

# **Vocational Rehabilitation and Pre-Employment Transition Services**

## **For Families and Students**

Many people are confused by the myriad of adult services and their eligibility requirements. Accessing those services while still in school makes the transition smoother. The transition team can help with understanding and accessing critical systems. The following explanation provides an overview of Vocational Rehabilitation and how it can support competitive integrated employment.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federal program that helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs. VR helps people overcome barriers to employment and become more independent. They also provide individualized services that connect to employment, e.g., post-secondary education, interpreter services, assistive technology, and transportation help. Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) can include:

- diagnosis,
- counseling and guidance,
- training,
- job placement,
- career advancement,
- and services to help keep a job.

For a more comprehensive description of services, reference the [VR Manual of Employment Services](#).

In Indiana, free VRS are offered through [25 Area Offices](#) for those eligible. VR counselors are available at those offices for each county. Schools, hospitals, and other agencies often refer people to VR, but people can also apply directly for services. Students or individuals with disabilities enrolled in adult education, those who have left school or are enrolled in training programs needing support to get and keep employment, are eligible regardless of disability severity. You can still apply for services even if you have left school. Contact your [local VR office](#). If you are denied services, follow the steps in the [Client Assistance Program \(CAP\) Fact Sheet](#) to appeal.

Ideally, schools should support students and encourage them to connect to VRS early in their high school career. With student and family permission, school professionals can help students access VRS by:

- Inviting the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and VR counselor to the student's case conference during their junior and senior years,
- Referring the student for VRS no later than the last semester of their exit year,
- Ensuring students apply for VR as a part of their Transition IEP Services and Activities or as a part of their participation in Pre-ETS Services described below.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services

Through a special program known as Pre-ETS, VR can help people explore their career goals and make positive life changes before leaving school. Pre-ETS is funded by VR, especially for students with disabilities. The [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA), a federal law, requires state VR agencies to provide Pre-ETS to students eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Indiana VR works with [local private provider organizations](#) to deliver those services in collaboration with school systems across the state.

The program's goal is to aid students in understanding their career interests, abilities, and strengths. Pre-ETS focuses on five core areas that will help students understand how to obtain and maintain employment. The Pre-ETS services include:

- job exploration counseling,
- workplace readiness training,
- instruction in self-advocacy,
- counseling on post-secondary education opportunities, and
- work-based learning experiences.

Pre-ETS is available in all Indiana counties, where students in Indiana can enroll if they meet the following criteria:

- **Age:** Students must be between the ages of 14 and 22.
- **Disability:** Students must have a documented disability, such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan.
- **Enrollment:** Students must be enrolled in an educational program, such as a public, private, or charter high school, home school, college, GED program, or vocational education program.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Key Players**

There are multiple players involved in the delivery of Pre-ETS. Below is a summary of how each party collaborates with the student and family to design and implement services during high school.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**

The VR counselor is a professional who works with students to evaluate education, training, skills, interests, and financial needs and outline career plans and services needed. For those in Pre-ETS, the VR agency has youth VR counselors assigned to regions of Indiana. The youth VR counselor connects with regional schools and local provider agencies contracted to provide Pre-ETS. These youth VR counselors may provide training and technical assistance related to Pre-ETS and attend Transition IEP meetings. They also monitor the case notes submitted in an online portal by the local provider organizations.

### **Local Provider Organizations**

In Indiana, VR contracts with private provider organizations to deliver the services outlined in Pre-ETS legislation. When the student is enrolled, the provider representatives should participate in Transition IEP meetings to report on progress on these five Pre-ETS activities.

1. Job exploration counseling,
2. Workplace readiness training,
3. Instruction in self-advocacy,
4. Counseling on post-secondary education opportunities, and
5. Work-based learning experiences.

### **Educators**

School personnel make recommendations for Pre-ETS services to the VR counselor. Teachers can identify students whom they believe will benefit from VRS. Most of the Pre-ETS providers take referrals directly from school systems. After enrollment, the school will send a release of information form and disability documentation (IEP, Section 504, or other documentation) to the provider.

### **Students and Families**

Students and parents prepare for involvement in Pre-ETS during transition planning. While the five core activities are the same, Pre-ETS can be implemented differently based on local resources and employer participation in work-related activities. Students and families should become familiar with local services. To understand the benefits of Pre-ETS, students and

families should meet with the provider agency, tour their services, and get information on the agency's success rate.

While Pre-ETS can provide a critical start in the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities, it is important to note that a student can enroll in Pre-ETS and still go through the VRS system to get more support for competitive employment. Students can apply for and enroll in VRS starting their junior year of high school.

## **Tips for Evaluating Pre-ETS**

Students and families should learn about Pre-ETS during middle school, such as a local provider and how they deliver required services. The following are key characteristics to assess Pre-ETS programs when evaluating services.

- Services should be individualized to address a student's needs and employment goals. This means the program should provide more than one type of employment setting for the work experience component. Curriculum and instruction should accommodate the student's unique learning style while focusing on priority skills.
- It is important that the program offers meaningful learning opportunities based on the student's knowledge and experience. This requires creativity and flexibility.
- During Pre-ETS, families and students should get information about ongoing support systems such as Medicaid Waivers. VR and Pre-ETS professionals must make connections to ensure a smooth transition, especially for students with long-term service needs.
- School staff and Pre-ETS providers should work together to build career-related records that the student can keep after graduation. Resumes, work portfolios, and presentations can help the student positively demonstrate their skills and support needs to employers.
- Pre-ETS is not a single class or work experience. Students can progress through different work experiences to evaluate careers available to them. Pre-ETS should allow a better understanding of the labor market and in-demand industries and occupations.

In summary, Pre-ETS is an individualized program designed to introduce students with disabilities to activities that will increase their knowledge of work and education options after high school. It requires collaboration between the student, family, school personnel, VR staff, and the Pre-ETS provider. The result should be clear direction and positive employment and/or post-secondary education outcomes.

## **Resources**

- ✓ Bureau of Rehabilitative Services: [BRS Pre-ETS Training Brief Pre-Employment Transition Services](#)

- ✓ Center on Community Living and Careers: [Understanding Pre-Employment Transition Services](#)
- ✓ Family and Social Services Administration: [Pre-Employment Transition Services Forms](#)
- ✓ Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation: [Pre-ETS Basics](#)
- ✓ PCG Indiana: [Pre-ETS Toolkit](#)
- ✓ PCG Indiana: [Collaborate Effectively to Support Your Pre-ETS Program](#)

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