

**CONSUMER HANDBOOK**

Maine Department of Labor

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

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# Introduction

This handbook is designed to provide you general information about the Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). BRS works to bring about full access to employment, independence and community integration for people with disabilities. The purpose of this handbook is to give you a basic understanding of the programs and services DBVI offers as well as an extensive overview of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program.

DBVI assists individuals who are blind or visually impaired to meet their employment and independence goals. The focus of DBVI is to use a holistic rehabilitation approach that helps people to meet their goals, build new skills, and improve their circumstances.

# DBVI Programs

### **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)**

DBVI’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program assists individuals who are blind or visually impaired in preparing for, engaging in, retaining, or advancing in employment consistent with their goals, aspirations, and their informed choice. Working with their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC), individuals identify a vocational goal and supporting services. Services may include individual counseling and guidance related to employment and adjustment to blindness issues, use of adaptive technology, low vision therapy, alternative skill training in communication (such as braille), instruction to develop independent travel skills (orientation and mobility), and instruction of daily living skills geared to being more self-sufficient.

To learn more, read section “[More about the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program](#_More_about_the)” on the next page.

### **Business Enterprise Program**

The Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facility Program, more commonly known as the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), may be an option for individuals who want to become independent self-employed managers. DBVI is the state licensing agency that administers this program. The federal and state laws governing this program require that candidates must be legally blind, at least eighteen years of age, a U.S. Citizen, and must complete our training program to become a Licensed Manager. These Licensed Managers are trained to run one of DBVI’s food service facilities as self-employed entrepreneurs. Maine has cafeterias, snack bars, vending machines and self-service facilities located in federal, state and municipal buildings throughout Maine. Qualified candidates are assigned to facilities as they become available.

For more information, please call 207-623-7964 or visit <https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dbvi/bep/index.shtml>.

### **Independent Living**

The independent Living (IL) Program provides services to individuals of all ages who are blind or visually impaired and whose primary goal is to remain as independent as possible. Those interested in pursuing IL services will work closely with an IL Case Manager to determine eligibility. Services may include information, referral, advocacy, counseling and skills training in activities of daily living, such as independent travel, cooking, using magnification and self-care. Services are designed to help individuals remain in their homes or supported living situation and participate in community life.

To learn more about this program please call 207-623-7948 or go to <https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dbvi/>.

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### **Education Services for Children**

Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children (ESBVIC) is a statewide program which provides assessment, instruction, and consultation to blind and visually impaired children birth through 22, their families and school personnel. Our multidisciplinary staff, in conjunction with teachers from the visually impaired, work with parents and schools to develop and implement an individualized education program.

### **More about the Vocational Rehabilitation Program**

The public vocational rehabilitation program is the result of a federal law, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This 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, and the cost is shared by both the state and federal governments. The goal of the program is to assist individuals with significant disabilities to prepare for, engage in, retain, or advance employment. You may be referred to the program by any source in the community or you may contact the program directly yourself. There are offices throughout the state to serve you in your local community.

# Will I be eligible for DBVI VR services?

Once you’ve made the decision to [apply for services with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dbvi/index.shtml) , the next step is to work closely with your VR Counselor to determine your eligibility. Once your application has been received, you will be contacted to schedule an intake. Information is gathered at the intake from you regarding how your disability impedes your ability to work, and if you require vocational rehabilitation services to attain, maintain, or advance in employment.

Our goal is to make your eligibility determination as quickly as possible with the minimum amount of documentation. The law requires that this process be completed within 60 days. If there is a need to exceed 60 days, a specific extension of time will be agreed upon by you and your VR Counselor.

The eligibility decision may be immediate if you are receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and you plan to go to work.

Occasionally it may be necessary for DBVI to arrange for medical tests or other assessments to determine your eligibility or priority under the Order of Selection. This would be at no cost to you. You are encouraged to be involved in how these assessments are done, including the selection of providers for these evaluations.

Examples of some types of DBVI assessments include:

* Collecting information about your history and any records that document your visual disability
* Psychological assessment
* Medical evaluations
* Talking with you to determine how your disability may impact employment
* Other evaluations that are determined to be necessary by you and your Counselor

Once you have been found eligible, the next step is the development of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Helpful Hints

\*Click here to view [DBVI’s rules](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dbvi/index.shtml) of the VR program.

\*Visit DBVI’s website to view the [application](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dbvi/index.shtml) or to complete an [on-line application](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=q6g_QX0gYkubzeoajy-GTkAh4-riwn5DoK0oDfWOGEJUMUUwRVQzRFExMDNTTUxKUTBPVElRVjhCTi4u).

\*Ask if you should bring anything to your appointments. When possible obtain medical or educational records that will be needed by DBVI.

# Informed Consumer Choice

Informed Consumer Choice is a concept that should guide all decision-making that occurs throughout your experience with Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). The Rehabilitation Act says that you are a full partner in all decisions made concerning:

* Your assessment
* Your employment goals
* Vocational Rehabilitation services
* The choice of service providers
* Ways of obtaining Vocational Rehabilitation services

Informed Choice also means that you are made aware of all the information and options available. If you need help understanding these options or support in carrying out these functions, you may ask your VR Counselor, a person you know, or an advocate from the [Client Assistance Program (CAP)](#_Contact_the_Client). See page 22.

It is important for you to work together with your VR Counselor and others who are assisting you to reach your employment goal. There are factors that influence choices such as: your abilities and capabilities, job market, legal and safety issues, cost effectiveness, and available financial resources, for example. Therefore, it is very important for you and your VR Counselor to explore career pathways that lead to meaningful employment outcomes.

Informed Consumer Choice is the cornerstone of your experience with DBVI. Discuss this partnership often with your VR Counselor.

