

**Pennsylvania  
Office of  
Vocational Rehabilitation**

**OVR  
Transition Guide  
for Professionals**



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & INDUSTRY  
OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The purpose of this guide is to provide professionals with an overview of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's role in the School-to-Work process. It is intended to provide basic knowledge of what students with disabilities and their families can expect when becoming involved with OVR.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is a state agency that helps individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. OVR is an eligibility based program. Two separate entities comprise OVR: the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) and the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS)

## Vocational Rehabilitation Process

- Referring Students
- Application and Initial Interview
- Eligibility Determination
- Order of Selection
- Financial Needs test
- Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)
- Coordination of Services with other Agencies
- Competitive Employment and Case Closure

## Referring Students

The optimal timing for OVR to begin working with a youth or young adult with a disability is when the youth or young adult is ready, able, and available, to engage in the activities necessary to establish an employment goal. These activities include the development of an IPE and participation in vocational services in order to become employed. The time at which this occurs is unique to each individual. Typically, this is two years prior to graduation. However, it may occur later due to onset of disability and the individual's ability to pursue competitive employment at that time. It should occur at a time when the youth or young adult becomes interested in pursuing an employment goal and becomes available for vocational programming.

An appropriate referral to OVR is any student with a disability who may need vocational guidance and assistance in preparing for, obtaining, or maintaining competitive employment. Competitive employment is a job in a community integrated setting, earning at least minimum wage. Students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), students who have a Section 504 plan under the Rehabilitation Act, and any other students with disabilities who may or may not require specialized services in school including Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health Issues are appropriate referrals to OVR. If there are any uncertainties regarding who would be an appropriate referral, contact your local OVR office to further discuss it.

A referral to OVR can be made by anyone, including a student, a family member or school/agency personnel. Students under the age of 18 must have parent/guardian permission to become involved with OVR services.

Referrals can be made in person, by phone, or on-line at [www.cwds.state.pa.us](http://www.cwds.state.pa.us). Contact the local OVR District Office, or the designated OVR Liaison to determine the preferred method. At the time of the initial referral, OVR will need the following information about the student to facilitate the application process:

- Name
- Address
- Telephone Number
- E-Mail address (if applicable)
- Date of Birth
- Social Security Number
- Gender

## The Initial Referral

At the time of referral, OVR will need the following information about the student:

- The student's name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, date of birth and social security number.
- A brief statement about the student's disability.

# Eligibility Determination

OVR's program is based on eligibility for services and is not an entitlement program. A student must be determined eligible by an OVR Counselor. The counselor must first determine that the student has a diagnosed disability, and that the student's disability substantially interferes with her/his ability to prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. Finally, there must be a demonstrated need for OVR services in order for the student to successfully pursue or retain employment.

Only an OVR Counselor, who has special training and experience, can determine if an individual is eligible for OVR services. Existing records (medical, psychological, vocational, etc.), staff observations, family input, and student self-evaluation will help the OVR Counselor make an eligibility determination.

# Order of Selection

Since OVR does not have the resources available to serve all individuals in Pennsylvania who are eligible, OVR has established an “Order of Selection” (priority of service). OVR serves only individuals with the “most significant disabilities” as the priority. To meet this criteria, the OVR Counselor will determine if the student's disability significantly limits at least three areas of functional capacity. They are:

- Mobility
- Self-Care
- Work Tolerance
- Interpersonal Skills
- Work Skills
- Communication
- Self-Direction

Please Note: This information is intended as a general guide. An OVR Counselor will determine the significance of an individual's disability after eligibility is established.

## Financial Need

The financial needs test determines to what extent the student may be required to contribute toward the cost of certain OVR services. These services will be outlined in the IPE. However, diagnostic and evaluation services, vocational counseling and guidance are always provided without regard to the student's and/or family income.

The financial needs test (FNT), using documented household income, determines to what extent the eligible student and his/her family may be required to contribute toward the cost of certain OVR services. These services will be outline in the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Documentation of household income will be requested such as a tax return, W2, pay stubs, etc. If the individual is receiving Social Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), a copy of their monthly awards letter will be required. Diagnostic and evaluation services, vocational counseling and guidance, rehabilitation teaching, orientation and mobility training, and job placement assistance are always provided regardless of the student's and/or family income.

# Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

The cornerstone of the OVR process is vocational counseling and guidance provided by an OVR Counselor. After the student is determined eligible and meets the Order of Selection criteria, he/she will work closely with an OVR Counselor to clearly define an employment goal and jointly develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

The IPE is developed by the student and the OVR Counselor to meet the student's unique vocational strengths and needs. The student's interests, strengths, and abilities guide the IPE development. Plan will be developed based on results of testing and evaluations as well as clients interests and aptitudes. Job market and employability will also be considered. The IPE will identify the student's vocational goal as well as the services and service providers that will be utilized to assist the student to reach that specific goal. The length of time from OVR referral to successful employment will vary widely depending on the content of the IPE and the unique circumstances of each student.

## Coordination of Services with other Agencies

A student may require support from other public, private or community agencies that will serve a role in the student's Transition from School to Work. These agencies are key to the provision of long-term supports that the student may need to achieve and maintain his/her employment and independence as an adult. Representatives of these agencies should also be invited to participate in the development and implementation of a student's Transition Plan while they are still in school. These agencies include but are not limited to:

- Department of Public Welfare
- Office of Intellectual Disabilities
- Office of Mental Health
- Bureau of Autism Services
- Office of Long-Term Living
- Office of Children, Youth, and Families
- Department of Health
- Department of Labor and Industry
- Workforce Investment Act Youth Program
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Other public/private agencies and community resources

## Competitive Employment and Case Closure

The goal of receiving OVR services is for the customer to obtain and maintain competitive employment. This goal is achieved when the individual is working in a community-integrated setting earning at least minimum wage. Customers will, ideally, be working in a position of employment that will help them to reach their full-vocational potential.

OVR services are complete when the customer achieves his/her vocational goal and is successfully employed for at least 90 days, at which time the case is closed. If necessary, post-employment services may be available after a case is closed. Other agencies may also be able to provide funding to the individual for long-term supports necessary to maintain employment.

# How Can School/Agency Personnel and OVR Help One Another?

Starting at a young age, students benefit from a systematic approach to career development. OVR counselors can provide technical assistance to school/agency personnel to assist in the development of learning activities and opportunities that are centered on career exploration and development. To prepare students for employment and OVR involvement, school/agency personnel can work with OVR staff to:

- Create ongoing work-based learning opportunities, such as job shadowing, mentoring, and unpaid and paid work experiences with the students
- Utilize ongoing assessment to effectively assist students to plan and prepare for employment
- Develop a career portfolio and utilize it as a tool for the student's self-development
- Provide presentations to staff, students, and families regarding Transition Services
- Develop "team teaching" activities on topics such as: OVR Orientation, Career Exploration, Self –Awareness/Self Advocacy, Disability Awareness, Eligibility vs. Entitlement, Job Readiness, Job Seeking, and Job Retention
- Evaluate the strengths and needs of the students being referred

To learn more about the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation please visit our website at <https://www.dli.state.pa.us> Click on Disability Services and then on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.



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