**Post-Secondary and Other Vocational Training**

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**I.** **Overview**

**Adherence to Policy**

The Division has a responsibility to provide services that meet each participant’s employment needs. The Division also has a responsibility to ensure that services are provided in a consistent, fair and equitable manner over time and throughout the state.  The policies in this section express the general rules that apply unless extenuating circumstances warrant an exception.  Such circumstances could include the participant's needs based on his or her disability or otherwise outside their control. Participants requesting exceptions to any part of this policy must submit a written request that documents the extenuating circumstances and provides a detailed rationale for the exception. The District Manager will review and approve or deny the request and, when appropriate, forward for spending authority approval.

The counselor may directly assist (e.g. write the rationale based on information reported by the participant) or provide services to assist a participant (e.g. transcription of a tape recorded request) who is unable to independently complete a written request for exception due to his or her disability.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of this manual all cases that include training by a facility that accepts Federal Student Aid are considered to be Post-Secondary Educational Training cases.

Cases that include training from a vocational school, such as certain for profit career training centers or trade schools that do not accept Federal Student Aid will be considered Other Vocational Training cases.

**II****. Post-Secondary Training**

**A.** **Overview and Considerations**

Post-secondary education is often a gateway to increased employment opportunities and self-sufficiency. VR supports post-secondary education necessary to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE. The goal of VR sponsored training is employment rather than education alone.

Prior to the provision of post-secondary training the counselor should assist the participant with a thorough career exploration. This may include encouraging the

participant to complete interest inventories, visit job sites and training institutions, participate in job shadowing and volunteer opportunities and using tools such as the Nevada Career Information System (NCIS), O-Net or the Occupational Outlook Handbook to explore training requirements, salary ranges and working conditions. Labor market trends should also be explored. The likelihood of employment in the planned occupation after completion of training should be given utmost consideration.

Qualified individuals who already have a Bachelor’s Degree, as appropriate, may be encouraged to explore advanced training leading to occupations in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering or mathematics—including computer science) medicine, law or business.

Factors to take into consideration when exploring the possibility of post-secondary training:

Employment Goal:

* Requirements to develop the basic skills and/or obtain the credentials required for the goal.
* Will post-secondary training prepare the individual for employment in this field?
* The specific skills, certificates, degrees or credentials required to reach the employment goal (certificate program, Associates degree, Bachelor’s degree private technical schools, etc.).
* The likelihood of successful employment upon completion of the training.

Participant Factors:

* Is the training being considered conducive to the participant’s learning style?
* At what rate does the participant learn?
* Did the participant like school?
* Did the participant graduate from secondary school?
* What were the participant’s grades, academic achievement test results, career assessment findings, college assessment findings, SAT scores?
* Will the participant require support to succeed? If so what support will assist the participant in being successful?
* Is a trial class or classes appropriate? If so, what courses would be most appropriate and meaningful? What supports will be needed to make the trial class (es) meaningful?

Note: Trial classes may be used if the counselor and/or participant have reservations about the participant’s ability to complete college course work or for an individual to take classes in a particular field to determine the participant’s ability to meet educational requirements for that field. Trial classes are a training service completed as a part of an IPE and thus are subject to financial participation. The IPE must clearly indicate that classes are being funded for no more than one semester or term and that full funding is still dependent on spending authority approval. If the trial class (es) is successful, strong consideration should be given to amending the plan for the entire training and submitting it for approval to the appropriate spending authority. The IPE should indicate that if the semester is not successful the participant agrees to consider a differentvocational goal. While a trial class or classes are allowed for one semester, nothing in this allowance is to be construed as permission to complete college IPE’s for only one semester or one year at a time.

**B.** **Funding for Post-Secondary Training**

1.  Overview and Requirements

Once it has been determined that post-secondary education will be included as part of an IPE, in order for a participant to achieve his or her employment outcome, the counselor and participant must determine how it will be funded. It is the policy of the Division that:

* Utmost effort must be made by the participant to obtain **comparable benefits** as described further, “Funding: Comparable Benefits.” (Subsection II.B.4).
* A **financial needs test** will be imposed. The family income will be counted when the participant is listed on an income tax return regardless of the age of the participant. Thus, if a student is claimed as a dependent on a parent's most recent income tax return, the parental income will be included in determining financial participation even if the participant is age 18 or older.

However, per federal regulation, a financial needs test will not be applied when considering the payment of tuition, books and supplies at an in-state public institution if the participant receives SSI for a disability or SSDI. SSI/SSDI recipients will still need to complete the FAFSA in order to determine the availability of comparable benefits.

* VR has established a **preference for in-state public institutions** as described in “Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State institutions not within Commuting Distance”(Subsection II.B.3)
* **College Selection:** Students must complete all available classes at the most cost effective local public college (such as a community college) or pay the cost difference between the most cost effective local public college and the more expensive program. Exceptions must comply with the “Adherence to Policy” procedures (outlined above in Subsection I at the beginning of Section 12.3) and be approved by the District Manager.
* **VR’s Contribution** = the post-secondary educational expenses consistent with the policies outlined in this manual, minus the total of all applicable grant monies, comparable benefits, and the participant’s financial participation amount (if any).
* VR will **approve** **payment** only for those services that are part of the IPE or assessment of VR needs. VR shall not approve payment for a service unless the counselor authorizes the service in writing before the vendor provides the service and/or before the participant incurs the expense. VR will not make payments on a loan the participant or the participant’s family has incurred.
* **Full Time Attendance**: Participants pursuing a degree program utilizing VR funding will attend full-time. Exceptions due to a disability require a note from a physician, psychologist or other qualified provider each year the participant attends part time. The note must document the rationale for determining why, due to the disability, the individual cannot attend full time. As the intent of schooling is employment, the note must also include the physician, psychologist or other qualified provider’s assessment of the individual’s ability to work once training is completed and recommendations on the number of hours a week the individual may work once training is completed. A note from the disability resource center is not sufficient to meet this need.

Exceptions are also allowed if the classes an individual needs to complete his or her degree program are not available during a given semester or if the individual only needs to take a few classes to complete his/her degree requirements.

Exceptions due to other extenuating circumstances should be rare and must comply with the “Adherence to Policy” procedures (outlined above in Subsection I at the beginning of Section 12.3).) and be approved by the District Manager.

* **Change in Majors and Credit Limitations:** Regardless of changes in the employment goal or major, the maximum number of credit hours a person may take and still receive VR funding is limited to125% of the published rate required for a degree. This includes credit hours paid for in previous VR cases, hours paid for by another State VR program and hours paid for by the Pell Grant or similar comparable benefits. However electives and other courses paid for by the participant, his or her family or similar private resources will not be calculated into this percentage. Exceptions for extenuating circumstances must follow the procedure outlined in “Adherence to Policy” procedures (outlined above in Subsection I at the beginning of Section 12.3) and be approved by the District Manager.