# Developing an effective and meaningful Individualized Plan for Employment

### **What is an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)?**

An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is a mutually agreed upon document written by you and your VR Counselor (VRC) that describes a realistic employment goal for you and a plan for how you will reach that goal. It is the outcome of analyzing such things as your local labor market, previous work experience, career pathways, how your disability impacts your ability to work and the type of job in which you are interested in. The plan outlines how you will achieve employment with the assistance of vocational rehabilitation services. The IPE must be developed within 90 days after you have been found eligible for services. The IPE is developed in alignment with the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs, which is based on information that you have shared with your VRC and information gained through vocational planning. It will take into consideration your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests and informed choice. You are welcome to involve family, friends, members of your support network, advocates, or experts outside of DBVI as you develop your IPE.

**Helpful Hint**

\*It’s important for you to be engaged in all aspects of decision making.

\*Think about your employment interests prior to meeting your VR Counselor. Carefully think about what your likes, dislikes, strengths and needs are. Having ideas to discuss with your VR Counselor can help you get to know each other.

\*Some examples of abilities are communication, self-motivation, decision making,
working well under pressure and time management.

How do I develop an Individualized Plan for Employment that is right for me?

An IPE is developed by meeting with your VRC to discuss and explore your strengths, abilities, capabilities, career interests and informed choice. You may be referred to the *Career Exploration Workshop* to explore vocational interests, labor market information and job requirements. *Job Club* is another opportunity for guidance around topics such as interviewing, applications, resumes and when to disclose to an employer. You may be asked to complete vocational assessments to explore career interests. Informational interviews, job shadows, job tours and paid work experiences may be encouraged to assist in developing your IPE. Referrals may be recommended for additional disability related testing to identify functional capacities (lifting restrictions, etc.) or to determine what accommodations may be needed at the worksite or education setting.

It is important to share with your VR Counselor supports that you have in place or may need. An example of a support network is the [Clubhouse](http://clubhouse-intl.org/what-we-do/international-directory/). DBVI works closely with Clubhouses which are located throughout Maine.

**Helpful Hint**

\*The Career Exploration Workshop (CEW) and Job Club are two activities that can set you on your career path.

### **Deciding on an employment goal**

There are two main steps to developing the IPE: 1) deciding on an employment goal and 2) determining how you will reach that goal. There are many things you need to consider when deciding on an employment goal. First, what work skills do you currently have? What type of job best fits you as a person, taking into consideration such things as your current skills, abilities, and interests? Next look at the job itself.

Some of the questions to think about are:

* Is this a job where there are many opportunities for employment?
* Where are the potential employers located and will transportation be an issue?
* What opportunities will there be for career advancement?
* What will this job pay, and does that meet your needs?
* Is there flexibility in working conditions?
* What resources will you need to reach the goal?
* If the goal will require a lot of preparation time, can you afford to be unemployed for an extended period while you prepare for the goal?

Your VR Counselor will help you select an employment goal that is right for you. You and your VR Counselor will also explore different career pathways. Career Pathways are “roadmaps” that outline the education and training that must be completed and credentials that must be earned to reach your career goal. Your VRC will assist you in developing an individualized career plan or “roadmap” that shows the steps to reach your goals. These steps will be outlined on your IPE.

VR Counselors have 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 DBVI in the development of your employment goal.

For additional information on choosing a job goal, see the section of this handbook called, [“How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?”](#_How_do_I_1) in the Resource section on page 23.

Helpful Hint

\*Click on the following links for helpful resources to help you explore employment:

[Center for Workforce Research and Information](https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/)
[Job Accommodation Network](https://askjan.org/)
[Maine Career Center](http://www.mainecareercenter.gov/)
[O\*Net](https://www.onetonline.org/)
[Employment Services and Supports (Office of Aging and Disability Services)](https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oads/get-support/employment-services)

### **Developing a plan for reaching the goal**

Your IPE will describe the services that you will need to reach your goal, the time frames, estimated costs for the goal and services and the responsibilities of everyone involved in your plan. The services that are included in this plan should be only those that are necessary to achieve your employment goal. Things you should consider include:

What will you need to reach the goal?

* How long will it take you to achieve this goal?
* What is the most efficient way of getting to the goal, both in terms of time and costs?
* Who are the potential providers of services and which one will be best for you?
* Will you have any problems in accessing the services you need (because of issues such as transportation or unique factors related to your disability)?

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

Once you and your VR Counselor have agreed on your employment goal and the services required to achieve that goal, your plan can be written, signed by you and your VR Counselor and services may begin. You will receive a copy of the IPE and any amendments made to the plan. Amendments occur if there are any changes made to your plan. The IPE should be updated at least once every year.

Helpful Hints

\*It is important to stay in contact with your VRC to develop and maintain your IPE.

\*An alternative to signing a plan in person is through electronic signature.
Your VRC will provide instructions on how to do that with a copy of your IPE.

\*Keep a copy of your IPE. All IPE’s should be reviewed annually.

### Factors DBVI needs to look at before agreeing to your IPE

DBVI will look at many factors with you to mutually agree on your IPE. The major factors that DBVI will consider are:

* Is the plan consistent with your strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice?
* Are the services requested essential to reaching your goal?
* Does labor market information support your goal in your chosen area?
* How will the plan 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 service being provided in the most cost-effective manner?
* Are treatments or interventions that you need to be successful addressed in the plan?
* Are the services consistent with DBVI regulations and policies?

**Helpful Hint**

\*Keep scheduled appointments. Missing appointments can delay your program.
If you must cancel, call ahead and reschedule.

### **What happens if I want to change my IPE *OR* if I need more services?**

It is important that you contact your VR Counselor immediately to discuss any changes in your IPE. When changes are agreed upon, the IPE will be amended. You and your counselor should review and update your plan at least once a year, even if there are no major changes. Your VR Counselor is the key person you can go to for answers. The provision of any service is based on individual needs. If your counselor cannot answer your questions to your satisfaction, you should request to speak to a DBVI supervisor. If you still disagree with DBVI, there are other procedures that may help. For more information about this, refer to [“What Do I Do If I Disagree with DBVI?”](#_What_do_I) on page 22 of this handbook.

