

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)  
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)  
Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)  
Thursday, February 23, 2023, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. ET**

### **NVTAC Staff**

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### **Key Points**

- **Introduction**
  - NVTAC coaches welcomed grantees to the February 2023 HVRP CoP event covering the VR&E program.
  - Formally called Vocational and Rehabilitation Employment, VR&E is part of the benefits umbrella at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- **Objectives**
  - The team from VR&E explained that the CoP session will help the audience understand the mission and purpose of VR&E, the types of special employment programs available, and the eligibility and entitlement process. In addition, the VR&E team will provide an overview of VRE's five tracks to employment, Special Hiring Authorities, and the evaluation and planning process to assist veterans.
- **VR&E Mission**
  - VR&E's mission is to help veterans with service-connected disabilities and an employment handicap prepare for, find, and maintain suitable employment.
  - For veterans with service-connected disabilities so severe that they cannot immediately consider work, VR&E provides services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible.
- **Chapter 31 or VR&E Process**
  - The application process includes receiving the application, establishing the veteran's eligibility, and scheduling the veteran for an initial counseling appointment, if eligible.
  - The entitlement decision is an adjudication process or legal decision; not every applicant will be found entitled. If found entitled, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) meets with the veteran; conducts an orientation to introduce the five tracks; conducts a vocational evaluation to assess skills, abilities, and

interests; determines any employment barriers and serious employment handicaps; and determines feasibility for employment.

- Evaluation and Planning includes working with the veteran to identify which track they will pursue, establishing a vocational or an independent living goal, defining services needed, and developing a written plan of services.
- Employment Services include ongoing case management for a maximum of 18 months and providing employment services such as interview skills, job placement assistance, and referrals to the Department of Labor.
- The veteran is considered rehabilitated if they held suitable employment for at least 60 days to ensure adjustment to the position or improved their ability to live independently for cases involving independent living services.

- **Entitlement, Evaluation, and Planning**

- Chapter 31 Eligibility and Entitlement – Veterans can apply online or in person at the nearest VA office.
- The following are eligibility and entitlement criteria:
  - Received honorable or other than honorable discharge;
  - Have a VA service-connected disability or memo rating of:
    - 10 percent with a serious employment handicap; or
    - 20 percent or more with an employment handicap.
  - Factors for consideration of a serious employment barrier include the number of disabling conditions; the severity of disabling conditions; the existence of a neurological psychiatric condition; deficiencies in education and training for suitable employment; negative attitudes toward the disabled; long or substantial periods of unemployment or unstable work history; a pattern of reliance on government support programs, such as welfare, workers' compensation, and social security disability insurance; being withdrawn from society; difficulties with communicating; a criminal record; the extent and complexity of rehabilitation services needed; and other evidence of significant restrictions on employability like high unemployment, age, race, sexual orientation, and gender discrimination biases; etc.
  - Determined by VR&E to have an employment handicap.
- The following are the eligibility factors for active-duty service members:
  - Expect to receive an honorable discharge upon separation from active duty or apply for rehabilitation and employment services;
  - Obtain a VA memorandum rating of 20 percent or more;
  - Participate in the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) or have an injury or illness that prevents them from performing military duties; and
  - Determined by VR&E to need vocational rehabilitation services.
- Vocational Impairment
  - VR&E submitted a request to Congress a few years ago to reassess the terms used in their program, but until the law changes, they will have to

continue using terms like employment handicap and serious employment handicap.