Exceptions, in general, may be limited to the following types of situations:

* + A participant utilized VR funding (or exhausted the Pell grant) a number of years ago. The District Manager may choose to exempt some or all of the credit hours that VR or the Pell Grant paid for years ago from the total credit hours used to calculate 125%
  + The student declared a major and took classes within that major to

prepare for a particular vocational goal, and then acquired a disability that

kept him or her from pursuing that particular major or goal. The District

Manager may choose to exempt some or all of credit hours taken that are

unique to that particular major from the total credit hours used to calculate

125%.

If contemplating a change in school or a change in majors after the 1st year, the student needs to meet with the institution and analyze transcripts, determine what classes are transferrable to the new school or major and develop a plan for completing required course work. The analysis and plan must be submitted to the counselor for approval.

* **Bachelor’s Degrees**: Students seeking a 4 year degree must complete all available classes at the most cost-effective local public college (such as a community college) that offers Associate’s degrees until they earn their Associate’s degree, transfer degree or equivalent prior to transferring to a university to complete the remainder of their degree program. Students who wish to start at the University may do so if they pay the cost difference between the two programs.

Exceptions must follow the “Adherence to Policy” procedures (outlined above in Subsection I at the beginning of Section 12.3) and be approved by the District Manager. Generally exceptions will be rare and may be limited to situations where a University, such as Gallaudet, meets specific disability needs.

* **Advanced Degrees**: VR may support advanced training in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering or mathematics, including computer science), medicine, law or business if an individual demonstrates:
  + - Eligibility for VR Services;
    - Previous completion of a bachelor’s degree program at an institution of higher education or scheduled completion of such a degree program prior to matriculating in the program for which the individual proposes to use VR support;
    - Acceptance by a program at an institution of higher education in the United States, consistent with the State’s policy and preference for In-State Public Institutions, that confers a master’s degree in a STEM field, a juris doctor degree, a master of business administration degree, or a doctor of medicine degree;
    - Maximum effort has been expended to obtain comparable benefits.

All of the conditions above must be met before VR funds an advanced degree in

these fields.

Advanced Degrees in Other Fields: The Work Force Innovation and Opportunity Act places an emphasis on advanced training in Stem Fields. However the agency may assist with advanced degrees in other fields if the advanced degree is a minimum qualification for the employment outcome or the employer requires it in order to advance in employment. The participant must still meet eligibility requirements.

IPE’s or IPE Amendments for Advanced Degrees should not be completed until an individual has either obtained a bachelor’s degree or is scheduled (within one to two semesters/terms) to obtain a bachelor’s degree. A reassessment of vocational needs may be completed upon receipt or scheduled completion of a bachelor’s degree in order to determine if an IPE amendment for an advanced degree is warranted.

2. Funding: Educational Expenses

VR funded educational expenses must be necessary for the participant to meet the IPE vocational goal. Educational expenses are defined as tuition, books and supplies, fees, a computer, transportation for educational purposes as well as tutoring and maintenance when applicable. Assistive technology, adaptive aids and other disability related needs are considered separately and are not to be calculated into the cost of educational expenses.

**Tuition:** Nevada VR has established a preference for in-state public supported institutions. Nevada VR will support out-of-state and private institutions according to the policies described “Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State institutions not within Commuting Distance” (Subsection II.B.3 below).

VR’s tuition assistance will be limited to classes needed to meet the degree requirements. The participant must obtain and supply the counselor with a list of required courses for the agreed upon certificate or degree program.

**Books:** VR may provide funding for required books as listed by the professor. Participants should purchase used books whenever possible. Refunds made to the participant for returned books will be applied to the purchase of future books. Participants should provide copies of receipts for books purchased and for books returned. In some cases it may be appropriate for the participant to rent books rather than purchase them.

**Supplies:** Participants may require special supplies to participate in a required class. For example, science courses requiring labs and lab materials. VR may fund these supplies if the class and supplies are needed to meet the degree or certificate requirements for the participant to reach his or her vocational goal. VR will not fund supplies for elective courses (such as supplies for a photography class) when another elective course that does not require additional supplies will meet the participant’s graduation/vocational needs. Class supplies will be purchased according to the required list published by the professor as would be required of all students in the same class. VR as a matter of course does not fund general supplies such as notebooks, back packs, paper, pencils etc. However, based on the unique needs and financial considerations of the participant, the counselor may authorize these items.

**Fees:** VR may fund mandatory fees required of students to register for training at a post-secondary institution at a public supported in-state institution. Examples of mandatory fees the agency may support include application fees, technology fees, laboratory fees, library fees and graduation fees. VR may also fund cap and gown fees if necessary to enable the participant to participate in the graduation ceremony. Examples of fees the agency cannot support include fees associated with an unpaid parking ticket, fines, social organization fees, entertainment fees, bank fees, court fees, graduation announcements and fees in excess of in-state public institution fees, that are associated with attending a private or out-of-state institution except as noted in “Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State institutions not within Commuting Distance” (Subsection II.B.3 below).

**Computers:** Purchase of a computer for academic purposes is subject to economic need and comparable benefits (e.g. Pell and other financial aid). Generally, a basic standard laptop that will meet the participant’s needs may be purchased. A participant may choose, at his or her own expense, to purchase any upgrades that are desired, but not necessary to complete school. Computers which are wholly or partly funded by VR for educational purposes are to be used solely by the participant for that purpose until the completion of school(unless purchased as part of an assistive technology package provided for school, employment and independent living purposes). VR will not repair or replace a computer which has been used by other individuals or which

has been used for other than educational purposes (or in the case of assistive technology has been used for purposes other than those intended). Nor will VR replace a computer that was damaged, lost, pawned, or stolen due to misuse or negligence on the part of the participant.

Note: VR generally will not purchase computers for students who are not attending full time or who are not enrolled in a degree program. Students taking one or two classes or not pursuing a degree may utilize the college’s computer lab. In compliance with the “adherence to policy” at the beginning of this section, exceptions to this may be made with District Manager approval if there is extreme undue hardships taking into account the participant’s circumstances and resources. For example an extremely long commute on the bus would not be an extreme undue hardship if the participant can organize his or her time to utilize the computer lab before or after his or her classes or if the individual does not have other pressing time commitments such as a job or child care responsibilities that preclude him or her from spending extensive time in travel.

Participants must sign an equipment agreement and the IPE must include a description of the participant’s responsibilities in regards to the protection and care of the computer.

The counselor or rehabilitation technician must confirm with accounting if any state purchasing or other requirements apply before purchase of the computer.

As Wi-Fi access is readily available on most college campuses, VR generally will not fund Internet access for academic purposes unless there are extenuating circumstances justified by the counselor. In such cases, Wi-Fi will only be provided during the academic school year. Access in summer will only be provided if the individual has a need due to participating in academic courses during the summer.