### Who will pay for the services I need?

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

You will be asked to voluntarily contribute resources toward the cost of your Individualized Plan for Employment. Examples of how you might contribute resources include: paying a vendor for a portion of the cost of the services you need, in-kind resources or getting some of the services on your own. DBVI strongly believes that the personal investment of each individual is an important ingredient in making the Individualized Plan for Employment 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 DBVI funds can be used, we need to look at other available resources. Are there other resources (such as other agencies, your health insurance, financial aid for post-secondary education, employee benefits) that will pay for the services you need? You may be required to apply for these other resources. DBVI will also use any other resources that are readily available toward the costs of your Individualized Plan for Employment. DBVI may pay for services or goods that are not available from other sources and that are agreed upon in your Individualized Plan for Employment. These goods and services must be purchased in a way that agrees with State and DBVI purchasing policies. DBVI is only able to use service providers who agree with these policies and terms. You can choose services that DBVI could secure more cost effectively elsewhere, but you may have to pay the difference.

Some individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) may be eligible for the Ticket to Work program. It is a voluntary program designed to help people who are receiving disability benefits from Social Security in securing meaningful employment. The Social Security Administration provides reimbursement to DBVI when ticket holders achieve earnings at a substantial wage.

 If you want additional information talk with your VR Counselor or Social Security Administration.

If you have any questions about who is paying for services in your Individualized Plan for Employment, please ask your VR Counselor. It is important that you know who is paying and what the costs are for services and goods in your Individualized Plan for Employment. This knowledge will help you make better decisions about the services that you seek.

**Helpful Hint**

\*Click here for more information on the [Ticket to Work Program](https://www.ssa.gov/work/overview.html).

\*Examples of comparable benefits are Financial Aid, Health Insurance,
Public Transportation, employee benefits.

#

# DBVI Services

The following is a listing of the types of services that DBVI may provide, if needed as part of your IPE. You are encouraged to ask your VR Counselor or other DBVI staff if you have questions about the availability or need for any service. Examples of core services are listed below:

* Counseling, guidance, and information about career and employment decisions
* Assessment services to determine eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs. Depending on your situation, this may include such things as opportunities to simply look at actual work sites, working at a job on a trial basis, medical or psychological tests, or other ways to learn more about your disability and vocational rehabilitation needs.
* Orientation and Mobility Instruction
* Vision Rehabilitation Therapy
* Rehabilitation Center Services
* Adaptive Technology Assessments and Services
* Rehabilitation Technology/Assistive Technology
* Computer Access Training
* Readers Services
* Teacher of Visually Impaired Instruction
* Personal Adjustment Counseling
* Physical and mental restoration services
* Self-Employment Exploration Planning
* Individual Employment Plan Development
* Occupational Tools & Equipment
* Job placement, job coaching and supported employment services
* Employment training and other training services
* Self-employment services, including technical assistance and consultation for the establishment of small business operations
* Occupational licenses, tools, equipment, and initial stocks and supplies
* Ticket-to-Work Services
* Benefits Counseling
* Work Opportunity Tax Credit
* Individualized transition services to support movement from school to work
* Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities
* Support Services
* Support services may also be delivered to support the above-mentioned primary services. All support costs need to be reasonable, necessary and cost- effective Some examples of support services are:
	+ - * + Services to family members, if needed for the individual with a disability to achieve the employment goal
				+ Reimbursement for additional costs incurred while participating in a DBVI evaluation or an Individualized Plan for Employment
				+ Transportation services
				+ Personal assistance services. These are services needed by an individual because of the disability to assist in performing daily living activities which are necessary for the individual to achieve the employment goal
				+ Interpreter or reader services

**Helpful Hint**

\*Services provided by VR must follow the rules of the program:

<https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/12/150/150c101.docx>

\*Comparable benefits are funds available through other resources that may be available to help
pay for some services listed on your IPE.

### **Progressive Employment**

After being found eligible for DBVI services, individuals may want to discuss with their assigned VR counselor if Progressive Employment is the right approach. Those referred to Progressive Employment have access to a team of workforce professionals who share their knowledge and create ideas in regular staffing meetings- leading to expanded opportunities!

Opportunities for hands-on activities in the community include:

* Job Tours
* Interviews
* Job Shadows
* Work Experiences/Summer Work Experiences
* On-the-Job-Training

Helpful Hint

\*Progressive Employment believes work readiness is individual and tailors services to individual readiness!

### **Paid Work Experience**

A paid work experience is an opportunity for you to try one or more jobs in the community. A paid work experience may help you learn more about jobs that match your interests and abilities, or it may help you build your work history. The choice of jobs will be based on your interests, abilities, and needs. Work experiences may vary in length depending on your situation. You will be paid for the work you do during the experience, usually at the customary rate for that position. Wages are paid through a staffing agency that is contracted through DBVI.

When it is agreed that you would benefit from a paid work experience, your VR Counselor will identify what supports are needed to secure an employment site. This may include working with other DBVI staff or a referral to a Community Rehabilitation Provider. Before the work experience begins, you will be involved in the decision about the type of job you will be performing. It is important that you let your VR Counselor and the evaluator know about anything that will help them find the right place for the work experience.

Before and during the work experience, 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 supervisors and co-workers, will help to ensure a good experience for you. In addition, the particular job where you are assessed will probably have other requirements that you will need to know.

Once a work experience is completed, you and your VRC will discuss the results to determine next steps. Your feedback on the work experience is important to develop next steps. Together, you and your VR Counselor will look at many aspects of your job performance such as: your work skills, behaviors, relationships with the supervisor and co-workers, attendance, and adaptability to the work. From participating in the paid work experience, you will have the chance to see how you like the job and how good you are at it. A work experience may be set up with an employer who has a job opening, and if the employer is satisfied with your work, you may be offered a job. After the work experience is finished, you and your counselor will get a report from the evaluator telling how you did, whether the job seems suitable for you and whether you will need other services to be successful.

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

Helpful Hints

\*Work experience sites will be determined by your interests, abilities, employer needs
and transportation options.

\*Sometimes a paid work experience can lead to employment if the job is a good match!

