

# COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) from VR and ODDS Employment Policy

This guidance is developed for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors and ODDS employment providers and will be updated on a regular basis with additional answers to questions that are submitted.

## **Topic: VR Referrals and Intakes**

**Question:** Is VR closing cases (successful or “other”) during the EO?

**Answer:** VR is still open for business and continues to work with all of our clients to the greatest extent possible. If an individual achieves one of these outcomes, we are continuing to work with all of our clients just as we were previous to the current outbreak.

**Question:** In relation to VR, has work been done around needs assessment forecasting per county once COVID-19 calms down and how will that information be distributed? In particular, will there be any process changes or increased VR Counselors to address the anticipated needs?

**Answer:** VR is actively engaged both with other states and with our federal partners to determine what the best path forward will be as we navigate this crisis. Part of that process is trying to determine how best to serve the expected influx of clients when the Governor’s Executive Order is lifted. At this time, VR has not received any waivers, extensions or amendments to any federal guidelines and is required to follow all existing timelines as far as applications, orientations, intakes, etc. VR staffing is set by legislative authority and we will not be authorized to bring new hires or temporary staff onboard during this time. Working within this framework, we will be actively engaged with all of our regions, branches and counselors to provide the best possible services, in the most efficient manner possible, when we have additional information about what this looks like.

**Question:** Can/will people reapply for VR Services if they lost their job due to COVID-19?

**Answer:** This depends on the specific situation. If the person experiences a temporary layoff, it would be crucial to see if they go back into work once COVID-19 is resolved. If that is the case, they likely would not benefit from VR services. If they have permanently lost their job, as soon as new intakes are available they could apply to VR.

If they continue to have an open file, they can continue to work with their VRC as they normally would.

**Question:** How to open up a VR Post-Employment Service (PES) plan for someone who is not stable in current job due to employer changes due to COVID-19 (need increased job coaching supports)?

**Answer:** This would be based on an individual basis. The person who is concerned that they are no longer stable should reach out to their VRC and share this information for consideration of PES.

### **New/Update May 1, 2020**

**Question:** Has VR received any additional guidance from the federal government as how to respond to the influx of clients to VR once the Governor's Executive Order is lifted?

**Answer:** We have not. In the CARES Act an update to Congress is required within 30 days (April 27) and will provide a list of waivers or flexibilities under OSERS. The Secretary of Education submitted a letter to congress requesting the following flexibilities and waivers.

1. Waiver Authority Recommendation (Obligation and Expenditure of FY 2019 Vocational Rehabilitation Carryover Funds)
2. Waiver Authority Recommendation (Reservation of Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Program Funds)
3. Waiver Authority Recommendation (Allowable Use of Vocational Rehabilitation Funds in Reopening Randolph-Sheppard Facilities)
4. Waiver Authority Recommendation (Internship and Service Obligations for Rehabilitation Services Administration Scholars)

These waivers that the secretary requested do not address an influx of individuals seeking VR services after the Executive Order is lifted.

**Question:** What are the updates on the VR intake and referral process?

**Answer:** VR has continued to accept referrals as normal and the local branches have been tracking them in the order they were received. This also includes previously scheduled intake appointments that had to be canceled due to the executive order (stay home, save lives). The referrals do not need to be resent and the local branches will be following-up to reschedule intakes that were cancelled, along with scheduling intakes for new referrals received.

If there are questions, the referrer should contact the local VR branch office ([Find a VR Office](#)) along with reviewing the updated information provided in the links below. Please remember that VR is always available for consultation at the local

level and is happy to discuss questions/concerns around the referral and intake process.

Director's Message on Virtual Intakes and More (4-27-2020)

VR-AR-20-07 Virtual Intake Guidance (4-24-2020)

VR-AR-20-04 Virtual Appointment Guidance (4/03/2020)

**Question:** How does someone get into a VR Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that is already eligible for VR services during the “stay at home” Executive Order?

**Answer:** VR has continued with business operations and timelines while also working to implement guidance specific to establishment of plan, extensions of plan, etc. VR-AR-20-04 Virtual Appointment Guidance (4/03/2020) and VR-AR-20-06 Eligibility IPE Extensions (4/17/2020)

**Question:** If a person is receiving job coaching through ODDS for a new job but isn't stable, should they go to VR for an intake?