**Tutoring:** If tutoring is needed it should be provided by a comparable benefit whenever possible. If a comparable benefit is not available, VR may fund tutoring that is needed as a support service to regular classroom instruction. It should not replace classroom instruction or be provided to the extent or degree that in effect it becomes one on one course instruction for the student.

**Transportation**: VR may provide bus passes, or gas cards or authorizations for these items, in accordance with Section 12 of this manual, “Scope of Services,” for the participant to travel to and from his or her home and the training institution when attending a public in-state institution within commuting distance of his or her home. In these cases the mileage allowance for gas cards or authorizations will not exceed 1000 miles per month.

Funding of travel expenses associated with attending training that is not within commuting distance must follow procedures set forth in “Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State institutions not within Commuting Distance (Subsection II.B.3 below).

**Maintenance:** VR does not fund normal living expenses that an individual would otherwise have incurred if not participating in the VR program. Funding of living expenses to attend training should not be provided if the individual is attending training within commuting distance of his or her home. For training not within commuting distance, procedures set forth in “Funding Private and Out of State Institutions and In-State Institutions not within Commuting Distance” (Subsection II.B.3 below) must be followed.

3.  Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State institutions not within

Commuting Distance

**Overview and Requirements**:

VR may fund training at private or out-of-state institutions or in-state training not within commuting distance of the participant’s residence at the same level of funding that VR would provide at the most cost effective in-state publicly supported institution that is within commuting distance of the participant’s residence.

As the State has established a preference for public in-state training, any additional expenses associated with private or out-of-area training such as room and board, increased tuition or fees, and travel costs become the responsibility of the participant except as noted in A) and B) below.

If the individual chooses to attend a training program that will cost more than VR is funding, the individual must demonstrate that sufficient funds are available from other resources to cover expenses that are not covered by the agency. This information must be documented in the case record by an award letter, a loan confirmation, or other verification that sufficient funding is available. In situations where the counselor has questions about the verification of resources, a budget for the training program may be developed with the participant.

VR may provide funding beyond the rate for in-state public institutions for tuition, books and fees, and as applicable for additional transportation and maintenance costs (for institutions not within commuting distance of the participant’s residence) under the following circumstances:

1. An out-of-state or private in-state institution or a public institution not within commuting distance specializes in and is better suited to prepare the individual for employment by meeting specific disability related needs (for example, a school that has experience and specializes in providing educational services to individuals who are deaf-blind or a college that offers a unique certificate program geared toward meeting the employment needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities). The participant must provide a valid rationale and documentation that demonstrates how another institution is better suited to meet his or her specific disability needs and increase his or her ability to achieve an employment outcome. Approval must be obtained by the District Manager and appropriate spending authority before signing the IPE or IPE amendment, Or;
2. No in-state public institution within commuting distance offers the training program needed to reach the vocational goal.

VR is under no obligation to pay out of state or private rates if an individual does

not meet the requirements to gain entrance into an in-state public institution

The participant must research programs within the state and provide

documentation that no public in-state institutions or training programs actually

offers the training.

Note: Even if B applies, students seeking a 4 year degree must complete all available classes at the most cost effective local public college (such as a community college) that offers Associates degrees until they earn their Associates degree, transfer degree or equivalent prior to transferring to a more expensive University that offers Bachelor’s degrees for the remainder of their degree program. District Manager approval is not required when considering all costs (such as transportation and maintenance if applicable) it is more cost effective to the agency for the student to attend an out of area or private institution. Prior to making this determination, bids must be obtained from in-state public and private institutions. Maintenance cost and travel expenses for each option must also be considered. All other exceptions must follow the “Adherence to Policy” procedures (Subsection I at the beginning of Section 12.3 above) and be approved by the District Manager. Generally exceptions will be rare and may be limited to situations where a University, such as Gallaudet, meets specific disability needs.

If “B)” applies the following preferences and policies will be followed:

**First Preference:** VR will fund a private institution within commuting distance.

If the student chooses to attend an out of area institution he or she will be responsible for additional expenses including transportation and maintenance.

Noted Exception: VR may fund the additional expenses for an out of area institution, if considering all applicable expense (including but not limited to, tuition, fees, transportation and maintenance) it is more cost effective for VR to fund an out of area program than to fund a private program within commuting distance. Prior to authorizing out of state training, bids and expenses for in-state public institutions in other areas of the state, as well as private institutions within the state must be obtainedand there must be documentation that this is the most cost effective option for the agency. If it is not the most cost effective option (taking into consideration all applicable expenses including tuition, transportation and maintenance) the participant may choose the out of state option if he/she pays the cost difference between the two programs.

**Second Preference:** If there is no institution that offers the training within commuting distance, VR may fund educational expenses at the most cost effective in-state public institution that will meet the participant’s needs.

If the student chooses to attend an out of state training or a private institution not

within commuting distances, he or she will be responsible for expenses that

exceed the in-state costs.

Noted Exception: VR may fund expenses associated with out of state or private institutions not within commuting distance; if considering all applicable expenses (including but not limited to, tuition, fees, transportation and maintenance) it is more cost effective for the agency to do so. Prior to authorizing out of state training bids and expenses for in-state public institutions in other areas of the state, as well as private institutions within the state must be obtained.

**Third Preference**: If no public institution within the State or private institution within commuting distanceoffers the training, VR may fund an out of state, or private training program not within commuting distance, that is most comparable in expenses to what VR would pay for attendance at an in-state public institution, taking into account all educational expenses including but not limited to tuition, fees, maintenance and transportation.

* Participants will take primary responsibility to complete research and obtain information on various alternatives available;
* Documentation must be in the file that both public and private in-state options, correspondence or on-line options (if appropriate for the participant and field of study), and options from other states, including surrounding or nearby states, were explored. As applicable and appropriate exchange programs that reduce tuition costs should be explored such as the Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) program.
* In-state bids (both for public and private training) must be obtained prior to pursuing out of state options.

**Transportation and Maintenance for Training Not Within Commuting Distance**

Overview:

VR does not fund normal living expenses that an individual would otherwise have incurred if not participating in the VR program. VR does not fund maintenance for out of area training unless the participant meets either criteria A) or B) above.

Any government assistance an individual receives toward the cost of housing, food or transportation will be considered a comparable benefit. (also see note on Social Security as a comparable benefit under “Maintenance” below)

All services must comply with Section 12: Scope of Services and Section 18: Purchases and Payments of Goods and Services, Authorizations, Cash Pays and Authority Levels.

Transportation:

Additional travel expenses (e.g. airline ticket, gas allowance for students driving their own vehicle) provided to participants who are not within commuting distance of the institution will be limited to one round trip per semester.

VR has established a preference for on-campus housing, therefore VR generally will not fund transportation to and from campus when a participant who is receiving VR funding for housing, chooses to live off campus.