When you and your VR Counselor decide that you are ready to find a job, your VR 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 serious 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. Some things you can do is register for the Maine Job Link, a service of the Department of Labor’s [CareerCenter](https://mainecareercenter.gov/), and review job search websites. There are many services that DBVI may provide to assist you with placement, depending on your needs, including the following:

* Job Seeking Skills (JSS) - JSS provides assistance with interviewing skills, resume writing and application techniques to help you prepare for your job search. JSS may be individual assistance or provided as part of a class.
* Individual Placement Assistance - Your VR Counselor can help you to 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.
* Referrals to workshops such as resume writing and interview skills
* Local job openings, follow-up with employers, and ongoing support
* Paid work experience - A paid work experience is an opportunity for you to try job to determine if you are suited to a particular type of work.
* A job coach may accompany you to assist you in learning the job and to observe your performance. The employer may offer you a job if you perform well during the assessment.
* The Maine Apprenticeship Program, in conjunction with DBVI, assists in setting up structured, yet flexible training programs designed to learn through on-the-job and related classroom instruction.
* The Career Exploration Workshop (CEW) is a class where you will explore employment areas that interest you, as well as uncover skills and talents that are unique to you. The workshop is often held at a local CareerCenter, school, or partner agency. It may be facilitated by DBVI staff or in conjunction with others.
* On-the-Job Training (OJT) is an arrangement between an employer and DBVI where the employer agrees to hire an individual and train the person while DBVI assists with the initial costs of the training and support. Once an employer has been secured, a written contract will be developed between you, the employer and DBVI. 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. The employer may offer you a job if you perform well during the training.

**Helpful Hints**

\*Networking with family and friends can often lead to job opportunities.

\*Registered Apprenticeship (RA) is an educational pathway for many occupations in Maine that is focused on mentored, on-the-job training. Apprentices are hired by the RA employer, are paid while in training and will receive an industry recognized credential upon completion of the training. For more information go to the [https:/www.maine.gov/labor/jobs\_training/apprenticeship/](https://www.maine.gov/labor/jobs_training/apprenticeship/)

\*The Career Exploration Workshop and Job Club are two small group activities that can aide you in identifying your career pathway.

### **Job Coaching and Supported Employment**

What is Job Coaching?

A Job Coach is a person who provides individualized employment supports. You may need the Job Coach for long term or short-term basis. A Job Coach will usually meet with you at work but may meet with you in the community if that is appropriate and more comfortable for you.

Some examples of how a Job Coach might support you are:

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

The Job Coach will work with the employer to encourage workplace natural supports. Natural supports are generally provided by a co-worker or supervisor who promotes a mentoring relationship. Natural supports allow a gradual reduction in the support of a job coach which enhances the natural flow at the worksite and increases the autonomy of the employee.

Helpful Hints

\*The goal of every Job Coach is to help you become independent on the job.

\*The Job Coach will work with you and the employer to reduce/fade job coaching supports when applicable.

### What is Supported Employment?

Supported Employment involves supports (usually job coaching) to help you keep a job. It is designed for persons who have a significant disability and are expected to need supports. The amount of support you would receive on a daily or weekly basis will depend on your needs. DBVI can provide these services only on a time-limited basis. Sometimes people who are in supported employment may need long-term supports. If this occurs, plans must then be made for the provision of job coaching or other supports once DBVI 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 DBVI services are completed. Examples of resources that may be available to provide these ongoing supports are: natural supports from an employer; family support; the Department of Health & Human Services; Social Security Impairment-Related Work Expenses; and DBVI’s Basic and Brain Injury Extended Support Funds.

### **When your Employment Goal requires Training:**

### What Is Employment Training and how can DBVI help?

Employment Training is the means by which a person learns the skills needed to do a particular job or type of work. If training is required for you to achieve your employment goal, and if DBVI has agreed to help you with this as part of your mutually agreed upon Individualized Plan for Employment, DBVI may help with employment training. The type of training DBVI will support depends on your abilities and interests, information about the job market and research on how most people get into the kind of work you want to do.

Examples of training include:

* Apprenticeship
* Paid work experiences
* On-the-job training
* Short-term specific skill training
* Internships
* Vocational/technical school
* College training
* The Rehabilitation Center

### **What is the Rehabilitation Center?**

Located in Portland, Maine and operated by the Iris Network, the Rehabilitation Center is a residential immersion program that seeks to prepare participants to enter/re-enter employment and provides intensive orientation and mobility training, vision rehabilitation therapy, assistive technology training and adjustment counseling.

To learn more, please visit <https://www.theiris.org/>

### **What is expected of me if DBVI helps me with post-secondary education and training?**

* You and your VR Counselor must agree on your employment goal and whether training is needed to achieve it
* You need to apply and be accepted for admission into the training program or school you wish to attend
* 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. You need to advise DBVI of any disability-related needs that you will have in attending the program
* You must maintain the performance requirements of the school or program to remain in good standing
* You need to discuss any significant changes with your VR Counselor beforehand as your Individualized Plan for Employment may need to be revised
* You must provide VR with copies of your grades or progress reports and maintain regular contact with your VR Counselor

Please refer to [“Vocational Rehabilitation, Post-Secondary Education, Training and You: A Consumer’s Guide”](#_Vocational_Rehabilitation,_Post-Sec) on page 24.

Helpful Hints

\*You can apply to the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA](https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa/)) as early as October.

\*If you are seeking accommodations connect with the disability office of your school before each semester begins.

### **Self-Employment Services**

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. If your employment goal can be best reached through self-employment, DBVI may be able to assist you with establishing or maintaining the business.

Self-employment services provided by DBVI are generally limited to start-up services and goods. Examples might include business consultants, bookkeeping, advertising, initial stock, insurance, permits, fees, equipment, supplies, rent, utilities, transportation, telephone and postage.

