

NC DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND POLICIES AND PROCEDURES VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Section:	S
Title:	Services to Groups
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I. ESTABLISHMENT PROJECTS

Authority - The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 103(b)(2), as amended, authorizes the use of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funds to support the establishment, development, or improvement of a public or other non-profit Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) that is used to provide services that promote integration and competitive employment.

Policy - Consistent with the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) will exercise its authority to award funds in support of establishment projects annually and will adhere to the procedure outlined below in determining and in making project funding selections.

Procedure - The following procedure and time frames shall be used in the determination of need for, and awarding of, establishment project funds:

1. **Need** - Between the period of April 1 through July 1, data shall be gathered from a variety of sources which will aid in determining needs and will guide the State Agency in setting its priorities for the Federal year to begin the following October. The needs assessment necessary to set priorities for establishment projects will occur simultaneously with the collection of data for the annual State Plan and Agency goals and priorities developed by the Rehabilitation Council. Mechanisms for determining needs will include (a) focus groups, (b) eligible individual surveys, (c) public hearings, and (d) surveys of individuals employed in extended employment positions at CRP's.
2. **Agency Priorities** - During August, Agency management will review data collected in the manner described above as well as data available from reports such as the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) comparisons between state agencies and statistical information collected for the State Fiscal Year ending June 30. From this data, the Agency will develop three to five priorities. Priorities will be more specific than "placement in competitive integrated employment," as this is an assumed component of any proposal and not viewed as a priority in and of itself.
3. **Requests for Proposals** - By the end of September, a list of the priorities shall be distributed to a broad sample of CRP's with special attention to geographic distribution and ability to serve traditionally underserved groups. The mailing shall include the procedure to applying for funding and deadline for applications. All CRP's that have traditionally served blind and visually impaired people shall be included in the mailing as well as some programs which have not routinely had a relationship with the Agency. The mailing shall contain the name, address, and telephone number of the individual in the Agency's central office who is designated to receive project funding requests and to answer questions.

All requests for funding shall include, at a minimum, the following:

- a. A brief description of how the project proposes to meet one or more of the Agency's stated priorities;
 - b. A description of the program's ability to meet the specialized needs of blind and visually impaired individuals;
 - c. Evaluation criteria to be used in determining the success of the project;
 - d. A budget reflecting total project cost and as much detail as possible relative to line items within the budget. When multiple-year funding is requested, budgets for future years should be included. A non-Federal match of an amount to be negotiated but not less than 21.3% of the project cost must be contributed by the program with a graduated scale for assumption of the cost of personnel funded under an establishment grant. The Agency cannot fund ongoing operative expenses of a CRP but must grant funds only for establishment, development, or improvement of a program that is necessary to make the program functional or increase its effectiveness. Personnel costs can be funded for a period not to exceed forty-eight months at a rate of 100% funding the first year, 75% the second year, 60% the third year, and 45% the final year. In-kind services are not eligible contributions to meet the program's non-Federal match requirement; and
 - e. Where appropriate, letters of support or commitment from partners.
4. Review of Requests for Funding - All project requests shall be received in the Agency's central office by December 31.

By the end of February, the requests will have been reviewed by the Establishment Project Review Committee (EPRC) consisting of individuals in the following positions: Assistant Director, Programs and Facilities; Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Programs and Facilities; Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services, and four Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors for a total of seven committee members. The Agency's Budget Officer shall serve for a total of seven committee members. The Agency's Budget Officer shall serve in a technical assistance capacity with responsibilities to include review of all project budgets prior to award of funding and review of total amount of Federal funds to be awarded to make certain that the projected availability of Federal funds will meet the expected grant costs. To the extent that additional expertise is required, other staff may be involved on a technical assistance basis.

Applicants will be notified of the acceptance or rejection of their proposal by the end of March.

Funding - In general, funding will be available in April. Within limits of Federal regulations, funding may be provided for multiple years for a specific project. Project requests which are not funded in March may be funded later in the Federal Fiscal Year based on availability of Agency funds.

5. The Agency will estimate the amount of Federal funds it can invest in establishment projects based on the previous year's expenditures and projected current year expenditure. It will be the responsibility of the Agency's Budget Officer to make a recommendation to the EPRC with respect to this figure.

Purchase of Equipment - Equipment shall be purchased in accordance with State purchasing guidelines to include Assistive Devices/Equipment (On-Line DSB-4016-VR Equipment and Computer Use Agreement with instructions). Equipment costing less than \$500.00 may be purchased locally as a cooperative effort between the Program Director and the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor and should not be placed on the Agency's Fixed Assets listing.

Purchases of more than \$500.00 will be made through the Agency's Purchasing Office and will be initiated by the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor via a purchase request. Purchase requests should flow from the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor to the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services to the Budget Officer to the Agency's Purchasing Office. Items should be shipped directly to the local program. Invoices should be signed by the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor after verification with the local program of receipt of the items (On-Line DSB-0950-VR Verification of Items Received with instructions). Invoices should be forwarded to the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services for approval and processing for payment. The Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services will be responsible for billing the local program for the non-Federal match of the cost for items purchased, for receiving checks from local programs, and for forwarding them to the Budget Officer for deposit and appropriate coding.

Items costing more than \$500.00 will remain on the Fixed Assets Inventory for the duration of the project's funding period. At such time as no Federal funds are being drawn in support of a project, equipment purchased for that project will be released to the local program for use in continuing to provide the service for which the equipment was purchased.

If, during the funding period, it is determined that the equipment is no longer required or that the project is not viable, the Agency may take possession of the equipment and will pay the local program the non-Federal share or a portion of that share based on current value of the equipment after depreciation.