- The following conditions may equate to restrictions on employability:
  - Effects of the claimant's service-connected and non-service-connected disabilities;
  - Deficiencies in education and training; and
  - Negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities.
- Other pertinent factors that result in restrictions on employability or in lack of stable, continuing, suitable employment include:
  - Evaluate their medical and employment history; review relevant information on the claimant's specific disability, the limitations they impose, and the impact on their employability; lack of sustainable, suitable employment; and assess if the impairment has impacted the claimant's ability to prepare for or maintain suitable employment.
  - Examples include homelessness, transportation, criminal background, substance abuse, childcare issues, family issues, mental and physical limitations, and financial issues.
- **Factors to Determining Entitlement Eligibility**
  - The claimant must have a vocational impairment.
  - The claimant's service-connected disability(ies) must substantially contribute to the vocational impairment.
  - The claimant cannot overcome the effects of the vocational impairment.
  - The claimant must have an employment handicap.
- **VR&E question to the participants: Fact or myth?**
  - If the claimant does not have a vocational impairment, the claimant is not entitled to Chapter 31 services provided by VR&E.
    - Fact.
- **VR&E question to the participants: Fact or myth?**
  - The service-connected disability does not need to contribute in substantial part to the vocational impairment.
    - Myth.
- **Purpose and Scope of a Rehabilitation Plan**
  - A rehabilitation plan is required for any VR&E participant who receives Chapter 31 benefits and must be based on the results of a comprehensive evaluation, including the required determination and assessments of factors identified using a questionnaire covering medical records, transcripts, vocational assessment results, and other relevant information.
  - The purpose of a rehabilitation plan is to structure individualized services that will enable the VR&E participant to obtain and maintain suitable employment and/or to maximize independence in daily living.

- The scope of the plan includes the services needed to accomplish the goals of the rehabilitation plan. The objectives of the rehabilitation plan must serve to prepare the VR&E participant to achieve their program goals.
- Counseling services must be included in every rehabilitation plan. In accordance with [38 U.S.C. § 3108](#), counseling services may include medical, social, psychological, economic, educational, personal adjustment, and/or vocational counseling.
- **VR&E question to the participants: Fact or myth?**
  - Rehabilitation Plans are written for entry-level employment only.
    - Myth.
- **Roles and Responsibility**
  - The **VR&E participant** is highly encouraged to openly and candidly discuss personal strengths, goals, limitations due to disabilities, obstacles to attain their goal(s), and other pertinent information with their VRC or Employment Coordinator (EC).
    - A participant's perceptions regarding employment planning and vocational goals must be addressed early and throughout the plan development process. It is critical to obtaining a successful rehabilitation outcome. The VR&E participant must agree to the plan before services are provided. The VR&E participant must maintain satisfactory conduct and cooperation in developing and implementing a plan of rehabilitation services under Chapter 31.
  - The **VRC's** primary role is to assist the VR&E participant in making an informed decision on an appropriate and suitable rehabilitation goal based on the VR&E participant's functional abilities, interests, and aptitudes, and to outline the steps needed to achieve that goal in the rehabilitation plan.
    - If employment is the goal of the rehabilitation plan, the VRC will also help the veteran participant understand the labor market to ensure the chosen vocational goal is suitable and viable.
  - The **EC** works closely with the VRC and the VR&E participant to ensure the chosen vocational goal is viable in the local labor market in which the VR&E participant will be seeking employment.
    - ECs are responsible for establishing a positive counseling relationship with the VR&E participant to ensure they receive quality services regarding employment planning as much as possible. An EC assists the VRC and VR&E participant in identifying suitable goals by utilizing the following resources: the VR&E participant self-report; the report of past training, employment, volunteer activities, or educational experiences; descriptive occupational literature from web-based sources; information-seeking interviews with prospective employers or with those who are currently working in the field; career and aptitude testing; review of their local labor market; and information about the VR&E's participant disability, including any functional limitations and capacities.