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

DBVI requirements for small business plans:

* You will be required to complete a self-employment questionnaire
* You must develop a business plan and it must be approved by an Approved Business Consultant, like the Maine Small Business Development Center (SBDC), as an economically viable proposal. An alternate small business resource acceptable to both you and your VR Counselor may be used instead of the SBDC. If you need additional assistance, there are numerous Small Business Development Counseling Centers offering ongoing consultation and workshops. Your VR Counselor will assist you with these connections
* Prior to providing services under an Individualized Plan for Employment for a small business plan, the DBVI must agree to both the goal and the business plan. The DBVI typically limits its contribution toward establishing a small business (excluding training and disability related expenses) to $7,500 for a business that will allow you to become completely self-sufficient or $2,500 that will allow you to work part time and continue to receive benefits such as SSI or SSDI
* You will be expected to seek outside financing for the start-up costs of your business, and you must contribute to your business in cash, in-kind labor, and/or materials
* You will be expected to own and operate at least 51% of the business
* NOTE: Self-employment plans that are expected to result in your becoming self-sufficient (able to live without public benefits) require that you have a good credit record, or a pattern of managing your debt well

Helpful Hints

\*Keep in mind that beginning a self-employment plan will take time to develop.

\*For more information, go to [Maine Small Business Development Center](https://www.mainesbdc.org/). Browse for workshops and resources.

### Once the small business is operating

Your VR Counselor may visit the business site and/or be in contact with you to see how the business is going. Before DBVI closes your case with the agency, you and your VR Counselor will agree to the viability of your business. To help you be successful, the recommended time-period for follow up of people on self-employment plans is two (2) years.

Helpful Hint

\*You VR case will typically be open longer under a self-employment plan.

# **Once you have achieved your employment goal**

Your VR Counselor will maintain contact with you during your first ninety (90) days on the job, or longer if necessary, to make sure your job is satisfactory. With your permission, your VR Counselor may contact your supervisor to discuss your progress on the job.

DBVI can provide technical assistance to you and your employer to identify ways to meet your disability related needs. This may include special equipment or rearranging the work site.

# **What will happen to my benefits if I go to work?**

If you receive disability-based cash or medical benefits such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, State Supplement, Medicare and/or MaineCare, there are incentives to encourage you to try work while still receiving 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 BEFORE you embark on an employment plan.

Helpful Hint

\*If you are a SSDI/SSI recipient, make sure to ask about Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE’s).

### **How do I get the information that I need on benefits so that I can make good vocational choices?**

Each person’s benefits are unique. The work incentives apply to each person based on their individual circumstances. The best way to get accurate information on work and how it will affect your benefits is to contact the source of benefits, i.e. the Department of Health and Human Services; the Social Security Administration; Maine State Housing; or contact a Benefits Specialist who has extensive training in work incentives and many other benefit programs.

Maine Medical Center offers Benefit Counseling Services across the state. Your VRC will assist you in completing a referral packet so that you can meet a Community Work Incentive Counselor (CWIC). The CWIC can answer your questions about working and benefits, and will talk to you about what work incentives are available to you.

The CWIC can dispel the many myths surrounding benefits and work. We often hear from recipients the fear they have of losing SSI/SSDI and health care benefits, such as MaineCare or Medicaid. By meeting with the CWIC, you will receive accurate information about your benefits and work. There are many incentives in place to support your decision to work. You will also hear about the added benefits of work, such as increased monthly income, socialization and self-care.

Helpful Hints

\*If you are a recipient of Social Security Benefits, a referral will be made to see a Community Work Incentive Counselor (CWIC) though Maine Medical Center to discuss benefits and work incentives.

\*More information is available by visiting: [Maine Medical Center Vocational Services Benefits Counseling](https://www.mainehealth.org/Maine-Medical-Center/Services/Vocational-Services/Benefits-Counseling)

# DBVI Youth Services

### **Eligibility for Transition Students**

* Students aged 14-21 receiving services either through an IEP or a Section 504 Plan
* Have a documented disability that creates a barrier to getting or keeping a job; or
* Require VR services to find or keep a job. High School and medical records can usually provide the necessary documentation.

Students may either be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services or “potentially eligible.” Students who are “potentially eligible” include individuals who are registered with VR but who have not applied to VR. “Potentially Eligible” students can receive Pre-Employment Transition Services. If a student receives Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) based on his/her disability and has an interest in working, the student is presumed eligible.

Helpful Hints

\*There are VR Counselors assigned to every high school across the State. In addition, VR Counselors work with youth who are homeschooled or attending other educational institutions.

\*If you have any questions, contact your [DBVI local office](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/offices.shtml) to ask about which paperwork to complete.

**Transition planning from school to work**

The DBVI knows the importance of starting early with career exploration and preparation. We provide students, youth and young adults with opportunities to learn about themselves and their strengths while building skills that will help them enter the workforce. DBVI believes that one of the best ways for young people to learn how their skills and interests match with career opportunities is through paid work experiences in their communities.

Helpful Hint

\*Up to age 18 your guardian/parent will need to sign all paperwork.

### **Pre-Employment Transition Services**

DBVI offers Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities, ages 14-21 (entering 9th grade and up) who have applied and been found eligible for DBVI VR services or who have completed the Pre-ETS Registration Form. Pre-ETS are primarily delivered to groups of youth in partnership with schools and other organizations and are designed to assist students with disabilities to prepare for post-secondary education and employment. This is provided in a number of ways including the expanded core curriculum offered throughout the school year and/or specialized summer programming.

Pre-ETS include:

* [Job exploration counseling](http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/job-exploration-counseling)
* [Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, experiences outside of the traditional school setting, and/or internships](http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/work-based-learning-experiences)
* [Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs](http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/counseling-opportunities-enrollment)
* [Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living](http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/workplace-readiness-training)
* [Instruction in self-advocacy](http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/overview/instruction-self-advocacy)

If a student or youth with a disability needs more individualized transition services than Pre-Employment Transition Services, then DBVI recommends that they complete an application for VR services upon entering high school.

Helpful Hint

\*VR can help you to begin thinking about jobs through the Transition career Workshop (TCEW), Virtual Job Shadow (VJS) and many other resources.