Maintenance:

Participants receiving VR funding for maintenance or meals will attend the educational institution on a full time basis.

**Social Security** and other government assistance **as a comparable benefit**: Although individuals who receive SSI and SSDI are exempt from financial participation, they are not exempt from the requirement to utilize comparable benefits. Social Security payments are considered a comparable benefit when it comes to paying for living expenses, therefore social security income must be taken into consideration and appropriately utilized before VR pays living expenses.  Participants receiving SSI or SSDI will be expected to contribute 75% of their SSI/SSDI allowance to the cost of their living expenses before VR provides maintenance funding for a student to attend a training institution.

**Housing:** VR has established a preference for on-campus housing. Payment will not exceed the rate for a double occupancy on-campus room unless a single occupancy room is required due to the nature of the participant’s disability. Exceptions to on-campus housing may be made if there is a lack of availability of on-campus housing or an exception request is made and approved per the “Adherence to Policy” procedures (outlined above in Subsection I at the beginning of Section 12.3).

Participants may choose off campus housing if it does not exceed the cost of on campus housing as described above and if they pay for their own transportation to and from campus. Off-campus housing expenses will be paid directly to the vendor when practical or if not feasible, reimbursed based on actual costs, not to exceed the cost that VR would pay for on-campus housing.

**Meals:** Meals should be provided per the most cost effective methods that will meet the participant’s needs. They will not exceed one half (1/2) the GSA Rate but usually should be less. Rates also will not exceed the rates noted below or in the “Maintenance Portion” of section 12 Scope of Services. Receipts are not required for meal allowances.

* In circumstances where the participant has the ability to prepare meals (e.g. an apartment/dorm with a kitchen -- stove top, oven, refrigerator, food and dish storage area), the meal allowance should not exceed the amount that a single individual who qualifies for food stamps would receive living in that geographic location.
* A basic college meal plans may be purchased for a participant (students may choose to purchase an upgraded meal plan if they pay the cost difference between the basic plan and upgraded plan):
  + - If it is a cost-effective means of providing meals to the student or;
    - For a student who does not have the ability to prepare meals because he or she is living in on-campus housing, that does not have appropriate meal preparation facilities, or who due to the nature of his or her disability is not able to prepare meals. Individuals who have access to a kitchen, but are not able to prepare meals due to the nature of the disability, must provide medical documentation of the inability to prepare meals. Note: If a government agency, insurance or other entity is providing personal care attendant or homemaking services that include meal preparation services; this will be considered a comparable benefit and the individual will be considered as having access to meal preparation facilities.
* If the individual does not have the ability to prepare meals and a meal plan is not feasible, the amount provided for meals will not exceed the amount charged for basic meals on campus by the local state supported institution, nor will they exceed ½ the GSA rate.

4. Funding: Comparable Benefits

**A) Overview:** Federal Regulations (See: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/> (type 34 CFR 361.48 (f) Funding Comparable Benefits) require maximum effort by the state and the individual to secure grant assistance from other sources before paying for training or training services in an institution of higher education (universities, colleges, community or junior colleges, vocational schools, technical institutes, or hospital schools of nursing).

RSA PD-92-02 (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/rsa/pd-1992.html>) also reinforces the intent that VR resources be used as a last resort to pay for training in institutes of higher education. This policy directive also clarifies how the state can carry out its responsibility by providing information about grants to the participant, assisting with completing the application if needed, and working mutually with the financial aid officer and participant to resolve any problems that may arise.

Close communication between VR and the financial aid officer may be needed in order to ensure the participant can take full advantage of comparable benefits and that VR funding does not negatively affect any other funding that may be available. A release of information between VR and the financial aid office at the school should be obtained. The Rehabilitation Technician will take primary responsibility for working with participants and financial aid officers to address financial aid matters.

**B) Allowed Exceptions:**

Scholarships: Monetary awards or scholarships to participants based on merit are not considered as grants or comparable benefits as long as no restrictions are placed by the organization on the use of the money. Even if the award is designated for general educational purposes, it is not considered a comparable benefit and will not be used to calculate VR’s assistance.

However, if the participant accepts a scholarship or grant that is specifically earmarked for tuition or a particular college expense, VR will not also duplicate payment for that same expense. The Millennium Scholarship (awarded by the State of Nevada for the payment of tuition and books) is paid directly to the school and will be considered first dollar resources in the payment of tuition and books. Scholarships and grants based on financial need are considered comparable benefits.

Loans: Student loans or any aid that must be monetarily repaid will not be counted as a comparable benefit. While a participant may choose to accept a student loan, the participant should understand the impact of and requirements for repaying the loan and make an educated and informed choice regarding this decision. The participant should be encouraged to study the Department of Education’s free on-line publication: [*Your Federal Student Loans: Learn the Basics and Manage Your Debt (PDF)*](http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/11-12YFSL.pdf). This website also provides information on ordering the pamphlet or requesting it in an alternative format such as Braille.

**C)** **Required Exploration**:

**WIOA Funded Partners**: As applicable to the training needs of the participant, WIOA funded partners or other comparable benefits that provide assistance with certificate programs or other post-secondary education assistance should be explored.

**Free Application for Federal Student Aid (****FAFSA):** All participants, except as noted below, attending post-secondary education must apply for financial aid by completing and submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Utilizing the Student Checklist for College Training (Appendix C) may be helpful.

From the FAFSA application the participant will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) and, subsequently, a financial aid award letter from the institution which identifies financial aid award amounts. It is the participant’s responsibility to meet all deadline requirements when applying for FAFSA (see Participant Responsibilities for Post-Secondary Training, Appendix C). If the participant fails to complete and submit the FAFSA in time to receive a financial aid award letter, except under circumstances noted below, he or she must wait until the next term before receiving VR funding for post-secondary education. Except as otherwise noted, a copy of the financial aid award letter must be in the file each academic year before funding of post-secondary education for that academic year. Grants, financial aid provided by government agencies and other aid will be the primary funder of educational expenses and will be subtracted from any amount that VR would otherwise pay. However, if the financial aid award letter indicates eligibility for student loans, VR will not calculate this amount when determining VR costs. Nor will VR expect the participant to accept any loan that must be repaid. However a participant may choose to accept a loan to cover expenses not paid by VR.

Exceptions:

* The FAFSA application may be waived for the following reasons:
* The participant is taking classes during only one semester or term to determine if college is an appropriate choice for this individual.
* The participant is only taking a total of one or two courses to refresh or learn a new skill such as a computer class or to obtain Continuing Education Units (CEU’s) or Credits (CEC’s).
* The individual is ineligible to receive federal or state financial aid due to graduating from high school with a Nevada adjusted diploma (or equivalent from another state). Federal guidelines usually require a regular high school diploma or GED in order for an individual to be eligible for the Pell Grant, and Nevada public institutions use federal criteria for awarding **state funds** as well. If attendance at an out-of-state institution is being considered for a participant with an adjusted diploma, the financial aid office at that school should be contacted directly regarding their criteria for awarding student aid. This must be done before the requirement to complete the FAFSA can be waived.

