

Chapter 209: Casework Practices Under WIOA

Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Policy and Procedures Manual

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Section I. Overview and Purpose

- A. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Common Performance Measures are the federal indicators used to evaluate the DVR program. These measures are:
1. Employment rate at six months post program exit;
 2. Employment rate at twelve months post program exit;
 3. Median earning at six months post program exit;
 4. Measurable skill gains;
 5. Credential attainment; and
 6. Employer satisfaction
- B. The WIOA Common Performance Measures encourage DVR to support consumers achieving long-term aspirational career goals. DVR policy is to promote practice that will support consumers achieving higher level employment beyond entry level jobs. The purpose of this chapter is to provide DVR counselors with policy guidance specific to the new career focused paradigm, in the following areas:
1. The development of IPEs and management of cases
 2. Case expenditures
- C. Nothing in this chapter overrides or replaces DVR policy and guidance in other chapters of the DVR Policy Manual. This guidance is intended to supplement those chapters and support counselors to manage casework and case services within the new career focused paradigm.

Section II. Development and Amendment of IPEs to Support Careers

- A. The Rehab Act gives DVR counselors significant flexibility in how they support a consumer to achieve a long-term career goal. The IPE and IPE amendment processes allow the counselor and consumer to explore career options and change direction during the rehabilitation process.

Guidance – IPE and IPE Amendment Case Examples

The following case examples are intended to illustrate how a counselor can use the IPE and IPE amendment processes to support careers.

Case Example 1:

A consumer has a long-term career goal, but also needs help getting a job right now to pay the bills. Can the counselor help the consumer get the “right now” job as well as support him with a long-term career goal?

- *Yes, if a consumer needs immediate income to be able to pursue a long-term goal, it is perfectly acceptable to support the consumer in obtaining a “right now” job. The services necessary to obtain the*

immediate job should be listed on the IPE and might include the following:

- ⊕ *Referral to an Employment Consultant for job placement*
- ⊕ *Work clothes or money for gas*
- ⊕ *Car repairs*
- *The counselor should document the purpose behind these services in the IPE case note. For example:*
 - ⊕ *Joe is starting a CDL program in July, however he needs current income to be able to participate in the program. I have referred him to an Employment Consultant for assistance finding an interim job, while he completes his CDL training.*

Case Example 2:

A consumer has a long-term career goal of becoming a Registered Nurse. This is an aspirational goal that will take many steps and many years to achieve. Should the IPE employment goal be to achieve an RN position, or should the goal be an incremental step towards that eventual goal?

- *In most cases it might be wise to work with the consumer on a sequence of successive plans designed to achieve interim steps towards this eventual goal. In this case example, it might involve three separate plans over multiple years:*
 - ⊕ *Plan One Goal: Licensed Nursing Aide*
 - ⊕ *Plan Two Goal: Licensed Practical Nurse*
 - ⊕ *Plan Three Goal: Registered Nurse*
- *Each IPE would only list the services necessary to achieve that specific goal and credential. The counselor would close the case when the goal was achieved. DVR would get credit for both the employment outcome and the credential attained in each case.*
- *The counselor should document the consumer's long-term career goal of becoming an RN in a case note.*

Case Example 3:

A consumer comes to DVR just wanting a job. She is not able to think about long-term career goals, even though her counselor sees great potential in her. Can the counselor develop an IPE to meet her immediate need, but also work with her to see if she might consider other opportunities?

- *You can only engage the consumer where they are at, so if their goal is an entry level position, that is okay. DVR will still get the employment outcome and close the case.*
- *During IPE development, counselors are encouraged to use the counseling process to explore higher level career options with the*

consumer. If the consumer becomes open to considering a more aspirational employment goal, the counselor has two options:

- ⊕ *If the consumer is in stable employment, the counselor could close the case as successful based on the original employment goal, and open a new case with the individual to develop a new IPE; or*
- ⊕ *If the consumer is not currently working, the counselor could complete a full IPE amendment with the new aspirational career goal and required services to achieve that goal.*

Case Example 4:

A consumer has lots of ideas about potential career goals but is struggling to narrow down his focus. He is young and has limited work experience, so it is not surprising he does not know exactly what he wants to do. Can the counselor develop an IPE for career exploration?

- *The counselor cannot create an IPE solely for career exploration purposes, because the IPE requires an employment goal. (School to Work cases for high school students are the exception to this rule) The counselor should select an employment goal that is broad enough, such as “Sales and related workers, all others”, to allow the consumer to explore a prospective career in that field. The services on the plan should:*
 - ⊕ *Be limited to exploratory type activities like progressive employment or enrolling in one community college class;*
 - ⊕ *Not include substantial training or educational services; and*
 - ⊕ *Not exceed \$500 in total costs. This is to ensure significant funds are not spent on exploratory activities.*
- *Once the consumer has completed the exploratory activities, the counselor should develop a new IPE with the specific employment/career goal and services necessary to achieve that goal. At this point the IPE can include:*
 - ⊕ *Substantial training and educational services;*
 - ⊕ *All the case service expenditures necessary to achieve the goal.*
- *The IPE and IPE amendment process in this case example, provides the counselor with a framework to go from a vague, general employment goal to something more specific and focused.*

End Guidance.

