor may, in most cases, buy it quickly and easily.
2. When you and your counselor decide that you need a rehabilitation technology consultation, your counselor will contact the BRS consultant for a referral to a technology specialist. Arrangements will be made for the technology specialist to meet and evaluate you in your home, school, or place of employment.
3. During the meeting, the technology specialist will talk with you about your specific needs and employment goals and may ask you to do some tasks to determine your level of functioning.

-
4. After the meeting, the technology specialist will write a report to your counselor describing his/her findings and recommendations.
 5. Your counselor will share the report with you and you will have an opportunity to ask any questions that you may have about the report. Once you and your counselor agree that the recommendations are necessary for your IPE to be successful, arrangements will be made to purchase the device or arrange for the service. The length of time it will take to receive the equipment depends on the type of technology, the availability and the purchase process. Customized devices (designed and manufactured especially to fit you) will take more time. BRS will also usually need to get competitive bids for higher cost purchases, which will increase the time required.
 6. BRS will try to accommodate your preferences and choices as much as possible. If you have a preferred product or vendor you'd like to try, tell your counselor.
 7. In some instances you may need training to learn how to use the equipment. You and your counselor can arrange for you to learn how to use the device once you receive the equipment. It will be your responsibility to cooperate with the training, to practice using the new device or technology and to complete all assignments.

What If I Have Questions or Concerns about My Rehabilitation Technology?

Your counselor and the BRS central office consultant for technology are the key persons you can go to for answers regarding rehabilitation technology.

Home Modifications

What Are Home Modifications?

Home modifications are changes to the structure of your home that allow you to work more independently and participate in your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that leads to work. Examples of home modifications include installing a ramp or a lift, or altering a doorway so that you can enter and exit your home unassisted. They may also include bathroom modifications or other alterations needed for you to achieve your employment goal. If you are self-employed, modifications to your place of business may also be provided, if needed, to allow you to perform your work more independently.

Your BRS counselor will work with you to determine if home modifications are a necessary part of your IPE. The length of time for this service to be completed may vary widely, depending on the complexity of the modification and the availability of contractors.

What Is the Procedure to Have My Home Modified?

1. Once you request a home modification, your counselor and his or her supervisor will visit your home to evaluate your request and discuss options. If options other than a home modification appear more appropriate, your counselor will arrange the other options.
2. If a home modification appears to be the most appropriate action, your counselor will request that an architect be assigned. The architect will meet you and your counselor at your home to discuss the issue and possible solutions. The architect will submit a preliminary estimate based on the decided course of action.
3. All preliminary estimates and proposed drafts will be compared to the flexible cap (limit) within BRS. This limit helps BRS weigh the need for the home modification against a reasonable standard for the amount of the expenditure. BRS must be fiscally responsible as it administers services to all consumers with significant disabilities. BRS will explore all options before agreeing to home modifications.

-
4. The District Director must approve estimates and drafts of any proposed work if the home modification is warranted.
 5. If your request moves forward based on need to fulfill your IPE and the bureau's standard for reasonableness, BRS would follow the rules and guidelines for the home modification as spelled out in the BRS Policy Manual. The property owner must sign a consent to authorize BRS to make the needed modifications.
 6. The bureau will request competitive bids from qualified contractors. You may provide the names of contractors whom you would like to give an opportunity to bid. It takes about four weeks to close the bidding process. Generally, the lowest bidder is awarded the contract.
 7. For most jobs, the contractor will need to secure a permit from the building inspector in your town. The contractor will work directly with you to schedule and perform the specified work. The contractor is also responsible for obtaining an inspection by the Town/City Building Inspector. Once the work is completed, you, your counselor and the architect will inspect the work to make sure it was done according to the plans. You will be asked to sign a copy of the bill indicating that the work is suitable before BRS will pay the contractor. All work is guaranteed for one year after completion. Beyond that, you are responsible for regular maintenance and upkeep.
 8. If the District Director denies a request, estimate, or plan, the counselor will review other options with you and give you information about the Client Assistance Program if you wish to appeal the decision.

Obtaining a home modification is a very detailed process that will require your full involvement. If home modifications are a part of your IPE, you will receive a copy of the BRS Policy Manual legal requirements and guidance detailing the Home Modifications process that you may review with your counselor.

Vehicle Modifications

What Are Vehicle Modifications?

Vehicle modifications are any mechanical or structural changes to a passenger car or other motor vehicle that will permit an individual with a disability to safely drive or ride as a passenger, for the purpose of employment. Generally, modifications may be considered as part of your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) when accessible public transportation or other means are unavailable. The length of time for the process of getting a vehicle modified can vary widely depending on the complexity of the modifications needed.

What Is the Procedure For Having a Vehicle Modified?

1. The vehicle modification process through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is complex and involves an investment of time and money for you and BRS. Your BRS counselor oversees and expedites the process and responds to inquiries regarding vehicle modifications from you and the vendor who will do the modification. Your counselor also coordinates with the driver training consultant, the driver rehabilitation specialist, and the automotive engineering consultant to review, prescribe, approve, and evaluate your vehicle modification.
2. Your counselor will refer you to the Easter Seals Mobility Center in Meriden, CT to determine:
 - √ If you can drive or learn to drive;
 - √ Whether you can independently transfer from your wheelchair to the vehicle (if applicable);
 - √ The kind of modifications needed to meet your needs; and
 - √ The type of vehicle you should purchase for modification.

After this evaluation, the Mobility Center will prepare a comprehensive report. If it is determined that you can drive, the Mobility Center will prepare a comprehensive vehicle modification prescription.