Note: Students with intellectual disabilities accepted for enrollment in a comprehensive transition and post-secondary (CTP) program may be eligible for a Federal grant and therefore must complete the FAFSA application.

* Exceptions to the requirement for the financial aid award letter:
* The counselor may make a one-time only exception to the requirement that the financial aid award letter be in the file before authorizing educational expenses if the FAFSA was not completed in time to receive the award letter due to extenuating circumstances beyond the participant’s control. For example, the participant was recently made eligible and was unaware of the FAFSA application requirement. In these cases the counselor may authorize expenses necessary for the participant to begin training, however the participant will still need to complete the application as soon as possible and refund VR any amounts paid for educational expenses up to the amount of the grant assistance received for that term/semester.

Denials of the Pell Grant:

1. **Defaulted Student Loans or Grant Repayment**: No post-secondary training funds will be authorized for a student who owes a refund on a previous grant or is in default on any student loan, unless it has been documented that the student has made maximum effort (see criteria below) to work out a satisfactory repayment agreement or other action has been taken to restore the participant’s eligibility for Title IV federal assistance. Under certain circumstances this may include a discharge of the debt. However, if the discharge of the debt was due to total and permanent disability and the determination that the individual cannot work, the individual must obtain a certification from a physician that indicates he/she is able to engage in substantial gainful activity.

Visit the Department of Education’s Federal Financial Aid website at <http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/DCS/loan.cancellation.discharge.html> to obtain additional information on discharge of debt.

**Maximum Effort to Repay Defaulted Student Loans:** The counselor must fully inform the participant of his or her responsibility to make maximum effort to restore eligibility for grant assistance and provide information or technical assistance where appropriate. RSA PD 92-02 (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/rsa/pd-1992.html>) indicates that in view of the flexibility of loan repayments, participants who are still in default status may not have made maximum effort to secure grant assistance.

The Department of Education’s Federal Financial Aid website at <https://www.myeddebt.ed.gov/> explains the U.S. Department of Education's Default Resolution Group’s commitment to assisting in making debt repayment a simple process.

The following website provides information on restoring eligibility for federal financial aid: <https://www.myeddebt.ed.gov/>.

In certain circumstances some participants may have such limited resources that a repayment plan is not feasible. The participant must complete a budget or statement of financial disclosure (found at the Department of Education’s Federal Financial Aid Website) <https://www.myeddebt.ed.gov/borrower/loanFormsPageFormsAction.action>

to determine what, if any, resources can be utilized for a repayment effort. The participant must utilize the Department of Education’s Federal Financial Aid office for assistance in determining an appropriate repayment amount or making repayment arrangements before the determination that a reasonable payment

arrangement cannot be made. However if after maximum effort has been made, no reasonable payment agreement plan is feasible, the counselor may authorize educational expenses. The participant’s budget or financial disclosure, as well as documentation of his or her inability to make reasonable repayment

arrangements must be in the file as well as a case note to explain the counselor’s rationale. If there is documentation that a participant has made re-payment arrangements, the counselor may authorize post-secondary educational expenses before the comparable benefits are restored. However, if the participant fails to make payments and reverts back to default status, VR funding will be withdrawn.

**Grant Repayment:** Grant repayment is generally required only if an individual received an over-award or if the individual withdrew early from the program for which the grant was provided. As with defaulted student loans, participants must make maximum effort to restore eligibility for Title IV federal funds before VR funding of educational expenses. Visit the Department of Education’s

Federal Financial Aid office at:

<https://www.myeddebt.ed.gov/borrower/myoptions_repayGrants.action>

to obtain information on grant repayment and restoring eligibility for Title IV services. The same general VR policies regarding maximum effort to restore eligibility for Title IV funds due to defaulted student loans also apply to denial of grant aid due to a grant repayment requirement.

1. **Drug Conviction**: No training funds may be authorized for a person who is currently ineligible for federal financial aid due to committing a drug offense.

The Department of Education’s student aid on the web at <http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/aideligibility.jsp?tab=funding> provides the following information:

*“Note: The Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended (HEA) suspends aid eligibility for students who have been convicted under federal or state law of the sale or possession of drugs, if the offense occurred during a period of enrollment for which the student was receiving federal student aid (grants, loans, and/or work-study). A participant who has a conviction(s) for these offenses may call the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243) to complete the "Student Aid Eligibility Worksheet" to find out how this law applies to them.*

*If you have lost federal student aid eligibility due to a drug conviction, you can regain eligibility if you pass two unannounced drug tests conducted by a drug rehabilitation program that complies with criteria established by the U.S. Department of Education.”*

Participants who are denied federal financial assistance based on this criterion must provide proof from the U.S. Department of Education that they have met its requirements and restored eligibility for Title IV funds before VR funds can be authorized for educational expenses. Participants should call The Federal Student Aid Information Center (1-800-433-3243) to obtain additional details on restoring eligibility for Title IV funds.

1. **Failure to Make Reasonable Progress:** VR funds will not replace grant funds or pay educational expenses that would have otherwise been paid by grant funds, if the funds are lost due to a participant’s failure to make reasonable progress (as defined by the school). A participant may fund his or her own educational expenses until he or she has met the school’s requirement for reasonable progress and restored eligibility for Title IV funds.

**C.** **Distance Learning: Post-Secondary**

This section applies to programs that are primarily correspondence, technology or web-based distance education programs. It does not apply to an individual correspondence course that is taken as part of a traditional campus based program.

VR may authorize the provision of correspondence or technology assisted training (e.g. web-based, distance learning etc.) if after appropriate exploration, the participant and counselor have come to the conclusion that the training is necessary to and will adequately prepare the individual to reach his or her IPE goal, and this is an appropriate method of training for the particular individual given his or her learning style, ability to work in a less structured environment and disability needs. Providers of the training must be accredited or licensed by the appropriate body and comply with all state and

federal requirements. The agency should not sponsor distance learning in subjects that require hands-on training (e.g. air conditioning, electrical, heavy equipment operation, truck driving or similar occupations) unless a viable method of obtaining practical experience has also been agreed upon.

Prior to signing an IPE for distance education, the participant should investigate and discuss with his or her counselor the graduation, employment rates of the prospective institution and the particular course of study. He or she will need to determine if the college under consideration has a high percentage of individuals graduating as well as a high percentage of individuals obtaining employment in the chosen field upon graduation.

Other considerations include:

* Does the distance learning program offer all courses necessary to complete the degree or certificate requirements?
* Are distance learning students required to go to campus?
* What are the technology requirements of the courses?
* Does the program provide academic, career counseling and placement assistance?
* What are the time frames for completing courses?

