

Chapter 102: Informed Choice

Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Policy and Procedures Manual

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Section I. Definitions

- A. **“Informed choice”** means the consumer is aware of all the information and options available with regard to their rehabilitation. It is a concept that guides all decision-making that occurs for a consumer during the VR process. Consumers must be an equal partner in all decisions made concerning assessment(s), employment goal, VR services necessary to achieve the employment goal, choice of other service providers as well as the way to obtain services. Through informed choice, the consumer participates fully in considering and choosing options for assessment, training and services to obtain employment and options to explore career advancement and upward mobility.

Section II. Informed Choice Guidelines

- A. Informed choice does not mean unlimited choice. A consumer’s choices are limited by several factors:
1. The choice must relate to and be necessary to achieving an employment outcome.
 2. The choice must be made pursuant to all Federal, State and VR rules and policies related to purchasing and providing services.
- B. When deciding what goods and services will be provided, the following will be part of the informed choice decision:
1. Cost, accessibility and duration of potential services;
 2. Customer satisfaction with those services to the extent that information relating to customer satisfaction is available;
 3. Qualifications of potential service providers;
 3. Types of services offered by the potential providers;
 4. Degree to which services are provided in integrated settings;
 5. Outcomes achieved by individuals working with service providers, to the extent that such information is available.

Section III. General Policy

- A. The Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) will provide each applicant, including persons who are receiving services during an extended evaluation, and each eligible person the opportunity to make informed choices throughout the vocational rehabilitation process. VR, in consultation with its State Rehabilitation Council, shall design policies and procedures and guidance materials that enable each person to make an informed choice with regard to the selection of a long-term vocational goal, vocational rehabilitation services, and service providers.
- B. The consumer shall be informed of the policies and procedures and guidance materials delivered through appropriate modes of communication. They will include, as applicable, information concerning the availability and scope of informed choice, the way informed choice may be exercised, and the availability of support services for consumers with cognitive or other disabilities who require assistance in exercising informed choice.

- C. In developing both an employment goal and a consumer's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), VR shall provide or assist the person to acquire information necessary to make an informed choice about specific services that are needed to achieve the consumer's vocational goal. This information shall include, but shall not be limited to:
 - 1. Cost, accessibility, and duration of potential services;
 - 2. Consumer satisfaction with those services to the extent that information relating to consumer satisfaction is available; and
 - 3. The qualifications of potential service providers, the types of services offered by those providers, and the degree to which services are provided in integrated settings.

- D. The IPE shall include documentation regarding the choices made. (See Chapter 203, Individualized Plan for Employment) In providing or assisting the consumer in acquiring the information above, VR may use, but shall not be limited to, the following methods or sources of information:
 - 1. Lists of services and service providers;
 - 2. Periodic consumer satisfaction surveys and reports, to the extent they are available;
 - 3. Referrals to other consumers, consumer groups, or disability advisory councils qualified to discuss services or service providers;
 - 4. Relevant accreditation, certification, or other information relating to the qualifications of service providers;
 - 5. Cost, accessibility, and duration of services; and
 - 6. Degree to which services are provided in integrated settings.

- E. In providing or assisting the person in acquiring the information above, VR may use, but shall not be limited to, the following methods or sources of information:
 - 1. Options for services and service providers;
 - 2. Periodic consumer satisfaction surveys and reports, to the extent they are available;
 - 3. Referrals to other consumers, consumer groups, or disability advisory councils qualified to discuss services or service providers;
 - 4. Relevant accreditation, certification, or other information relating to the qualifications of service providers;
 - 5. Cost, accessibility, and duration of services; and
 - 6. Degree to which services are provided in integrated settings.

Section IV. Facilitation of Informed Choice Decision-Making

Counselor Participation

- A. In the implementation of the practice and philosophy of informed choice, the counselor listens, guides, questions and encourages the consumer to actively participate in and make meaningful choices in their VR program. Informed choice is a collaborative decision-making process. The counselor's participation includes:

1. Supporting the consumer's choice-making process;
2. Identifying the range of services offered by VR;
3. Providing information about resources, services and vendors;
4. Encouraging the consumer to explore alternatives they may not have considered;
5. Working with the consumer to analyze the services needed to achieve a job goal;
6. Reviewing any limitation on VR services and expenditures; and
7. Helping to identify other means of accessing and obtaining services that VR is unable to provide.

Opportunities for Consumer Choice

- B. There are opportunities for consumers to make choices throughout the VR process. Some examples at each stage of the process include:
1. **Intake:** Choosing to participate in a group process versus an individual orientation or deciding whether VR services are appropriate based on an understanding of the eligibility criteria;
 2. **Assessment:** Deciding what types of assessments will be used (e.g., paper and pencil testing, progressive employment) to help the consumer identify an employment goal that is based on an understanding of the different types of assessments that are available, how assessment results assist in the career planning process and a sharing of assessment results to the extent possible;
 3. **Eligibility:** Identifying and understanding barriers and impediments to employment and functional limitations of the consumer's disability on possible jobs;
 4. **IPE Development:** Choosing a vocational goal/career plan and deciding the services needed to reach that goal, and choosing service providers and identifying comparable benefits available to help the consumer reached their vocational goal;
 5. **Employment:** Choosing the path to employment among options such as progressive employment, work experiences, work searches, job shadowing, and on the job training, and finally selecting a job and employer;
 6. **Closure:** Agreeing whether to close their VR case.

Limitations on Consumer Choice

- C. There are some situations where the counselor cannot support the consumer's choice, including situations where:
1. There is documented evidence the decision will not lead to an employment outcome. If a goal is incompatible with the consumer's abilities, capabilities and limitations and no accommodation, rehabilitation technology or other service can bridge the gap, the counselor can say no.
 2. Relevant labor market information indicates that the employment goal or services will not lead to an employment outcome.
 3. The consumer wants VR to pay for a service, but the service is not required to achieve employment.

4. The choice may be harmful to the consumer or others. The counselor has a responsibility to ensure that the consumer understands the consequences of their decision.
5. The choice is contrary to federal or state law or considered to be an inappropriate use of state funds.

Steps in the Informed Choice Process

- D. There is no linear, precise process to follow in making the often-complex decisions around employment goals and the services required to meet those goals. Informed choice is a collaborative decision-making process between the consumer and the counselor. Consumers bring diverse experiences in choice making, for example, cultural attitudes about disability may limit access to information about options and responsibilities. Often the consumer will need to develop decision making skills. The counselor must clearly communicate both consumer and VR responsibilities, expectations and boundaries up front. Without this, the door is left open for confusion and misunderstanding as to how VR service are intended to assist consumers to achieve employment outcomes.
- E. When guiding consumers, the following are general steps that are part of the informed choice process:
 1. Analyze needs
 2. Gather information or learn how to gather information from a variety of sources
 3. Involve supports as appropriate, including family, friends and others
 4. Outline options
 5. Evaluate the information
 6. Select from among the options and make a choice
 7. Assume the responsibility for the outcome of the choice
 8. Evaluate the results of the choice