

Veteran Readiness & Employment

Chapter 31 Program

Presented by: Christina Hicks, MS, CRC



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Overview

- VR&E Defined
- Eligibility Criteria
- Eligibility vs. Entitlement
- VR&E Process + Time limits
- VR&E Support & Service Tracks:
 - Reemployment
 - Rapid Access
 - Self-Employment
 - Employment through Long-Term Services
 - Independent Living
- Example Scenarios
- Limitations
- Additional services for qualifying family members



What is Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E)?

The Veteran Readiness and Employment program (formerly called Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment) assists Veterans or service members with a service-connected disability and an employment handicap by helping them prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable careers. This is completed through one of five support-and-services tracks which provide education or training, find and keep a job, and/or live as independently as possible.

Eligibility Criteria for Active Duty Servicemembers



- Active Duty Servicemembers are eligible *if they*:
 - Expect to receive an honorable or other than dishonorable discharge upon separation from active duty
 - Obtain a memorandum rating of 20% or more from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and
 - Apply for VR&E services
- OR
- Are participating in the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) or are certified by the military as having a severe injury or illness that may prevent them from performing their military duties
 - Apply for VR&E services, and
 - Report for an evaluation with a VR&E counselor before separating from active duty

Eligibility Criteria for Veterans

- Veterans are eligible *if they*:
 - Have received a discharge that is other than dishonorable
 - Have a service-connected disability rating of at least 10% from VA
 - Apply for VR&E services

Expiration Date: Basic eligibility ends 12 years from date of notification of

1. Separation of active military service

OR

2. When first notified by VA of a service-connected disability of 0% or higher



VR&E Entitlement Determination

- **Eligibility ≠ Entitlement**

- Entitlement is established by a VA counselor during the initial meeting.

“Entitled”: a term applied to a Veteran or Servicemember who meets the criteria to receive VR&E benefits based on a service-connected disability and an employment handicap.

- A comprehensive evaluation is conducted to determine if the claimant has an “employment handicap”, this includes:
 - Development and analysis of information necessary to obtain a general understanding of the whole individual.
 - Determination of the effect(s) of his or her service-connected condition(s) on obtaining employment.
 - Evaluation of his or her capacity for suitable employment and/or independence in daily living.
 - Discussion of claimant’s vocational skills and needs.
 - Identification of barriers that may impact employability and assessment of other life circumstances.

VR&E Process

Eligible veteran
or SM applies
for services

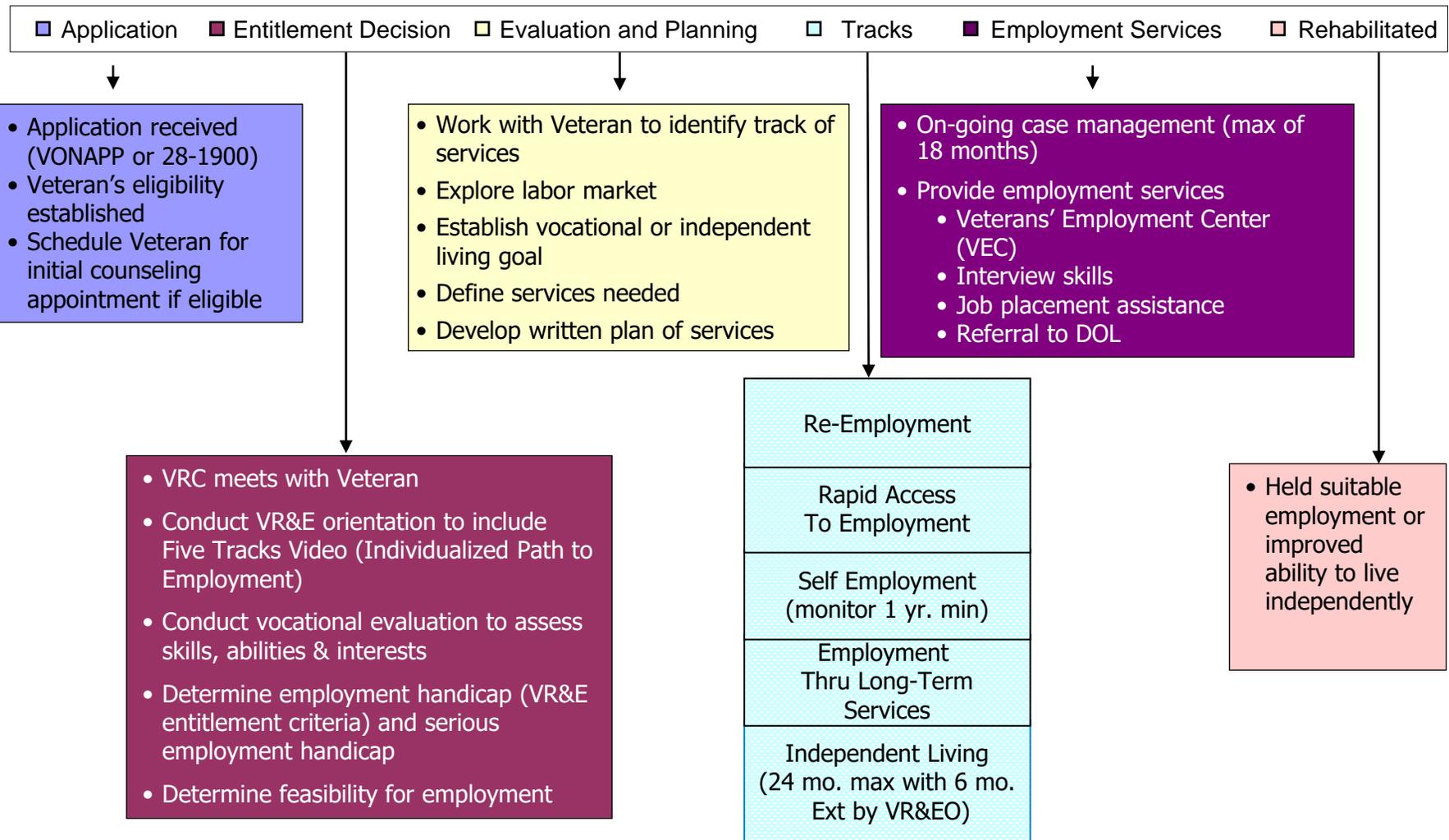
An initial
appointment
determines
entitlement to
program