3. You and your counselor will meet to develop your IPE. **If the recommended modifications are needed for you to achieve your employment goal, they will be included in your IPE.**

-
4. If you are not the owner of the vehicle to be modified, you will need to obtain written permission to use the modified vehicle for at least five years.
 5. Once your Employment Plan is approved, your BRS counselor will handle modifications or adaptive equipment prescribed by the Driver Training Unit (DTU) or the Easter Seal Mobility Center.
 6. The vehicle modification prescription will be sent to approved vendors* for competitive bid. It usually takes about three weeks to complete the bidding process. Generally, the lowest qualified bidder will be awarded the contract. If you want a qualified vendor who is not the lowest bidder to modify your vehicle, you will have to pay the difference between the lowest qualified bid and that of your preferred vendor.
** Approved Vendors – Vehicle modification vendors who have and keep certification through the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) Quality Assurance Program.*
 7. After the bid has been awarded, you may proceed to buy your vehicle. Most consumers buy a vehicle through the vehicle modification vendor. These vendors have new car dealer and used car dealer licenses through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).
 8. The vendor who is awarded the job will contact you to arrange to pick up your vehicle. The amount of time required to complete the job depends upon its complexity and the company's schedule. Basic van modifications take up to 60 days. You will be expected to travel at least once to the vendor's location for a "fitting" to position the equipment to best meet your needs. Upon completion, the Bureau's consulting automotive engineer will inspect your vehicle for compliance with the specified modifications and other requirements. You will also be asked to sign a statement verifying that the work is complete and satisfactory before BRS will pay the vendor.
 9. Upon completion of your vehicle modification, you must contact the Driver Training Unit to advise them of your availability for training and/or licensing.

-
10. The vehicle owner is responsible to maintain and insure the vehicle and the modifications. Equipment installed or modified by the vendor has a one year warranty. During the first 90 days of warranty coverage, minor adjustments or preventative maintenance will be performed by the vendor at no cost.

What If I Have Questions or Concerns about My Vehicle Modifications?

Your counselor is the key person that you can contact for answers.

Obtaining a vehicle modification is a very detailed process that will require your involvement. If a vehicle modification is a part of your employment plan, you will receive a copy of the Vehicle Modifications Handbook that you may review with your counselor.

Restoration Services

What Are Restoration Services?

Restoration services includes any form of recognized treatment for mental or physical impairments.

When Am I Eligible for Physical or Mental Restoration Services?

Under your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), restoration services may be provided if you need them in order to achieve your employment goal and if the treatment is not available to you through other resources such as your private insurance, Medicaid, Medicare or through the state mental health and addiction system. These services will be provided only if they are expected to substantially increase your ability to perform on the job within a reasonable period of time, which would generally be no longer than six months. All restoration services through BRS are time-limited.

The following are examples of restoration services that might be provided if you and your counselor agree they are required for you to attain your employment goal:

- Physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy or corrective surgery;
- Psychotherapy, cognitive training or behavioral treatment;
- Prosthetic and orthotic devices;
- Mobility devices, communication devices, eyeglasses and hearing aids;
- Necessary hospitalization in connection with surgery or treatment; and/or
- Special services for individuals with end-stage renal disease.

How Do I Find Out More about Restoration Services?

Your counselor will answer any questions you may have concerning restoration services and whether or not they are required as part of your IPE. If you and your counselor agree that restoration services are needed, they will be provided by recognized professionals who are licensed to practice their respective field or specialty.

BRS Central, Regional & Local Offices

Central Office

55 Farmington Avenue, 12th floor (*effective June 1, 2014*)

Hartford, CT 06105-3702

Telephone: 860-424-4840 or 4844; Fax: 860-424-4850

Toll Free in Connecticut: 800-537-2549

Video Phone: 860-920-7163

Northern Region

3580 Main Street, Hartford, CT 06120

Telephone: 860-723-1400 Fax: 860-566-4766

Video Phone: 860-920-7172 or 860-856-6000

Local Offices:

Danielson (*Killingly*): 860-412-7070

East Hartford (*Temporarily @ Hartford Office*): 860-723-1403 or 860-723-1416

Enfield: 860-899-3569

Manchester (*Willimantic*): 860-647-5960; Video Phone: 860-288-4870

New Britain: 860-612-3569

Southern Region

414 Chapel Street, Suite 301, New Haven, CT 06511

Telephone: 203-974-3000 Fax: 203-789-7850

Video Phone: 203-584-9840

Local Offices:

Ansonia: 203-732-1667

Middletown: 860-704-3070

New London: 860-439-7686

Norwich: 860-859-5720; Video Phone: 860-237-3525

Western Region

1057 Broad Street, Bridgeport, CT 06604

Telephone: 203-551-5500 Fax: 203-579-6903

Video Phone: 203-416-6761

Local Offices:

Danbury: 203-207-8990

Stamford: 203-251-9430

Torrington: 860-496-6990

Waterbury: 203-578-4550; Video Phone: 203-577-5319

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)
is a division of the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

DORS is an Equal Opportunity Affirmative Action Employer and offers its programs regardless of race, color, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, religion, age, sex, or marital status.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this handbook is available upon request in an alternate format.

If you need this report in an alternate format, please use the contact information listed below:

1-800-537-2549 (Toll-free in Connecticut only)

860-424-4871 (Voice)

860-920-7163 (Video Phone)

E-mail: evelyn.knight@ct.gov

Web Site: www.ct.gov/brs

DORS 12-01
Published April 2014