### What Services Does DBVI Provide**?**

After being found eligible for DBVI services, youth and young adults may also work with their VR Counselor to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Your VR Counselor may:

* Participate in Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meetings, particularly when the focus of the meeting is on transition services. Transition planning works best when goals and objectives from your DBVI Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) support the post-secondary goals on your IEP
* Get to know you and your family so that you have an understanding of how you can work with DBVI both before and after graduation
* Consult with you, your family and school staff to help you select courses in school that will help you to meet your post-school goals as well as to promote opportunities for employment experiences while you are still in school
* Assist you and your family in becoming familiar with, planning for and accessing needed employment-related adult service programs
* Invite you to participate in the Transition Career Exploration Workshop curriculum to help you learn more about your strengths and skills
* Offer you Peer Mentoring Services to help you prepare for your first job or post-secondary education
* Explore financial literacy, benefits counseling, rehabilitation technology and other needs
* Arrange informational interviews, job shadows, and paid work experiences in the community

Helpful Hints

\*Actively working with your VRC will help you to explore the possibilities in employment options now and in the future.

\*Click here for a [Guide to Transition Services in Maine](https://www.maine-ytc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/MSK.HandbookWEB-1.pdf) and [Find Your Path To Employment](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/Find%20Your%20Path%20to%20Employment/Find%20Your%20Path%20to%20Employment.shtml)

[\*Click here for](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/youth_transition.shtml) [Financial Literacy Guide](https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/youth_transition.shtml)

#

# Rehabilitation Technology/Assistive Technology

Rehabilitation Technology, sometimes also referred to as Assistive Technology, is the evaluation and application of devices that assist individuals with disabilities to maintain or improve their ability to function independently. Rehabilitation Technology 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 leading to competitive employment.

There are many different kinds of technology devices. Some are simple and easy such as 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 include a computer with voice recognition software or screen readers, and other communication devices.

Your VR Counselor will work with you to determine whether you need rehabilitation technology devices or services. An evaluation by a technology specialist 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.

Helpful Hint

If you are already working with a qualified professional bring documentation to your VRC.

Assistive technology is individualized and will vary based on your IPE.

### **What Is the Process to Get Rehabilitation Technology Services?**

You and your VR Counselor may agree on simple devices that can, in most cases, be purchased quickly and easily.

When you and your VR Counselor decide that you need a Rehabilitation Technology consultation, your VR Counselor will refer you 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.

* During the meeting, the technology specialist will talk with you about your specific needs or employment goals and may ask you to do some tasks to determine your level of functioning. After the meeting, the technology specialist will write a report to your VR Counselor describing his/her findings and recommendations.
* Your VR 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 VR Counselor agree that the recommendations are necessary for your Individualized Plan for Employment 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, availability and the purchase process.
* Customized Aids and Devices that are designed and manufactured specially to fit you will take more time.
* DBVI will do its best to accommodate your preferences while following State procurement policies. If you have a preferred product or vendor, you should be sure to let your counselor know.

In some instances, you may need training to learn how to use the equipment. You and your VR 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, and to complete all assignments.

### **Maine CITE**

The **Maine Department of Education’s Maine CITE Program** is designed to help make assistive technology more available to Maine children, adults and seniors who need them. Administered by the [Maine Department of Education](http://www.maine.gov/doe/) and funded by the federal [**Administration for Community Living.**](http://www.acl.gov/)Maine CITE delivers services through the [**Maine CITE Coordinating Center**](http://www.mainecite.org/maine-cite-coordinating-center/)as well as numerous private and public organizations that provide information about:

* [Assistive Technology.](https://mainecite.org/assistive-technology/more-about-assistive-technology/)
* [Device demonstrations](http://www.mainecite.org/demonstrations/).
* [Device loans](http://www.mainecite.org/devices-for-loan/).
* [Device reutilization](http://www.mainecite.org/equipment-reuse/).
* [Alternative financing.](http://www.mainecite.org/paying-for-at/)
* [Training](http://www.mainecite.org/training/).
* [Public awareness.](http://www.mainecite.org/news/)

### **Adaptive Equipment Loan Program (AELP)**

Through this state bond funded program, individuals and businesses can obtain low interest loans from $250 up to $100,000 to enable the acquisition of assistive technology or to improve access at home or at work. An Individual or businesses may access the program directly to acquire items. This program is administered by Alpha One. For More Information go to: [Alpha One Adaptive Equipment Loan Program](https://alphaonenow.org/aelp/)

# What do I do if I disagree with DBVI?

If you disagree with a decision that DBVI makes concerning you, there are several options to resolve the disagreement. Below is a description of some of those options which are designed to help you and DBVI move forward in planning for your vocational rehabilitation.

If you have a disagreement, DBVI encourages you to first discuss your concerns with your VR Counselor. This is potentially the fastest and simplest way to resolve any dispute. If you are not able to resolve your differences by talking with your VR Counselor, you may want to discuss the issue with another DBVI representative, such as the supervisor, regional manager or a DBVI central office manager. The local DBVI office can give you information on how to contact any of these individuals.

Helpful Hint

Don’t wait to let your VRC know if you have any questions, or you disagree with a decision.

### **Contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP)**

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is operated by Disability Rights Maine (DRM). CAP provides information, advice, advocacy and, if determined necessary, legal representation to persons who have concerns about the rehabilitation services they receive from DBVI. The CAP is required to use informal means, like negotiation with your counselor when resolving conflicts, to the maximum extent possible. If those informal means are not successful, the CAP can pursue formal or legal steps, including mediation or a due process hearing. Each case is unique, and, in some instances, it may be determined that the only way to resolve a dispute is to go straight to mediation or a due process hearing.

You have the right to request any means of resolving a disagreement within thirty (30) days of the dispute, with or without assistance from the CAP. All advice and discussions with CAP are confidential and will not affect your services adversely.