VR’s funding of correspondence and distance education courses will not exceed the rate for in-state public institutions if the training is available at an in-state public institution.

The division may fund internet access as required for participation in distance education. Assistance with transportation generally will not be required when participating in distance education.

All other policies regarding training (e.g. applying for comparable benefits, financial participation, IPE requirements and considerations) also apply to distance learning.

**D.** **IPE Considerations and Participant Responsibilities for Post-Secondary**

**Education**

Prior to completing the IPE the counselor and participant must:

* Negotiate the individual minimum requirements for successful progress in training.
* Review and sign the “Participant Responsibilities for Post-Secondary Training” form and retain a copy in the individual’s case file. Although not required, the counselor and participant may find it helpful to utilize the Student Checklist for College Training, especially for first-time students.

**The IPE at a** **minimum must include**:

* **The specific type of certificate or degree being sought** (the specific major and if VR is supporting a certificate, AA or Bachelor’s Degree, etc.).
* A **specific comment** that the participant understands and agrees to abide by all the requirements found on the **“Participant Responsibilities for Post-Secondary Training” form**
* A description of comparable benefits, the estimated amounts the benefit will pay and a description of any financial participation expected of the participant.
* If applicable, the participant’s responsibility to reimburse VR for expenses VR fronted which a comparable benefit will subsequently fund (for example, when VR fronts the tuition for a given semester, but later in the semester the individual is awarded the Pell Grant).

**Minimal Participant Expectations**

As a general guideline the following will be the minimum expectations of the participant.

Exceptions require the counselor to enter a case note rationale that adequately justifies why an exception is appropriate. Some exceptions, as noted, require District Manager approval.

1. A participant pursuing a degree will attend full-time.

As previously noted, exceptions must be submitted to and be approved by the District Manager as described in the “Adherence to Policy” at the beginning of this section. District Manager approval is not required if the classes an individual needs to complete his or her degree program are not available during a given semester, if the individual only needs to take a few classes to complete his/her degree program or if the individual can only attend part time due to a disability (see note below).

Note: Exceptions due to a disability require a note from a physician, psychologist or other qualified provider each year the participant attends part time. The note must document the rationale for determining why due to the disability, the individual cannot attend full time. As the intent of schooling is employment, the note must also include the physician, psychologist or other qualified provider’s assessment of the individual’s ability to work once training is completed and recommendations on the number of hours a week the individual may work once training is completed. A note from the disability resource center is not sufficient to meet this need.

1. Prior to including college on the IPE, the participant will provide the counselor a course outline of all required courses to meet the certificate or degree requirements. VR will only fund courses needed to meet these requirements.
2. The participant will provide the counselor grade reports at the end of each semester and before any funding for additional training is provided.
3. The participant will maintain a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average; however if the standard for a particular degree is higher, or a higher grade point average is required to continue with training (e.g. the participant is attempting to get into a limited entry degree program and the GPA in core classes is taken into consideration when determining who is accepted into the program), then the higher grade point average must be maintained.
4. VR will not fund the same course a second time including courses the participant must re-take due to a low or failing grade or due to withdrawing from the course after the deadline for receiving a refund has expired.
5. The participant will make satisfactory progress as defined by the training institution.
6. The participant will contact the counselor if there are any problems which may impede satisfactory progress in school (such as attendance, problems with accommodations, etc.).
7. As previously noted, students must complete all available classes at the most cost effective local public college (such as a community college). Students seeking a 4 year degree must complete their Associates degrees, transfer degree or equivalent prior to transferring to a more expensive University that offers Bachelor’s degrees for the remainder of their degree program. Exceptions must be approved by the District Manager and generally will only be granted when a college, such as Gallaudet, meets specific disability needs. District Manager approval is not required when considering all costs (such as transportation and maintenance if applicable) it is more cost effective to the agency to sponsor the student at a University or other college.
8. As previously noted if contemplating a change in school or a change in majors after the 1st year, the student needs to meet with the institution and analyze transcripts, determine what classes are transferrable to the new school or major and develop a plan for completing required course work. The analysis and plan must be submitted to the counselor for approval. VR’s funding of credits is limited, thus students should use good judgment and plan appropriately when changing majors.

**III. Other Vocational Training**

**A. Training at a Vocational Training Center or Facility**

1. Overview and Considerations

While there are many types of vocational training, for the purposes of this manual the term “vocational training” in this Subsection refers specifically to training from a vocational school, such as certain for-profit career training centers or trade schools, that do not accept Federal Student Aid.

When vocational training is offered at an in-state public post-secondary institution within commuting distance of the participant, the policies regarding funding for post-secondary education will apply even when the participant chooses to attend a private vocational school. The participant will be responsible for additional costs associated with attending the vocational school (see Subsection II.B.3 Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State institutions not within Commuting Distance for further information).

2. Procedure for Selecting Vocational Training Programs

Appropriate preparation for employment is a key element in determining the vocational training needs of a participant. Prior to the provision of vocational training, the counselor should assist the participant with a thorough career exploration. Once an appropriate vocational goal has been identified that is consistent with the individual’s abilities, skills, interests, aptitudes, functional limitations and is supported by a positive local labor market demand, the participant and the counselor must determine who will provide the training and how the training will be funded. In accordance with established financial participation guidelines, VR supports vocational training that is necessary to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

Higher cost providers do not necessarily produce the best outcomes. Cost-effective providers with good outcomes should be utilized. As part of the selection process, the participant must visit and assess training providers. They should take into consideration factors such as: the rate of attendees who complete the program, the percentage of graduates who obtain employment within six months of completing the program, the average wage of graduates, student satisfaction with the training provider (if available), as well teaching styles as they relate to the student’s learning style, and any unique disability related needs the individual has. After this assessment the participant should submit his/her top three choices. Division Staff (such as the VR Counselor, Technician or Administrative Assistants) will then solicit bids from those three training providers. In addition, after consulting with the participant and taking the above factors into consideration, the agency has the option of soliciting additional bids from other training providers, if there are more-cost effective providers who can effectively meet the needs of the participant (for example if the participant only selected the most expensive programs as options). As a general rule, the agency will select the training program with the lowest bid unless the VR counselor can articulate and provide a legitimate rationale for selecting a more expensive option that is directly related to the participant’s disability. In this situation, the counselor will need to complete a justification as to why this exception is warranted. This justification should be entered as a case note into the case file and submitted to their supervisor for review. The supervisor has the ability to approve, reject or ask for more clarifying information regarding the request. The supervisor will enter a case note in response to the VR counselor’s request. It is essential and a demonstration of being a good steward with federal dollars that the counselor always considers the reasonableness of the request and how this training will directly lead to a successful employment outcome.