Section III. Case Service Expenditures to Support Employment and Careers

Assistance with Basic Needs

- A. While many DVR applicants and consumers have basic support needs for food, housing and other essential items, it is important to recognize that DVR is an employment and training program, and case service expenditures must be directed toward assisting DVR consumers with achieving their employment goals. It is also important for DVR as an organization to be compassionate and help people access the appropriate non-DVR resources available.
- B. When assessing DVR applicant and DVR consumer requests for case services, it is important for DVR counselors to keep the following in mind:
1. DVR is an employment and training program and not a basic support program.
 2. DVR case service expenditures must be directly related to the achievement of an employment outcome as described in the IPE. It is not allowable under WIOA for DVR to expend funds simply to meet a basic need.
 3. There is no entitlement to DVR services as there are with some basic support programs.
 4. Employment is the only reliable route out of poverty for most DVR applicants and consumers. DVR resources should be focused on helping people achieve long-term sustainable employment, not to provide short-term financial support.
- C. In some situations, basic support might be the key service that helps the person achieve an employment goal. DVR can assist a consumer with basic support needs if it can be directly tied to the achievement of the employment outcome on the IPE. To make this determination, the counselor should consider the following factors:
1. Are there other potential sources of support available including comparable benefits?
 2. Will the expenditure(s) help move the consumer to a sustainable situation? For example, can the consumer afford to maintain the car they are asking DVR to help repair?
 3. Is the basic support service(s) necessary for the consumer to achieve the employment goal?
 4. Is the consumer engaged in the DVR program and their plan for employment, or are they simply looking for financial assistance? The following factors would be evidence that the consumer is engaged:
 - a) The consumer is participating in a short-term training program;
 - b) The consumer is working with an Employment Consultant or participating in a Supported Employment program;
 - c) The consumer is actively looking for work;
 - d) The consumer is participating in a career assessment or job readiness activity;
 - e) The consumer is currently employed or has a confirmed job offer.

Guidance – Basic Needs Case Examples

The following case examples are intended to illustrate when a counselor should and should not provide financial support for a consumer's basic needs.

Case Example 1:

Joe applied for DVR services a year ago. He presented an immediate need for car repairs to help him get back to work. After finding Joe eligible and developing an IPE, DVR authorized \$800 in car repairs. Not long after, Joe stopped showing up for meetings and his counselor eventually closed his case. Now he is back asking for more help fixing his car.

- In this situation it is reasonable and appropriate to evaluate if Joe truly has an employment goal or is just seeking financial assistance. The counselor should use the initial interview and assessment process to make this determination. If Joe is reluctant to engage in the Deployment process, this may indicate he is not serious about pursuing an employment goal and the counselor should consider closing the case.

Case Example 2:

Mary is currently working 40 hours per week in retail, making close to minimum wage. She has an opportunity to enroll in an LNA program but will have to reduce her hours. The training will be paid for with a VSAC non-degree grant, but she estimates she will need \$2,500 over the next three months to pay her rent so she can complete the program.

- In this situation, the basic support is clearly going to make it possible for Mary to complete the LNA program and is therefore allowable as an IPE service. Even though it is a large case service expenditure, it will put Mary in a higher earnings category and give her a credential that has value over a lifetime.

End Guidance.

Spending Guidelines to Support Careers

- D. The WIOA Common Performance Measures encourage DVR counselors to focus services and spending on activities that will help DVR consumers achieve credentials and higher-level career goals. Counselors should consider the following when determining what services and supports are necessary to assist consumers in achieving their employment goals:

1. The spending guidelines are just that, guidelines. The counselor is expected and encouraged to make judgements around what is necessary for the individual to achieve an employment outcome.
2. It may be necessary to go beyond the spending guidelines when supporting a consumer to achieve a higher-level career goal.
3. It is appropriate for a counselor to consider the reasonableness of the expense as compared to the employment outcome. For example, it is reasonable to spend more funds on a plan that will help a consumer achieve a credential leading to higher wage employment.
4. Conversely, it may be appropriate to spend less than the guidelines indicate if the consumer's employment goal is more limited. For example, it would not be reasonable for DVR to purchase and adapt a \$100,000 van for a consumer who is going to work 10 hours per week.

Guidance —Career Support Case Example

The following case example illustrates the benefits of focusing services and spending on activities that help a consumer achieve a higher-level career goal.

Case Example:

Michael had almost no resources or income when he applied to the DVR program. After finding him eligible, the counselor referred Michael to an Employment and he obtained a job in retail. While Michael now had an income, it was very limited, so he pursued and was accepted into an apprenticeship program. To participate however, he needs hearing aids. He can only contribute \$200 to the total cost and the DVR spending guideline is not enough to cover the balance.

- *In this situation the counselor can clearly justify exceeding the spending guideline to support Michael's employment goal. If Michael is successful in the apprenticeship program, he will have a credential and be qualified for a higher wage and more stable employment.*