

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



VR&E School Certifying Official Handbook

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**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT (VR&E)
FOR VETERANS AND SERVICEMEMBERS WITH SERVICE-CONNECTED
DISABILITIES
CHAPTER 31, TITLE 38 U.S. CODE**

What is Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment?

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/>

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program is authorized by Congress under Title 38 of the United States Code, chapter 31. It is sometimes referred to as the chapter 31 program.

A Servicemember may be eligible for VR&E benefits if he or she:

- Is hospitalized or receiving outpatient medical care, services or treatment for a service-connected disability that will likely be compensable at a rate of 20 percent or more
- Has a memorandum or Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) proposed rating of at least 20 percent

A Veteran may be eligible for VR&E benefits if he or she:

- Has received, or will receive, a discharge that is other than dishonorable
- Has a service-connected disability rating of at least 10%, or a memorandum rating of 20% or more from the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)
- Applies for VR&E Services

The basic period of eligibility in which VR&E Services may be used is 12 years from the latter of:

- The date of separation from active military service, or
- The date the Veteran was first notified by VA of a compensable service-connected disability rating

VR&E helps Servicemembers and Veterans with service-connected disabilities and an employment handicap prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable careers. Potential services include comprehensive evaluation, vocational counseling, employment services, On-the-Job Training, post-secondary education, supportive rehabilitation services, self-employment, or independent living.

Rehabilitation services provided by VR&E must meet requirements and guidelines.

How to Apply

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/how-to-apply/>

eBenefits:

- Log in to your eBenefits account
- Select "Additional Benefits" from your Dashboard
- Select "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program" - be sure to read the program information and to update your contact information - and apply for the "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program "

Paper Application:

- Download and complete [VA Form 28-1900 "Disabled Veterans Application for Vocational Rehabilitation"](#)
- Mail or drop off the application to your [local regional benefit office](#).

VetSuccess on Campus

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to develop innovative ways to help Veterans make the transition to college life. The VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program aims to help Servicemembers, Veterans, and their qualified dependents succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery of on-campus benefits assistance and counseling, leading to completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers. Read the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) fact sheet.

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/docs/VetSuccessOnCampusFactSheet.pdf>
<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vetsuccess-on-campus/>

VR&E IDES Counselors

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to develop innovative ways to help Servicemembers make the transition to civilian life. The VR&E Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) program aims to help Servicemembers and Veterans and their eligible dependents succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery of benefits assistance and counseling during the transition from active duty, completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers. The VR&E IDES program provides a VA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) to each participating military installation. A VA Military Services Coordinator (MSC) is also provided, co-located on many military installations to assist with application for benefits through the IDES, Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) or Quick Start pre-discharge programs.

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/ides/>

Subsistence Allowance Rates

Veterans participating in the VR&E program may receive a subsistence allowance while they pursue an educational or training program in preparation for a future career. The subsistence allowance is paid each month and is based on the rate of attendance (full-time, three quarter time, or half time), the number of dependents and the type of training. If a Veteran qualifies for Post-9/11 GI Bill, he/she may be eligible to receive the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate for subsistence.

Subsistence Allowance rates are updated each Fiscal Year. For current rates, refer to VR&E's web site:

https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/subsistence_allowance_rates.asp

Certification Process

1. VA Authorization

When the VRC and the Veteran have agreed on a facility that meets chapter 31 regulations and related instructions and can provide the services needed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the rehabilitation plan, the VRC may authorize the Veteran to begin his/her program of services. For this authorization, the VRC shall create an electronic authorization. The authorization is used to:

- Confirm an individual's election of chapter 31 benefits, including training
- Identify the VR&E point of contact
- Notify the training facility that the Veteran is authorized to attend at VA expense
- Notify the School Certifying Official (SCO) that the training hours may be certified in VA-ONCE.

The SCO will receive an electronically generated email which will provide notification that an authorization for a VR&E student has been completed. The SCO will access the electronic authorization by clicking a link in the email which will take them to the electronic authorization in the Tungsten Network.

An Authorization for payment of training, services, books, and/or supplies at your facility for a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) participant is available in the [Tungsten Network Support](#). If this is the first Authorization you are receiving, you will need to register using this [link](#). The Tungsten Network is an electronic invoicing service that the VA uses to authorize and pay all invoices

The Authorization approves the costs for participants training under chapter 31, Specialized Vocational Training, or Special Restorative Training under chapter 35, or Vocational Training for Certain Children with Spina Bifida or Other Covered Birth Defects under chapter 18. The authorization also serves as notification to the School Certifying Official that training should be certified. Therefore, this notification must be forwarded to the responsible party at your facility to alert them of the available authorization in the system and to initiate the certification process using VA-ONCE.

VA will pay for required tuition, fees, books, and supplies for the program identified in the "Name of Service" section of the Authorization for participants of chapter 31 and 18. However, VA will pay only for the Special Restorative Training services listed in the "Name of Service" section of the Authorization for participants of chapter 35. If applicable, detailed information for specific training courses, supplies, equipment, and services during the authorized period for all chapters may be listed under the specific "Notes" section of the Authorization. Please note that VA will pay all invoices for the required tuition, fees, books, and supplies directly to the institution in arrears.

If you have questions regarding the authorization, you may contact the case manager listed in the "VR&E Case Manager Email" section of the Authorization. For procedures on electronic invoice processing, you may contact Tungsten directly at 1-877-489-6135 and notify the VR&E Case Manager about your concerns.