It is the Agency's expectation that any equipment purchased through establishment project funding will be used for the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to blind and visually impaired individuals even after the conclusion of the funding of the project.

Ongoing Evaluation - During the funding period, monthly written reports shall be submitted to the Agency's Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor and Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services by the local program. The report shall document progress in implementing the project and, once implemented, progress toward achieving outcomes as stated in the project proposal. Such data might include number of people attempting training, number of people completing training, number of people placed in competitive integrated employment, wages, hours, worked, etc.

Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors shall make on-site visits to any projects funded in their area on at least a quarterly basis. Identification of any problems through either on-site visits or review of monthly reports shall be discussed with program staff at the CRP and a written summary of that discussion provided by the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor to the program and the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services. Corrective action should be recommended. Failure to take corrective action resulting in resolution of the problem may result in withdrawal of funding.

Following the funding period, the Agency shall continue follow-up to determine ongoing success of the project. Such follow-up shall be conducted twice annually in March and September for three years following the completion of the funding cycle. The follow-up shall be conducted by the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor and a report submitted to the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services.

Documentation - The Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services shall maintain a file in the Agency's central office containing the following:

Original project proposal

- Letter of funding award from the EPRC
- Any amendments to the original proposal and subsequent approval by the Agency
- Copies of purchase requisitions and invoices
- Documentation of receipt of any non-Federal match funds
- Progress reports and follow-up reports consistent with this policy
- Any contracts related to the project and associated invoices
- Time sheets for staff positions funded under the project
- Any correspondence between the Agency and the project related to the project or other matters relevant to the project
- Any other communication or documents relevant to the project

These records shall be maintained for a minimum of five (5) years following the conclusion of project funding by the Agency.

II. OTHER SERVICES TO GROUPS OF INDIVIDUALS

Consistent with the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, the Agency may provide services under its Services to Groups of Individuals authority if it is determined by Agency management that a requested service will substantially contribute to the rehabilitation of a group of individuals, but where

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the service is not related directly to the Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) (On-Line DSB-4005b-VR Individual Plan for Employment with instructions) of a single individual.

Consistent with the obstacles most often experienced by people who are blind and visually impaired in preparing for an obtaining employment, services most likely to receive funding by the Agency under the Services to Groups of Individuals authority include:

1. Those services which will contribute to increased access to printed material in a format or formats more usable by blind and visually impaired individuals;
2. Those services which will improve communications for Deaf-Blind (deaf/blind) individuals and employers;
3. Those services which will eliminate Transportation (transportation) barriers and thus enable a group of individuals to obtain or retain employment in a competitive employment/integrated setting; and
4. Those services which will contribute to the improvement, development, or establishment of a public or other non-profit CRP which provides services that promote employment of blind and visually impaired individuals in competitive integrated work settings.
5. Requests for funding, excluding those which are clearly covered under the procedures for funding of establishment projects, may be submitted to the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services at any point. Once such a request is received, it will be reviewed by the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services, Assistant Director, Programs and Facilities, Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Programs and Facilities, and four Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisors in consultation with the Agency Budget Officer. Depending on the availability of both Federal funds and non-Federal match funds and presentation of the request as judged by the reviewing committee, the Agency will take one of the following actions: support the request for immediate funding; support the request for future funding; or deny funding.
6. When the Agency provides funding under the Services to Groups of Individuals authority in an effort to meet an identified need and consistent with one of the priorities listed above, it should be noted that non-Federal match funding for the service must be generated from a source which will not derive benefit from the expenditure. Upon the receipt of a request for a service under this authority, Agency management should review carefully the provisions of 34 CFR 361.60. Decisions regarding funding under this authority will be made based on: (1) demonstration of need; (2) projected impact of the service; and (3) availability of both Federal funds and non-Federal match.
7. Purchase of Equipment - Equipment purchases made in support of a project will comply with current purchasing procedures. Items purchased for a cost of under \$500.00 may be purchased locally and those costing more than \$500.00 shall be purchased through the Agency's Purchasing Office. The same process shall be followed that is described in Section A. of this policy for Establishment Projects.

8. The Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor and a representative from the program seeking funding shall determine the length of time a piece of equipment will remain on the Agency's Fixed Assets list if that piece of equipment costs more than \$500.00. That time frame should be reflected in writing prior to purchase. If, at any time while it is being maintained on the Fixed Asset list, it is determined that a piece of equipment is not being used for the purpose for which it was purchase, it may be repossessed by the Agency for possible use by the Agency or another program.
9. Project Evaluation and Follow-up - Following a commitment by the Agency to fund a request, it is the responsibility of the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor to monitor progress of the funding process and assist with needed purchases. Quarterly documentation of progress in completing the project and thereafter on the progress toward accomplishing the project goals should be provided by the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor to the Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services. Any problems and proposed corrective action regarding project implementation or achievement of goals should be documented and subsequent resolution documented.
10. Documentation - The Chief, Vocational Rehabilitation Field Services shall maintain a file on each project request including: initial request, Agency response, copies of any purchase orders and invoices, quarterly reports from the Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, copies of any correspondence between Area Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor and project staff, and any other documentation related to the project.
11. The Agency provides services under this authority to operators placed in food service/vending operations through the Business Enterprises Program (BEP). The Agency is the designated State Licensing Agency (SLA) for the Randolph-Sheppard Program. Procedures have been established for the collection of and use of set-aside monies consistent with Law and regulations.
12. The Agency maintains separate policies and procedures for the provision of services under the BEP.