The Five Tracks
are reviewed
with client and
an appropriate
track is
determined

A plan is
written and
implemented
for the
specified track

The veteran is
provided
support and
services while
pursuing
agreed upon
goals

The end result
is Employment
(or the
achievement of
a higher quality
of life through
independent
living services)



VR&E Time Limits



- The program offers up to 48 months of benefits which can be used for up to 12 years from date of separation from active military service, or date the veteran was first notified by VA of a service-connected disability rating (including ratings of 0%).
- The 12-year time limit to access services is waived for Veterans discharged after January 1, 2013.
- Unlike the GI Bill which is an education program, the purpose of VR&E is **employment**.

VR&E's Five Tracks

- Reemployment
- Rapid Access to Employment
- Self-Employment
- Employment Through Long-Term Services
- Independent Living

Reemployment

A plan for reemployment services provides a claimant with necessary skills to return to the occupation he or she had held prior to entering active military service. This track is provided to a claimant who may need some short-term or refresher training. If the previous employment is no longer suitable, the claimant must be evaluated to determine if an alternative suitable vocational goal with the same employer is an option.

- What may be included:
 - In this track, services provided are solely focused on returning the claimant to the position previously held. The VRC completes an occupational analysis to ensure that the claimant's previous employment is suitable, with or without accommodations, and the claimant has the functional capacity to return their former position.

Re-Employment Example

James is a National Guard soldier who is employed full-time with a warehouse as a forklift operator. He deployed for 9 months with his unit and sustained an injury to his left rotator cuff. Though recovered from surgery, James lost some of his range of motion which prevents him from frequent lifting, pulling, pushing and heavy physical work. Since his job often required manual labor when not using a forklift, James is worried he won't be rehired. The VRC works with him and his employer to see what's available for accommodations or modifications. The employer is willing to place him in a managerial role, but he needs some on-the-job training to learn the logistical software. VR&E helps cover the cost of the OJT program. Now, James is in a role where he is responsible for overseeing warehouse operations and no longer has to worry about aggravating his injury.



Rapid Access to Employment

A plan for rapid access to employment services provides a claimant services to enhance already acquired skills necessary for him or her to obtain and maintain employment without delay.

- What may be included:
 - Services to improve the claimant's rehabilitation potential may include short-term or refresher training, such as interview skills training; job-seeking techniques; resume development; assistance with translating military work experience into civilian work experience; and other necessary rehabilitation services.