- The **VR&E Officer, Assistant VR&E Officer, or Supervisory VRC** may conduct higher-level reviews to resolve disagreements by the VR&E participant related to plan development or implementation.
- **VR&E question to the participants: Fact or myth?**
  - The VRC has the final authority on the training facility selection.
    - Fact.
- **Selection of Training Facility**
  - The VRC will consider the VR&E participant's preference for a particular training or rehabilitation facility.
  - The cost of education and training services must be considered in selecting a facility. The VRC has the final responsibility for the selection of the facility.
  - The VRC and the VR&E participant must work together to identify the facility that can best meets the VR&E participant's needs.
- **VR&E question to the participants: Fact or myth?**
  - There is only one VR&E plan type.
    - Myth.
- **VR&E question to the participants: Fact or myth?**
  - A VR&E participant may use VA Education and VR&E benefits at the same time.
    - Myth.
- **VR&E Tracks to Employment**
  - The Re-Employment Track can help eligible veterans and service members return to their former job. This can occur if the employer is able to provide support in meeting the participant's needs upon their return from active duty.
  - The Rapid Access to Employment Track allows entitled veterans and service members to find a job or career using their existing skill set(s). Some services that may be provided in this track include any tools to help with the job search, professional or vocational counseling, help with writing a resume and preparing for interviews, help to determine eligibility for veteran's preference, and help with networking and job opportunities.
  - The Employment Through Long-Term Services Track helps entitled veterans and service members with employment barriers and the education or training needed to find work in a different or suitable career field. Some services that may be provided include a complete skills assessment, career guidance, job market evaluation, education and training for a professional or vocational field that is a good fit for the veteran, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, volunteer opportunities, and employment assistance. Most participants go through this track.
  - The Self-Employment Track is limited based on additional criteria for entitled participants. The types of assistance are less about monetary assistance than coordination services. Some services in this track include coordination services and help to develop a business (e.g., proposed business plan, analysis of the business concept, training in small business operations marketing and finances, and guidance in getting the right resources to implement the business plan).

- The Independent Living Track is for entitled veterans and service members who cannot return to work right away due to being severely disabled. They can then be assessed to determine if any services are needed that can assist the individual in living as independently as possible.
- **Employment Services and Rehabilitation**
  - VR&E Employment Services
    - Special Types of Employment Services
      - The On-the-Job Training Program (OJT) and Apprenticeships provide training for specific positions with the employer based on vetted, approved curriculum.
        - The veteran is hired at the trainee wage, and the difference of the journey-person wage is offset by the monthly subsistence allowance. This allows for an earn-while-you-learn program. These opportunities result in permanent full-time employment after successful completion of the training program.
        - Apprenticeships also have a formal training module in combination with the OJT.
      - Non-Paid Work Experience (NPWE) provides eligible VR&E participants with practical work experiences and allows the veteran to obtain training and practical job experience concurrently.
        - Placement can be at any government facility that will provide the participant work experience consistent with their vocational rehabilitation goals and does not aggravate their disabilities.
        - The NPWE usually lasts six months but can go up to a year. This can be reduced or extended.
        - There is no cost to the employer; the VR&E participant receives a subsistence allowance from the VA.
        - This program allows the VR&E to pick up the participant noncompetitively, and it is a good opportunity for the VR&E participants to gain work experience that they need, build experience to build their resume, network or obtain professional references, and potentially secure employment with a government agency.
      - The Special Employer Incentive (SEI) assists veterans who face extraordinary obstacles in obtaining employment, and the employers need an extra incentive to hire them. Reimbursement up to 50 percent of a veteran's salary may be authorized for a maximum of six months. Payment to the employer may be made monthly or in one lump sum.
        - Veterans are hired by participating employers, which cannot be governmental employers.