3. Policies and Funding Requirement

General policies regarding post-secondary education (but that are not unique to post-secondary education) also apply to training at vocational training centers or facilities. For example, policies regarding obtainment of a course outline prior to completing the IPE, funding limited to courses needed to meet the course requirements and the requirement to make satisfactory progress apply to both post-secondary education and training at a vocational training center.

* **Comparable** **benefits**, when available, should be utilized to offset VR’s costs. Work Force Development partners who provide funding for training are an example of a comparable benefit that may, totally or partially, cover the cost of vocational training.
* **Training not within Commuting Distance**: VR’s funding for vocational training not within commuting distance of the participant will follow the same basic policies as funding post-secondary education not within commuting distance found under Subsection II.B.3 Funding: Private and Out-of-State Institutions and In State institutions not within Commuting Distance
* **VR’s contribution** toward funding will equal the vocational training expenses in accordance with the policies in this manual, minusany comparable benefits and/or financial participation, if applicable.
* VR will **approve pay****ment** only for those services that are part of the IPE. VR shall not approve payment for a service unless the counselor authorizes the service in writing before the vendor provides the service or before the participant incurs the expense. VR will not “refund” to participants costs they may have incurred before VR authorization.

* **Training and the RXQ Process:**

Direct purchase authority is allowed in cases where the school charges separately for individual sessions and each session is less than $5000.00. In this scenario, if the person attended two different sessions each costing less than $5000.00, then each session is a different authorization and there is no need for an RXQ.

If a session costs $5,000.00 or more, the RXQ process in Section 18 must be followed. Every session that is $5,000.00 or more requires a separate RXQ. After obtaining the RXQ, partial payments (as agreed upon with the training institution) may be made based on participant progress, milestones met, quarters or courses completed etc. However, encumbrances cannot cross the state fiscal year, thus authorizations should not go beyond June 30th. If the training period continues after July 1st – June 30th, an encumbrance needs to be created for that fiscal year. A session is whatever time frame the school has established (for example, it might be a semester, or it could be 10 weeks, or it could be for the entire program).

* The **purchase of tools, equipment, supplies**, training materials etc. that are not included in the cost of the training will adhere to the equipment agreement in Section 17 of this manual when applicable. VR may fund standard supplies, tools, equipment, etc. that are required for all individuals attending the same vocational training. The participant may choose, at his or her own expense, to purchase additional or upgraded supplies, tools, and equipment or training materials.

4. Distance Learning Through Vocational Schools

This section applies to programs that are primarily technology or web-based distance education programs at facilities that do not accept federal financial aid.

If the same course of study is offered at a public in-state institution, policies regarding post-secondary education will apply. If the training is offered through a private training facility, “Procedures for Selecting Vocational Training Programs” (Subsection III.A.2) should be followed.

VR may authorize the provision of technology assisted training (e.g. web-based, distance learning etc.) if, after appropriate exploration, the participant and counselor have come to the conclusion that the training is necessary and will adequately prepare the individual to reach his or her IPE goal, and this is an appropriate method of training for the particular individual given his or her learning style, ability to work in a less structured environment and disability needs. Providers of the training must be accredited or licensed by the appropriate body and comply with all state and federal requirements. The agency should not sponsor distance learning in subjects that require hands-on training (e.g. air conditioning, electrical, heavy equipment operation, truck driving or similar occupations) unless a viable method of obtaining practical experience has also been agreed upon.

Prior to signing an IPE for distance education, the participant should investigate and discuss with his or her counselor the graduation and employment rates of the prospective institution and the particular course of study. He or she will need to determine if the training provider under consideration has a high percentage of individuals completing the program as well as a high percentage of individuals obtaining employment in the chosen field upon completion of training.

Other considerations include:

* Does the distance learning program offer all courses necessary to prepare the participant for employment in the field?
* Are distance learning students ever required to go to a campus?
* What are the technology requirements of the courses?
* Does the program provide career counseling and placement assistance?
* What are the time frames for completing courses?

The Division may fund internet access as required for participation in distance education. Assistance with transportation generally will not be required when participating in distance education.

All other policies regarding training (e.g. applying for comparable benefits, financial participation, IPE requirements and considerations) also apply to distance learning.

5. IPE Considerations and Participant Responsibilities (for Other Vocational Training see sub-section II (D) for post-secondary education requirements)

Prior to completing the IPE the counselor and participant are to negotiate the individual minimum requirements for successful progress in training and other IPE requirements.

At a minimum the IPE should include a description of the following:

* The length of training and the specific type of training/certificate being funded;
* Expected progress and the participant’s/school’s responsibility to provide progress reports;
* attendance expectations;
* The terms on which continued training may be funded (if applicable);
* Information regarding VR’s limits in funding repeat training;
* Participant responsibilities in applying for and obtaining (and a description of) any comparable benefits;
* Amount of financial participation, if applicable;
* Participant’s responsibility to contact the counselor regarding any problems that may impede satisfactory progress (attendance, problems with accommodations etc.);
* Participant responsibility to contact counselor before withdrawing or taking actions that may affect the participant’s progress in the training, meeting IPE goals or other agreements with VR.

**B. Continuing Education Units or Credits (CEU’’s/CEC’s)**

Courses taken for CEU’s or CEC’s should be taken at the local public institution if available. Exceptions to this should be documented and justifiable. Exceptions include, but are not limited to, situations where it would be unreasonable for the participant to wait for the next semester at the local public institution as time frames for obtaining the CEU’s are critical in order for the participant to start or maintain a job.

**C.** **On-the-Job Training (OJT)**

On-the-Job Training enables a participant to learn the tasks, routine and skills of an assigned job at the actual work site. OJT is intended to result in continued or permanent employment in the assigned job or in a closely related job at the conclusion of the training period. OJT offers a wide range of preparatory opportunities and is adaptable to the unique needs and abilities of participants. This training resource is effective when formal training in the participant's vocational objective is unavailable or where ability to benefit from formal training is questionable.

OJT is not appropriate when there is a prerequisite for specific education or licensing, which the participant lacks. OJT is not intended to serve as an alternative to job placement when the participant already meets the minimum qualifications for the job and no additional skills training is needed. OJT payment is intended to reimburse the employer/trainer for the extraordinary costs associated with the training of the participant/trainee; it is not a subsidy of employee wages.

Comparable Benefits:

Community Partners and Work Development agencies receiving funding under WIOA may be able to fund OJT’s. They should be explored and utilized as appropriate. If a comparable benefit provides all of the funding for an OJT, their policies will apply in lieu of the following policies. The case record however, should include copies of the training progress reports.

OJT Trainee Wages and Fringe Benefits

Trainees are deemed employees of the employer.  Trainees shall be compensated in accordance with the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) at the rate, including periodic increases, as other persons employed by the employer in the same or similar jobs.  It is the policy of the Rehabilitation Division that participants in OJT’s, at a minimum, must be paid the State Minimum Wage. Trainees shall be assured of fringe benefits at the same level and same extent as all other employees of the employer including workers’ compensation benefits, unemployment insurance, health insurance and other benefits.