Rapid Access to Employment Example

Steffi has been out of work for the past three years while raising her children as a stay-at-home mom. After separating from service, she attended school and earned an Associates in Computer Science as well as several IT-related certifications. However, since she's been out of the job market, her CompTIA A+ cert expired and though she was previously certified for Windows 7, the system is now updated to Windows 10 and she requests assistance with obtaining this new certification. The VR&E program is able to approve paying for both of these, as they are justifiable, given the labor market research and necessary qualifications. Additionally, the Employment Coordinator assists her with updating her resume and practicing interview skills. She is also referred to the local Disabled Veterans Outreach Program and is added to the email distribution list where she receives job updates every week. After attending a job fair with her new resume, updated certifications, and confidence with practiced interview skills, she is hired on the spot for a Desktop Support position.



Self-Employment

The purpose of the self-employment track is to provide services to claimants who have the necessary job skills to start a business and for those who have limited access to traditional employment or require a more accommodating work environment due to the effects of a disability.

- What may be included:
 - For an existing business, only services for accommodations that allow the veteran to continue working
 - For “Category 1” claimants: Comprehensive training in the vocational goal and in the operation of a small business. Minimum stocks of materials such as an inventory of salable merchandise or goods. Expendable items required for day-to-day operations and items which are consumed on the premises. Essential equipment, including machinery, occupational fixtures, accessories, and appliances. Incidental services, such as business license fees, Workers’ Compensation Insurance, and disability insurance.
 - For “Category 2” claimants: Comprehensive training in the vocational goal. Incidental training in the management of a small business. License or other fees required for employment (e.g., required business insurance such as workers’ compensation insurance and disability insurance). Necessary tools and supplies that are required of all individuals to begin employment in the approved occupational field.

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Self-Employment (continued)

 VA will not authorize any of the following items, under any circumstances, even if considered essential to the startup of the business for Category I assignments:

- Full or partial payment to purchase land or buildings
- Lease or rental payments
- Purchase or rentals of cars, trucks, or other means of transportation.
- Stocking either a farm for animal husbandry operations or a fishery
- Franchise fees
- Support for non-profit business concepts

All Self-Employment plans must be approved by the VR&E Officer and cannot exceed a cost of \$25,000 without additional concurrence by the Executive Director of VR&E Service.

Self-Employment Examples

Manuel requests assistance with his bakery business. He opened over a year ago but has had to close several times due to personal illness. To gain exposure and boost sales, he started a line of gluten-free items but doesn't have the budget to advertise these all over town. Because this is an existing business, the VA can only consider services for reasonable accommodations. The VRC assigned to him cannot find any accommodations that he needs and closes his case because paid advertisement is not a disability accommodation. Thus VR&E services cannot cover this cost.



Self-Employment Examples

Casey has a plan to work as a freelance software designer. She enjoys working with computers and has experience from the military in Cyber Security. Because she experiences chronic pain and has severe difficulty with daily living tasks, she has been unable to secure employment and is now considered “totally disabled” by the VA and Social Security. She still wants to work though, and her VRC can assist her with a self-employment plan to work part-time from home. VR&E services provides her with some additional training in software design, as well as an ergonomic chair and a new computer monitor with special screen protectors to prevent her migraines from worsening. License or other fees required for employment can be approved. Outside of self-employment, no equipment or supplies would be needed for this occupation and therefore would not be approvable under VR&E



Employment Through Long-Term Services

The employment through long-term services track is targeted to claimants who need long-term services, such as remedial or refresher courses, specialized training, and/or post-secondary education, to obtain and maintain suitable employment.

- What may be included (though not limited to):
 - Specialized testing and evaluation
 - Career development and skills acquisition
 - Training and education (tuition, fees, books, tools, supplies)
 - Apprenticeships
 - On-the-Job Training (OJT)
 - Non-Paid Work Experience (NPWE)
 - Employment readiness preparation (resume writing and interview skills training)
 - Veteran preference documentation for special hiring authorities
 - Job accommodations
 - Special employer incentives

Independent Living

An Individualized Independent Living Plan (IILP) may be provided to claimants who cannot pursue an employment or vocational goal due to the limitations of their service-connected disability(ies) (SCD) to enhance activities of their daily living and independence from their family and community.

