

IDVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Training Series Informed Choice – Part 1

Welcome

Welcome to IDVR's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Training. This program is provided by the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and Interwork Institute of San Diego State University. It is part of the Agency's effort to provide readily available training support to vocational rehabilitation counselors. For further information contact: shannon.wilcox@vr.idaho.gov.

Introduction

Throughout each stage of the VR process, it is important that you understand and apply the concepts of informed choice. Informed choice is based on the principle that applicants and individuals eligible for VR services are full and active partners in the VR process and are able to make meaningful and informed choices throughout the life of their case.

Applicants and eligible individuals, with the benefit of counseling, guidance, and support from the counselor, make decisions regarding their employment goal, services, and service provision (providers, settings, and methods) throughout their VR case. VR program customer choices are not binding but must be respected by the counselor and taken into serious consideration in all stages of the VR process.

1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act

Requirements for informed choice for vocational rehabilitation services first appeared in the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.

Section 2(c)(1) of the Act states,

“It is the policy of the United States that all programs, projects, and activities receiving assistance under the Act shall be carried out in a manner consistent with the principles of respect for individual dignity, personal responsibility, self-determination, and pursuit of meaningful careers, based on informed choice, for individuals with disabilities.”

The term “informed choice” appeared 22 times throughout the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 and was affirmed throughout the 1998 Amendments, and most recently in the 2014 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act found in Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Why Informed Choice?

Given that employment is a key to independence and improved quality of life for people with disabilities, choice in the selection of employment goals and rehabilitation services necessary to meet those goals is an important element for empowering persons with disabilities.

Working with VR counselors who apply their professional judgment, VR customers consider applicable laws, regulations, policies, and sound planning based on the customer's circumstances.

Expanding the customer's role in the decision-making process is an effective way to foster independence and self-reliance. It is presumed that an individual's skills and abilities to exercise informed choice can be developed through the use of self-assessment techniques, training, and experience in goal setting, decision-making, and customer education.

New Section: Requirements of Informed Choice

Customer Decisions

Per RSA Policy Directive-PD-01-03, the state VR agency must provide customers with opportunities to exercise informed choice throughout the VR process, including making decisions about the employment goal, VR services, VR service providers, settings for employment and service provision, and methods for procuring services.

VR Agency Requirements

IDVR agency must provide information, support, and assistance needed by the individual. The agency must also implement policies, procedures, and practices, and develop resources which enable individuals to exercise informed choice.

Implementing Informed Choice

The decision-making process considers the individual's values and characteristics, the availability of resources and alternatives, and general economic conditions. Implementing informed choice requires:

- Communicating clearly in the method most effective for the customer (for example, a sign language or foreign language interpreter may be required for effective communication).
- Gathering and understanding information,
- Setting goals

- Making decisions, and
- Following through with decisions.

Responsibilities for Informed Choice

Implementing informed choice requires effort from both the counselor and the customer. The customer should take primary responsibility for making and carrying out decisions.

Counselor Responsibilities

Counselors provide counseling and guidance to assist customers in navigating the VR system. They facilitate the customer's ability to obtain information, gain self-knowledge, understand the world of work, and develop skills to make meaningful choices that will result in successful employment.

To assist customers in making informed choices, VR counselors can:

- Take a customer-centered approach: work together, listen carefully and communicate clearly,
- Encourage and support the customer to become a partner and create channels for customer feedback,
- Assist the customer to set goals, make plans and follow through with decisions,
- Promote awareness of services, service goals, service providers and methods of procuring services

Explain that “informed” choices are based on a pool of options. For example, helping the customer to understand that a weak labor market, availability of funds and resources, or legalities may limit some choices.

- VR counselors should ensure that the customer understands that VR cannot support a “hobby” occupation (for example, one in which the net income will not solely support the customer or significantly assist them financially when there are other sources of income).
- VR counselors must recognize that, in a partnership, the customer has an equal responsibility to research, identify and analyze options,
- VR counselors should review relevant options and their implications to assist the customer in making meaningful choices, and
- Use accommodations, high tech solutions, family members and other resources to assist customers with severe disabilities to make informed choices.

Customer Responsibilities

To the extent of their ability, customers have the responsibility to:

- Research and obtain information from a variety of sources in order to make informed choices.
- Be an active customer in the rehabilitation process.
- Be open to what is possible.
- Make informed career choices consistent with identified strengths, resources, and abilities.
- Use problem solving strategies to make informed choices.
- Make choices within the available options.
- Explore other options when VR is not able to support a choice.
- Follow through with agreed-upon choices.
- Take responsibility for choices.

Knowledge Check

To check your understanding of this lesson, click this [link](#) and answer the question. You must successfully complete the knowledge check to move on to the next module.

Lesson Completed

You have now completed the first part of the lesson for this module.