Reimbursement

The Rehabilitation Counselor may reimburse the employer for any portion of the participant's actual wages/salary, usually averaged or decreased over the length of the training period.  While the Rehabilitation Counselor may reimburse the employer for the workers’ compensation premiums, the premiums must be paid directly by the employer to a workers’ compensation provider.

In negotiating the reimbursement ratio with the employer, the Rehabilitation Counselor may progressively decrease the reimbursement rate as the trainee acquires skills and becomes more productive during the training period.

On the Job Training Agreement

The On-the-Job Training Agreement must be completed for all on-the-job training programs funded by the Division.  The Rehabilitation Counselor will include in the agreement a description of the essential functions of the job as provided by the employer, and the employer’s commitment to train to these specific requirements of the job and to provide appropriate supervision during the training.

All parties, including the participant, prior to the initiation of the training, must approve the OJT Agreement.  The OJT program must be clearly defined in the IPE.

The OJT agreement must indicate that no payment to the employer is made for services initiated prior to the signatures of the parties to the Agreement and the written authorization of the Division.  The employer is paid upon the submittal of progressive invoices and trainee progress reports during the training period as described in the agreement.  In no event will the total payments exceed the total authorized amount or the prorated obligation over the training period in which a terminated trainee was paid wages.

On The Job Training Budget and Certification Form

This form is completed with the required information for reimbursement to the employer. Additional pages may be added if the employer and Rehabilitation Counselor agree to a decreasing/revised contribution by the agency as the training period progresses.

Training Progress Reports

The employer submits training progress reports and timesheets with the invoice to the Rehabilitation Counselor.  The invoice cannot be processed for payment without receipt of the progress report and timesheet. Training reports are generally submitted on a weekly basis.

Modifications to the Agreement

The OJT Agreement is not a legally binding contract but rather is an agreement made in good faith.  It may be modified in writing or terminated by any of the parties concerned.

**D.** **Work Experience**

Work experience is training thatprovides participants the opportunity to develop hands-on skills at a real work site in the community without being an employee of the work site.  Work experiences may be volunteer positions or paid training.

1. Volunteer Work Experience**:**

Volunteer, unpaid work experience, provides the participant hands on-skill training at a work site that has an active volunteer program (such as hospitals).  Only sites that have a known volunteer program or a formal training agreement in place (that includes workers compensation or liability coverage as required by Nevada Revised Statues) should be used for this type of work experience. The employer/volunteer site provides workers compensation/liability coverage for the volunteer.  The participant must sign up for and be officially accepted and recognized as a volunteer to ensure workers compensation and/or liability coverage is in place.

VR may provide supports such as transportation assistance, work clothing and job

coaching for this type of work experience as follows:

1. If there is a formal agreement between VR and/or a Community Partner (such as a School District or a Regional Center) and the Business according to the length and terms of that agreement.
2. If there is no formal agreement, supports generally will not be provided for more than two months, but may be provided up to six months if there is a sufficient rationale and justification for this decision and it is well documented.

In either case, the agency must be provided weekly attendance and progress reports from the supervisor or as agreed to (when there is a formal agreement with a

Community Partner). The participant should be making reasonable progress in skill

obtainment for VR to continue to provide supports.

2. Paid Work Experience Training:

The participant is provided training at a work site without being an employee of the employer either through a formal program such as an agreement with a Community Partner and/or Business or through an informal agreement with a particular worksite.

In either case, the agency must be provided attendance and progress reports from the supervisor. The participant should be making reasonable progress in skill obtainment for VR to continue to fund and provide supports for paid work experience training.

**Formal Agreements:** Provision and supports for these work experiences will adhere to the formal agreement.

**Informal Agreements with an Individual Work Site:** Generally this will only be used when other methods of hands on skill development such as an On the Job Training is not practical.

In these cases, the Division authorizes an employment agency with a fully executed Division approved provider agreement or contract to provide workers’ compensation, payroll and other related services. As this is training and the participant is not an employee of the job site, the reimbursement rate for a participant’s wages will be the State’s minimum wage.  Work experience wages are considered wages for the purposes of income tax and may affect calculation of some benefits or entitlements, thus, the participant must plan accordingly.

Work Experience will not be used to pay wages for practicums and internships that are part of a degree program or for which the participant is receiving college credit. Practicums and internships of this sort are regarded as college training.

No participant will start a paid work experience funded by VR unless all necessary authorizations and paperwork are completed and arrangements have been made for the Division approved employment agency to provide payroll and related services.

The rehabilitation technician assigned to the team will take responsibility to ensure the participant has been instructed on completing payroll forms and/or paperwork required by the employment agency and that all other activities needed for administration of payroll and related services have been completed before the work experience start date.

The work experience agreement forms must be completed and signed by an authorized work site representative, counselor and participant. The supervisor at the work site will submit weekly reports to the counselor. The counselor and participant will be the primary developer of a work experience site that meets the needs of the particular individual. The counselor will be the primary contact with the work site supervisor, and will provide or arrange for any intervention needed.

The following are the general practices in regards to paid work experience. Any exceptions must include a written rationale and justification as well as approval from the Rehabilitation Supervisor.

* For VR purposes, paid work experience is considered training -- not employment.

* May be provided when hands-on training is needed to acquire the skills necessary to obtain entry level work consistent with the IPE vocational goal, but on-the- job training or other forms of hands-on training are not appropriate or feasible. For example, government agencies are generally not suitable sites for OJTs for administrative/payroll reasons, but may be a good option as the setting for a work experience.
* Will not exceed two months in duration (exceptions require District Manager approval as described in “Adherence to Policy” (Subsection I at the beginning of Section 12.3)
* Paid work experiences are 4-6 hours per day not to exceed 30 hours per week. No overtime is allowed. The participant is not considered an employee of the work experience site.
* VR’s funding will be at minimum wage plus any mandatory requirements associated with the work experience (e.g. worker’s compensation coverage) and administrative fees. VR will not fund optional benefits even if the employer provides these benefits to his or her employees.

* Participants will apply for comparable benefits when applicable (e.g. summer youth programs).
* Tools or Supplies:
  + VR will fund tools and supplies required for the work experience only when it is a requirement of the employer and the employer requires its employees doing the same work to supply their own tools and supplies. If the employer routinely provides tools and supplies for its employees, the employer will also be expected to provide them for the individual participating in the work experience.
  + Purchase of tools and supplies will be limited to the standard and customary tools required for all employees doing the same work within the organization, as documented by the employer. Participants may choose to purchase additional or upgraded tools or supplies at their own expense.
  + Tools and supply purchases will adhere to the Equipment Agreement in Section 17 of this manual.
* The participant and counselor should explore the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of renting tools versus purchasing tools, particularly if it is anticipated different tools will be needed when the participant enters employment