- What may be included (though not limited to):
 - Incidental training (to achieve IL goals) and subsistence allowance during training
 - Assistive Technology Assessment
 - Medical/Mental Health services (referrals)
 - Identifying appropriate housing accommodation
 - Coordination with community-based resources
 - Equipment to increase independence in ADLs (i.e., grab bars, shoehorn, raised toilet seat)
 - VR&E Housing Grant, if needed

Independent Living: Limitations



- Active duty Servicemembers who are entitled to IL services under [Public Law \(Pub. L.\) 110-181](#), National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, can only receive IL services that focus on the transition to civilian life, not retention in the military.
- Long term training, such as a college degree program, must **not** be authorized as part of an IILP. Training is limited to short term training programs that are specifically focused on improving a claimant's independence in daily living.
- IL objectives must not include provision of medical marijuana or legalized recreational substances, or tools for its cultivation or consumption. IILPs may not include training or other services related to the medical marijuana industry or legalized recreational substances.
- In accordance with [38 U.S.C. 3114](#), the provision of IL services is limited to the United States and its territories. IL services cannot be provided to claimants residing in foreign countries.
- “Avocational” options are also assessed but limited to certain criteria: reasonable accommodations are required to continue the avocation, these services are limited to one type of activity and VRC cannot update/replace existing equipment unless it is required to meet the goals of the IL plan.

Independent Living Example

Joan is unemployable and seeking assistance with gaining independence, so she doesn't have to rely as much on her husband and adult daughter. Her VRC completes a comprehensive evaluation which includes an assessment of her home that results in several needed items such as a shower chair, grab bars, ramp, bed rail, and a grabber. Joan also expressed "avocational" interests in painting, baking, and gardening. The VRC provides her with community resources so she can find those with similar interests and is able to provide some additional assistance with one activity. Since baking is her favorite and something she does at home, the VRC is authorized to purchase equipment to accommodate the Veteran's disabilities so that she can continue this avocation. Equipment might include a sit/stand stool, ergonomic grips on utensils and other adaptive equipment.



Overall Program Limitations



VA will authorize only those supplies or purchases which are required:

1. To be used by similarly circumstanced individuals who do not have a disability in the same training or employment situation
 2. To mitigate or compensate for the effects of the claimant's disability while he or she is being evaluated, trained, or assisted in gaining employment
 3. To allow the claimant to function more independently and to lessen his or her dependence on others
- Special supplies and equipment may be authorized as necessary to mitigate or overcome the effects of a disability. The VA Medical Center is the program of choice for providing medical care, treatment and equipment such as hearing aids or eyeglasses.
 - VR&E may purchase necessary tools, protective clothing, and other required supplies for training or initial employment. The case manager must discuss with the employer any tools, uniforms, and supplies that are required of all journeymen employees on the job. If the items are not required of all new employees in the same position, then the VA cannot authorize it. Uniforms that are normally rented must be rented as opposed to purchased.

Common Myths

- **They'll help me finish my degree**
 - FACT: As discussed before – ONLY if it's feasible and necessary to gain suitable employment. What does the person bring to the table? What else is needed?
- **They'll buy me a laptop**
 - FACT: Only if it's *necessary* to complete a training program (there must be evidence of need). This goes for any request for supplies (i.e., uniform, backpack, printer, specialized equipment or software, etc...)
- **They'll pay for my Masters/Doctorate or other higher education**
 - FACT: First, what does the person bring to the table? What is needed? Then it depends on labor market research, remaining entitlement, and feasibility

Additional services for qualifying family members

Chapter 35

Claimants who are requesting to receive benefits under Chapter 35 must be found eligible by the Regional Processing Office (RPO) based on one of the following conditions:

- The Veteran died while on active duty or as a result of a service-connected disability
- The Veteran is rated for total and permanent service-connected disability.
- The Service member is missing in action.
- The Service member is captured in the line of duty.
- The Service member is forcibly detained for longer than 90 days.

Chapter 35 services include one or both of the following:

- **Special Restorative Training**

- SRT is provided to assist a claimant to overcome or lessen the effects of a physical or mental health disability. The goal is to assist the claimant to attain an educational, specialized vocational or other appropriate goal through a comprehensive rehabilitation evaluation, plan development, or redevelopment and case management.
- Sample courses authorized under SRT: Speech and voice correction or retention, Language retraining, Speech (lip) reading, Auditory training, Braille reading and writing, Training in ambulation, One-handed typing, Non-dominant handwriting, Personal, social and work adjustment training, and Remedial reading

- **Specialized Vocational Training**

- SVT is a training program that includes training needed to accommodate a claimant with psychological or physical disabilities to achieve a selected vocational goal. Claimants with severe disability(ies) may be authorized a period of SVT following a successful completion of a plan of SRT services, provided the vocationally oriented goal of SVT is found to be feasible for the claimant.

References

- VR&E Program Definitions:
https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/program_definitions.asp
- VR&E Information for Veterans and online application:
<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/>
- VR&E Specific Information for Service Members:
<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/ides/>
- VR&E's Five Tracks: <https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/programs/>