- How VR&E ECs Can Help
  - VR&E ECs can assist employers in accessing veteran talent nationwide and help build employment opportunities. By partnering with VR&E, employers will receive assistance in meeting their staffing and workforce needs and managing their relationships with local VR&E offices, the employer's local offices, and the veteran talent pool.
- Special Hiring Authorities for Federal Employment
  - According to [Feds Hire Vets - Veterans - Job Seekers - Special Hiring Authorities](#), Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA), an excepted authority that allows an agency to non-competitively appoint an eligible veteran (up to and including a GS-11), provides flexibility in staffing, especially if you have positions that are hard to fill, can help overcome underrepresentation, allow for quick hiring, etc. After two years, the veteran will be transferred to competitive service. This is also used to fill temporary positions that do not exceed four years but will not result in the veteran being transferred to competitive service. There are no limits to the number of times a veteran can apply if they meet the definition of a covered veteran under applicable law. The veteran must provide acceptable documentation of their preference or appointment eligibility. If the veterans:
    - Served during a war or are in receipt of a campaign badge for service in a campaign or expedition; or
    - Are a disabled veteran (therefore all VR&E veterans); or
    - Are in receipt of an Armed Forces Service Medal (includes the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal) for participation in a military operation; or
    - Are a recently separated veteran (within three years of discharge); and
    - Separated under honorable conditions (this means an honorable or general discharge).
  - According to [Combat-Related Special Compensation \(CRSC\) | Veterans Affairs \(va.gov\)](#), “[t]he 30% or More Disabled Veteran authority allows an agency to non-competitively appoint any veteran with a 30% or more service-connected disability.” It cannot exceed one year or four appointments, and each veteran must provide acceptable documentation of their preference or appointment eligibility. Veterans are eligible if they:
    - retired from active military service with a service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more; or
    - have a rating by the VA showing a compensable service-connected disability of 30 percent or more ([USAJOBS Help Center | Hiring authorities for disabled Veterans](#)).
  - “The Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998, as amended (VEOA) provides preference eligibles and certain eligible veterans the opportunity to compete for certain positions announced under an agency's merit promotion procedures. It applies only when the agency is filling a permanent, competitive service position and has decided to solicit candidates from outside its own

workforce. It allows eligible veterans and preference eligibles to apply to announcements that would otherwise be open to so called ‘status’ candidates, i.e., ‘current competitive service employees and certain prior employees who have earned competitive status.’

To be eligible to be considered pursuant to VEOA appointment, your **latest**, discharge must be issued under honorable conditions (this means an honorable or general discharge), **AND** you must be either:

- a preference eligible (defined in title 5 U.S.C. 2108(3)), **OR**
- a veteran who substantially completed 3 or more years of active service under honorable conditions. ...

#### Disabled Veterans Enrolled in a VA Training Program

Disabled veterans eligible for training under the VA vocational rehabilitation program may enroll for training or work experience at an agency under the terms of an agreement between the agency and VA. While enrolled in the VA program, the veteran is **not a Federal employee** for most purposes but is a beneficiary of the VA.

Training is tailored to the individual's needs and goals, so there is no set length. If the training is intended to prepare the individual for eventual appointment in the agency rather than just provide work experience, the agency must focus the training on enabling the veteran to meet the qualification requirements for the position.

Upon successful completion, the host agency and VA give the veteran a Certificate of Training showing the occupational series and grade level of the position for which trained. **The Certificate of Training allows any agency to appoint the veteran noncompetitively under a status quo appointment which may be converted to career or career-conditional at any time”** ([Feds Hire Vets - Veterans - Job Seekers - Special Hiring Authorities](#)).

- Other Special Hiring Authorities
  - Schedule A Appointing Authority for People with Certain Disabilities is an accepted service authority that agencies can use with individuals, including individuals that have a psychiatric or severe physical disability. An agency’s announcement will generally dictate if they will consider candidates under this authority. To be eligible, the veteran must show proof of their disability from a licensed professional or agency.
  - Pathways offers clear paths to federal internships:
    - Internships for students from high school to post-graduate school;
    - Recent Graduates Program, which applicants must apply for within two years of successful degree completion;



- Presidential Management Fellows Program, a Flagship leadership development program at the entry level or for advanced degree candidates
- Additional information can be found on [USAJOBS.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov) and [Feds Hire Vets - Veterans - Job Seekers - Special Hiring Authorities](#)

## Conclusion

- VR&E explained the presentation was full of information, all of which is available on the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) website.
- NVTAC thanked participants for attending and provided the link to a survey in the chat.