Disability Rights Maine contact information:

Augusta

160 Capitol Street, Suite 4

Augusta, ME 04330

800-452-1948 (V/TTY)

207-626-2774 (V/TTY)

207-621-1419 (Fax)

advocate@drm.org

Falmouth

1 Mackworth Island, Building C

Falmouth, ME 04105

800-639-3884 (V/TTY)

207-797-7656 (V/TTY)

207-766-7111 (VP)

207-797-9791 (Fax)

deafservices@drme.org

If you wish to request assistance via DRM’s website, visit
[DRME Online Intake Form](https://drme.org/online-intake-form).

### Dispute Resolution Procedures**:**

Negotiation usually involves helping with communication between you and your VR Counselor or discussing different ways of overcoming disagreements. Negotiation is often the quickest way to resolve a problem.

Mediation is a voluntary informal dispute resolution process in which the mediator, who is not a DBVI employee, helps you and DBVI to reach an agreement. The mediator has no power to make a decision for you or DBVI. If you come to an agreement with DBVI, the agreement would be put in writing and signed by you and DBVI. You will receive a copy of this agreement. This type of dispute resolution may be provided only if both you and DBVI agree to be involved with mediation.

In a due process hearing, you would present the information you are disputing to a hearings officer, who is not an employee of DBVI. The process is much more formal, and the information presented by both you and DBVI is generally more involved than in mediation. In a due process hearing, both you and DBVI are usually represented by advocates or attorneys and may call witnesses. The process of scheduling, conducting the hearing and making the decision by the hearing officer generally takes much longer than for an Informal Review. If you disagree with the hearing officer’s decision, you may appeal the decision further through the court system.

Requests for mediation and due process hearings must be in writing and sent to the DBVI Director. The address for the DBVI Administrative Office can be found at the end of this [booklet](#_Division_for_the). If you decide that you want to go through one of these procedures, DBVI must receive your request within thirty (30) days after DBVI informs you of the decision with which you disagree.

In any of these procedures, you have a right to bring a representative (for example, a CAP advocate, an attorney, or a family member). However, DBVI would not be responsible for the costs of your bringing a representative (such as the fees charged by a private attorney).

Helpful Hint

Requests for mediation and due process associated with the VR program must be in writing and sent to the attention of the Director of the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired

# **Resources**:

### **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 workplace of today. This is a fluid process consisting of activities designed to help you pick a realistic employment goal. Your VR Counselor is available to help you with this process.

### **Four Steps in Choosing a Career:**

1. **Knowing yourself:**
	1. The process begins with a detailed exploration of yourself. What motivates you? What are your interests? What are you good at? What is your personality? What disability-related issues might impact your career choice? Where do you want to live and work? This self-assessment may be accomplished in a variety of ways, including self-assessment, in-depth counseling interviews with your VR Counselor, interest or ability tests, job shadowing and career groups.
	2. As part of this process, your counselor may refer you to the Career Exploration Workshop (CEW) which is either held at a CareerCenter or offered remotely, and facilitated by DBVI staff. The workshop covers areas such as expectations about work, your readiness for work tools to evaluate your interests and skills, tools for finding work, and working with your VR Counselor.
2. **Occupational and educational information gathering:**
	1. Because occupational and educational information is always changing, it is important that you gather information about today’s workplace and determine where you best fit. Your VR Counselor can help you with this process. There are a number of resources available to you for career information through the Maine Department of Labor’s CareerCenters 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 that interests you or trying out the job yourself for a short period of time.
	2. In addition, talking to employers or other people in the field that interests you is an excellent way to learn more about the career(s) you are considering. Your VR Counselor may also have some of this information from talking to employers. The more of this type of information you can gather, the better your career decision is likely to be. In developing your Individualized Plan for Employment, it will be helpful to share any of the information you have gathered with your VR Counselor.
	3. Situational Assessment- If you do not know the kind of work you want to do, or if your VR Counselor is unsure about how VR can assist you, your counselor may first set up a paid work-based experience for you.
	4. If your employment interests require formal education and training, and there are some questions whether the training is appropriate, your counselor may develop a trial educational evaluation. This is where you would have the opportunity to attempt limited training as part of your evaluation.
3. **Career decision making and finding the right match:**
	1. Once you have gone through a good self-assessment process and completed the occupational information phase, you are ready to make a sound decision about matching your skills, abilities, values, and personality with the demands of your chosen occupation. You and your counselor can determine if a type of work is a good match for you, something for which you have the aptitude and enjoy doing. The information gathered will be used in any further work you and VR do together. Additionally, your VR Counselor can help you assess the physical or mental demands required and potential reasonable accommodations you might need to be successful.
4. **Planning a course of action:**
	1. Developing a DBVI Individualized Plan for Employment with a focused employment goal which details the services and supports you will need to reach your goal is one good way of planning a course of action. Your VR Counselor is available to help in developing this plan.

# Vocational Rehabilitation, Post-Secondary Education, Training and You: A Consumer's Guide

### **Introduction:**

The purpose of this section of the handbook is to help you understand how VR and Post-Secondary Education work and to explain all the roles and responsibilities of the individuals who are involved in the process. This information pertains to training programs, both educational and vocational, which qualify for and participate in the Federal Financial Student Aid Program. A Financial Aid Information Form will be used to identify your costs, resources and VR’s contribution towards your program. While we have attempted to identify the important issues and concerns, we know you will have questions. Please contact your VR Counselor when this occurs. Remember that good planning and frequent and open communication with all the individuals involved in the process is the key to success.

### **What Does the Law Say?**

Federal laws and the Maine Vocational Rehabilitation rules say that if post-secondary education is required for you to attain an employment goal (job), DBVI may be able to help. DBVI support for post-secondary education cannot be provided unless you make maximum efforts to secure assistance from other sources, including federal student aid.

### **FAFSA:**

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a form completed by current and prospective college students ([undergraduate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Undergraduate) and [graduate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postgraduate_education)) in the United States to determine their eligibility for [student financial aid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_financial_aid_%28United_States%29). All post-secondary students, who are using VR services, need to complete this form. The FAFSA will determine what kind of financial aid will be available to you.