Thank You,

Sample electronic authorization notification email

2. SCO Certification

After retrieving the electronic authorization, the SCO uses VA-ONCE to certify the student's enrollment. VA-ONCE allows training facilities to electronically certify attendance and includes number and type of hours, beginning and ending dates, and changes in enrollment. The SCO should certify enrollment in VA-ONCE prior to the drop-add period if possible. Once the SCO certifies enrollment, the VRC can process the claimant's subsistence allowance. The SCO should identify whether the training is semester or quarter hours and if it is residence or distance.

The use of VA-ONCE is mandatory. Training facilities electing not to use VA-ONCE must provide documentation to the local VR&E Supervisor.

Requesting Supplies

Whenever possible, VR&E will use IPPS to authorize the purchase of required books and supplies from the Servicemember's or Veteran's training facility bookstore. This method ensures that supplies are available and can be secured in a timely manner. Any restrictions and/or dollar limitations on bookstore purchases will be noted in the Line Item Detail section of the electronic authorization form. The VRC must only authorize books and supplies for approved periods and can only authorize the purchase of required books and supplies. If the training facility does not have a bookstore or if an individual is requesting additional books or supplies, please refer them to their VRC.

Invoicing

All invoices must be completed by the appropriate SCO electronically within the Tungsten Network. Separate invoice must be provided for each Servicemember or Veteran and must be directly related to an existing VA Authorization.

If a school/training facility invoices VA in any other manner other than through the Tungsten Network, the receiving VR&E office will return it for re-submission through the Tungsten Network.

Grades, Transcripts, Progress Reports

Servicemember's and Veteran's participation are evaluated regularly to determine if the he or she is satisfactorily completing his/her program. Grades, transcripts or other progress reports from the training facility are part of this evaluation. SCOs must provide grades, transcripts or progress reports to VR&E staff by the end of each term or by request. The SCO should also notify VR&E staff of any problems the Servicemember or Veteran is having at school that may be disrupting his/her training. If the program the Servicemember or Veteran is enrolled in has changes to its requirements, the SCO should inform VR&E staff so appropriate adjusting and planning can take place.

Rounding-Out

*A student participating in the VR&E program can round out a schedule with non-required courses to bring his/her course load up to a full-time schedule in his/her **last term only**. This policy applies when the Servicemember or Veteran is attending degree courses taken on a quarter, semester or term basis. The non-required classes used to 'round-out' the schedule must contribute to employment of the occupational objective established in the Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP). The SCO must confirm with VR&E staff that the non-required courses used to round out the term are approved by VR&E staff.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) by VR&E participants

1. I can't get in contact with my VRC and need books, supplies etc. What should I do?
 - a. If you are unable to reach your VRC, call or visit your VA Regional Office and ask to speak to the VR&E Office Supervisor. Someone will be able to assist you in your VRC's absence
2. I need books and supplies for my classes. What will VR&E pay for?

- a. VR&E will pay for all supplies that VA determines are necessary for the Servicemember's or Veteran's rehabilitation program. Supplies necessary to accomplish the purposes of a Servicemember's or Veteran's rehabilitation program may include, but are not limited to, the following: books, office supplies, tools, consumable goods, computer packages and other material.
 - b. Preapproval is required prior to obtaining needed supplies. Your VRC is solely responsible for determining the need for supplies.
 - c. VR&E will only provide supplies for Servicemembers or Veterans who are participating in an active plan of service.
3. I am experiencing medical/emotional/dental issues that are impacting my school work. What should I do?
 - a. Contact your VRC to ask about a referral for FREE care at the nearest VA Medical Center to address the issue that is impacting your training. VR&E participants may be eligible for services for a wide range of medical, counseling or dental services if enrolled in a plan of service, and the medical service is needed for you to continue your training.
4. How can I get paid the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate for my Vocational Rehabilitation program?
 - a. A Veteran participating in the VR&E Program who qualifies for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits can elect to receive the Post -9/11 GI Bill rate of pay instead of the regular chapter 31 subsistence allowance. In most cases, the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate is higher than the regular chapter 31 rate of pay. To elect the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate, the Veteran must have remaining eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and must formally choose (or "elect") the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate. Your VRC can help you with the election. Veterans participating in the VR&E Program who elect the Post-9/11 rate are paid at the 100% rate level for their school and training time, even if their Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility is less than 100%. Note, if you are not attending school at the full-time rate, the actual subsistence allowance paid will be based on the 100% rate but reduced based on the percentage of training time you are attending. Additional benefits are also available through the VR&E Program, such as payment of all required books, fees and supplies as well as other supportive services.

VR&E Staff Updates

Below is a list of current VR&E Officers in each of the Regional Offices. At least annually, the SCO should contact the VR&E Officer to obtain a list of each VRC and their contact information.

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EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL COUNSELING SERVICES

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/education-and-career-counseling/>
VA offers free Educational-Vocational Counseling services (also called Chapter 36 counseling) that are available to:

- Service Members within six months prior to discharge from active duty.
- Veterans within one year following discharge from active duty.
- Individuals receiving or eligible for educational assistance under Chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 1606, 1607.
- Veterans and qualified dependents who are eligible for and have entitlement to education assistance under Chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 1606, 1607.

Services include:

- Counseling to facilitate career decision making for civilian or military occupations.
- Educational and vocational counseling to choose an appropriate civilian occupation and develop a training program.
- Academic and adjustment counseling to resolve barriers that impede success in training or employment.

How to Apply:

eBenefits:

- Log in to your eBenefits account
- Select "Additional Benefits" from your Dashboard
- Select "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program" - be sure to read the program information and to update your contact information - and apply for the "Educational and Career Counseling"

Paper Application:

- Download and complete [VA Form 28-8832 "Educational/Vocational Counseling Application"](#)
- Mail or drop off the application to your [local regional benefit office](#).