



How to seek tuition sponsorship from the state VR agencies



ADVANCING JUSTICE. ADVOCATING INCLUSION.



Presenters



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About Disability Rights NJ

- Disability Rights New Jersey is the designated Protection and Advocacy agency for New Jersey
 - Each state was to designate an agency to receive federal funds to investigate and monitor facilities where individuals with developmental disabilities were located to ensure that they were not the subject of abuse and neglect
- We advocate for and advance the human, civil and legal rights of residents of New Jersey with disabilities



Client Assistance Program (CAP)

- CAP is a federally funded program designed to assist individuals seeking or receiving Vocational Rehabilitation, or VR, services who need assistance
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights to VR services, or you disagree with VR service decisions you may contact Disability Rights New Jersey



Learning Objectives

- Eligibility for VR services
- Requesting College Sponsorship
- The IPE Meeting
- Challenges at the IPE Meeting
- Concerns with IPE Development
- IPE for Tuition
- Financial Needs Test
- Comparable Benefits
- Timeline for applying for Tuition
- What to do if You Have Concerns



NJ's Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies

- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS)
- Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI)

Both VR agencies provide financial sponsorship for higher education, including vocational training, certificate programs, community college and four-year colleges and universities.



Eligibility for VR Services

DVRS

Individuals with physical, mental, cognitive, or other forms of disability who have a substantial impediment to employment may be eligible for DVRS services.

Individuals who receive SSI or SSDI are presumed eligible for DVRS services.

CBVI

Individuals who are blind, visually-impaired or deaf-blind Individuals who have a visual impairment and who need services to work may be eligible for CBVI VR services.

Individuals who receive SSI or SSDI for a visual impairment are presumed eligible for CBVI services.



Requesting College Sponsorship

- Once client has been found eligible for services
 - Request an IPE meeting to discuss the client's occupational goal
 - DVRS/CBVI have 90 days after determination of eligibility is made to create an IPE for the client.
- Client will need an employment goal that would require additional training, i.e., an undergraduate degree, a certificate, or graduate degree.



The IPE Meeting

- Notify DVRS/CBVI that you will be attending
 - Meeting may be in person or by zoom
- Client and representative attend the meeting
 - Client discusses their career goal with the counselor
 - Client will need to Identify training programs that they have researched
 - Discussion with counselor about career goal and objectives
- NOTE: to gain sponsorship for tuition, a degree will need to be a standard requirement for your occupational goal



Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

- The IPE is an important document that defines the services the VR agency agrees to provide the eligible individual. The IPE is not a contract, but it has significant weight if disagreements occur.
- The IPE must be reviewed at least annually and, if necessary, amended if there are significant changes to the employment goal, the VR services to be provided or service providers.
- Changes to the IPE do not take effect until agreed to by the individual and the VR counselor.



Basic Components of the IPE

- Employment Goal - *chosen by the individual.*
- VR services to be provided to achieve the employment goal, including appropriate AT and personal assistance services.
- VR transition services for eligible students or youth with disabilities.
- Timeline for when services start and for achieving the employment goal.
- Entity providing the VR services - *chosen by the individual.*
- Any costs the individual is responsible to contribute to VR services.



Common Problems at the IPE Meeting

- The VR agency may say they want to explore "guidance and counseling"
 - Gives time to explore career options, but does not provide tuition sponsorship
- VR agency may not agree with the career objective
 - Each VR client is to be given informed choice, including the ability to have a say and chose their employment goal. VR agency may seek to change career objective to meet their plan rather than what you are seeking



Common Problems with IPE Development

- VR agent "selects" an employment goal
 - Denial of Informed Choice, not allowing you to have a say in your employment goal
- VR agency may not include payments for tuition on the IPE
 - IPE may be generated with the proper employment goal; however they may not include tuition as a covered service
- VR agency may not agree to tuition if you have already enrolled
 - The VR agency may say you "unilaterally enrolled" without involving them
 - Sponsorship, if appropriate, could be for subsequent school year, but VR agency may be hesitant to do so



The IPE for Tuition

- The Individualized Plan of Employment will set forth the services the VR agency will be providing
 - An appropriate IPE will include a budget for the services the VR agency will be providing
- Two considerations for tuition
 - The Financial Needs Test
 - Comparable Benefits, i.e. need based scholarships and grants
- The IPE and budget should identify what portions are being covered by other benefits, what is being covered by the VR agency, and what, if any, is being covered by you



Financial Needs Test

- Generally, VR agencies are NOT required by federal law to have a financial needs test; however, many do. 34 C.F.R. 361.54
 - DVRS and CBVI *both* use financial needs tests to determine if an individual needs to contribute to the cost of their VR services.
 - Parental income is considered in the financial needs test for individuals under 22 years.
 - Parental income is *not* considered for individuals 22 years of age or older on January 1 of the year services are scheduled, only personal income, or a spouse's income.



DVRS Financial Needs Test

B) Allowable income and liquid assets will be as follows:

Number in Family	Annual Income**	Weekly Income	Liquid Asset Allowance
1	\$45,080	\$867	\$40,000
2	\$60,970	\$1,173	\$45,000
3	\$76,860	\$1,478	\$50,000
4	\$92,750	\$1,784	\$55,000
5	\$108,640	\$2,089	\$60,000
6	\$124,530	\$2,395	\$65,000
7	\$140,420	\$2,700	\$70,000

*The most recent allowable income limits for services with DVRS



Financial Needs Test - SSI/SSDI Recipients

- SSI/SSDI clients are EXEMPT from and NOT subject to a financial needs test. 34 CFR 361.54(b)(3)(ii).
- SSI/SSDI clients are also NOT required to financially contribute for their VR services. 34 CFR 361.54(b)(3)(ii).



Comparable Benefits

- Comparable benefits – are services or benefits provided, in whole or in part, by another public agency, health insurance, or as an employee benefit. e.g., Pell grants, Medicaid.
- VR agencies are required to check whether other funding sources are available to provide “comparable benefits” (i.e., services) prior to funding a specific service.
- The comparable benefits must be presently available to the VR client.



What are NOT Comparable Benefits?

For Purposes of Higher Education these are NOT comparable benefits:

- Awards and Scholarships based on merit, and
- Student Loans

34 CFR 361.5(c)(8)(ii).



Timeline for requesting tuition sponsorship

- There are two timelines to be aware of
 - VR agency has 60 days from date of application to make an eligibility determination
 - VR agency has 90 days after eligibility to develop an IPE
 - Combined, it can be 150 days, or 6 months, from application to IPE being developed
- If you are starting school in August, you should start the process in January or February



What to do if you have concerns?

- If you have any concerns or problems during the application and eligibility phase, what can you do?
 - Contact your VR counselor for updates
 - Contact the Manager of the VR office you are working with for updates
 - Contact the Client Assistance Program





Questions



We're Here to Help:



ADVANCING JUSTICE. ADVOCATING INCLUSION.

New Jersey's designated Protection and Advocacy agency under federal law.



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