### **What Is Financial Aid?**

Financial aid is designed to help individuals meet their educational expenses when their own resources are not enough. A student who believes that his/her resources and those of his/her family are not sufficient to pay for all the costs of attendance (tuition, room and board, books, transportation, and campus activities) should work their kigh school guidance counselor and/or with the Financial Aid Office (FAO) of the institution he/she plans to attend to apply for the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA). Three types of aid are available.

* Grants – gifts and scholarships, which do not have to be repaid.
* Loans – money borrowed to cover school costs. It must be repaid, usually with interest, over a specified period of time. Repayment of loans usually takes place after the student has left school or graduated.
* Work Study – employment, which enables a student to earn a portion of school costs.

### **What Is the Expected Family Contribution**?

If you do not receive SSI/SSDI or are 1619b eligible, you will be expected to pay the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). EFC is an index number that colleges use to determine how much financial aid you’re eligible to receive. Your EFC is calculated according to a formula established by law and the information from your [Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)](https://www.salliemae.com/college-planning/financial-aid/fafsa).

The EFC factors in your family's taxed and untaxed income, assets and benefits (such as unemployment or Social Security). Your family size and the number of family members who will attend college during the year are also considered.

### **Am I Required to Take a Loan?**

When loans are offered as part of your financial aid package, you are encouraged to take out loans towards your education, but this is not a federal or state requirement. Many people realize that loans are a necessary part of attending a post-secondary education program. Consider the loans an investment in your future. Also, you may need to consider taking out a loan to cover basic living expenses.

If you have defaulted on a previous student loan, you will be unable to receive any grants, additional student loans or work study assistance. You will need to demonstrate that you have made a reasonable effort to clear your default status before VR will consider replacing any grant award. As stated previously, DBVI support for post-secondary training cannot be provided unless you make maximum efforts to secure assistance from other sources.

### **How Vocational Rehabilitation fits into the financial aid process:**

Once post-secondary education has been identified as a service you need to reach your employment goal, a coordinated, multi-step effort involving you, DBVI and the school’s Financial Aid Office begins.

Financial aid is based upon a partnership between the student, parents, post-secondary institutions, federal government and agencies such as VR. The financial aid process can be complex and time-consuming. It requires coordination, cooperation and communication between the FAO, the VR Counselor and you.You will be asked to complete a portion of VR’s Financial Aid Exchange form. This form is exchanged between you, DBVI and the school’s Financial Aid office. It is used to confirm the financial aid awarded to you by FAFSA and the school and identifies the cost of attendance.

DBVI will use this information to determine your actual cost of attendance including disability related expenses. Your VR Counselor will calculate the cost of attendance minus the financial aid awarded. This figure is called the “Unmet Need.” The unmet need is what DBVI will contribute toward the cost of your education. For students receiving SSI/SSDI, your entire unmet need should be covered by DBVI.

### **What educational expenses are considered disability related?**

The student with a disability is often faced with additional expenses not incurred by other students. Examples of these expenses include:

* Purchase and maintenance of disability-related equipment
* Expense of services for personal use or study such as readers, or personal care attendants
* Transportation necessary to pursue an academic program, if regular transportation is not accessible
* Medical expenses relating directly to the individual’s disability that are not covered by insurance
* Food and veterinary bills for guide dogs
* Batteries for hearing aids and Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf
* Costs of recruiting and training readers or personal care attendants

Often, leaving home necessitates the purchase of new or additional equipment that will allow the student to be independent at school. Some of the equipment and support services may be available at the post-secondary institution. You and your VR Counselor should check with the 504 Coordinator or Office of Disability Support Services at the institution to see what is available there.

### **What Are My Responsibilities?**

Attending post-secondary education carries with it a variety of responsibilities. These include:

* Applying for and completing the Financial Aid information in a timely manner
* Exploring other funding resources which could assist in some post-secondary expenses. Examples of these resources include the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS), Ticket to Work, ASPIRE, VA and Workforce Development Center
* Maintain at least six credit hours per semester which demonstrates academic progress
* Remain in good academic standing with the institution
* Provide your counselor with a copy of your grades at the completion of each semester/module
* Meet with the disability services department to make arrangements for any accommodations you require
* You will be required to notify your VR Counselor of any changes in your status, i.e. full to part-time, and of any problems you are encountering at the institution

##

### **Places for Additional Information:**

Your VR Counselor and FAO should be able to answer the questions you have. Here are some places for more information:

* The Federal Student Aid website has a number of resources and publishes a booklet called “Funding Education Beyond High School” which is available at <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/fsa-handbook>
* The Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) is a program that may be a resource for students who want to further their education. For more information:

Finance Authority of Maine (FAME)

5 Community Drive, P.O. Box 949
Augusta, ME 04332-0949
TEL: (207) 623-3263 or 1-800-228-3734

TTY: (207) 626-2717
FAX: (207) 623-0095
<http://www.famemaine.com/>

* The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a federally funded advocacy program that can provide information and, if necessary, representation to clients/applicants of VR. For more information see page 22 of this Handbook

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### **Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired Offices**

Administrative Office

45 Commerce Drive
Augusta, ME 04330-0073
623-7948or 1-800-760-1573
TTY please use Relay 711
287-5292 (Fax)

Augusta

45 Commerce Drive
Augusta, ME 04330-0073
624-5191 or 1-800-760-1573
TTY please use Relay 711
287-6249 (Fax)

Bangor
45 Oak Street, Suite 1
Bangor, ME 04401-6589
561-4020 or 1-888-545-8811
TTY please use Relay 711
561-4027 (Fax)

Lewiston

5 Mollison Way
Lewiston, ME 04240-5805
212-4994 or 1-800-741-2991
TTY please use Relay 711
753-9051 (Fax)

Portland
151 Jetport Blvd.
Portland, ME 04102
822-3371 or 1-877-594-5627
TTY please use Relay 711
775-7870 (Fax)

Presque Isle
66 Spruce Street, Suite 3
Presque Isle, ME 04769
768-6847 or 1-800-635-0357
TTY please use Relay 711
760-6316 (Fax)