**Answer:** Yes, they should be referred for an intake to address job stabilization. Also, VR is always available for consultation at the local level to determine if an intake, natural supports, post-employment services, etc. are needed. Please reference the Worker Guide - Employment Stabilization. The ISP team and consulting VR Counselor may determine based on the individual circumstances that the person is stable in the job. If this is the case, follow the steps outlined in the Employment Stabilization Worker's Guide and submit the Job Coaching Without VR Placement Form.

**Question:** What can school programs and employment providers do to help with comprehensive vocational assessments prior to VR intakes? What suggestions does VR and ODDS have?

**Answer:** Communicate with local school programs to determine which vocational assessment tools have been completed.

**Question:** How can educators and employment vendors/providers utilize Oregon Career Information System (Oregon CIS) that VR offices have access to? This could be a good resource that could help in career awareness/exploration prior to intake with VR.

**Answer:** Work directly with the local VR office for licenses and access to Oregon CIS. YTP programs also have licenses for Oregon CIS.

**Question:** Is VR projecting to go into order of selection?

**Answer:** Not at this time.

## **Topic: VR Employment Plans**

**Question:** Will VR expand job goals for current individuals given the type of work right now that is available if someone wants a job?

**Answer:** If a VR client is interested in exploring employment opportunities outside of those described in their current plan, we encourage the individual to call and schedule a virtual appointment with their counselor. They can then discuss the opportunity and to determine if the job is a good fit for their skills and abilities and if it meets the requirements for VR services.

**Question:** How do we get an employment plan finalized?

**Answer:** It just needs to be signed.

**Question:** How can people be brought into plan quickly?

**Answer:** VR services are highly individualized to a person's specific goals and needs and the length of time it takes to get an individual into plan varies based on the complexity of the services required. We are actively working with all of our clients to support them in the most efficient, and safest manner possible. Additionally, none of the federal timeline requirements to determine a person's eligibility or to move them into plan have been amended due to the Covid-19 crisis and we are continuing to follow all application guidelines as required.

**Question:** Can VR support temporary work into essential jobs?

**Answer:** If an individual working with VR is interested in pursuing some of these essential positions, and the job itself is a good fit for the client, we can discuss this as an option with the person and/or their support team on a case by case basis.

**Question:** Will VR approve temporary jobs for people during this time and help fund those placements?

**Answer:** All VR services are unique to the individual person. If an individual receiving VR services has a specific interest in a temporary job, we'd encourage them to reach out to their VRC and discuss the specific circumstances with their counselor to see if the specific job in question is a good fit for them and if the specific job meets the requirements necessary to be eligible for VR supports.

## **Topic: Job Development and Job Coaching**

**Question:** What steps to take with ODDS if a person has lost their job and would like to find a new job?

**Answer:** ODDS is not able to fund job finding or job placement. However, if the person is with ODDS and gets a job, ODDS can fund job coaching without VR following that policy. As stated above, VR is in the process of allowing virtual intakes, etc. If the person is still open with VR this would be a process to discuss with the VRC and CME, etc.

**Question:** Can ODDS fund Job Placement (Job Development) services if VR is not taking new applications, creating new IPEs, etc.?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** Is ODDS going to fund Job Placement (Job Development) for those who lost their job due to COVID-19?

**Answer:** No.

**Question:** What is the best way for job developer to get new authorizations for payment?

**Answer:** VR is still open for business and processing authorizations for payment (AFP) just as we have always done. If a vendor requires a new AFP or has questions surrounding an existing one, please contact your local branch office for specific instructions on processing.

**Question:** Will ODDS pay placement fees until VR starts taking new intakes again?

**Answer:** No, ODDS will only fund placement if VR is in Order of Selection. At this time, VR is not in Order of Selection. If a provider has ODDS contingency funding, they can provide job coaching with that funding. If there is no contingency funding, they could bill job coaching without VR, and if they stayed in the work for 90 days, could request retention, as outlined in the Worker's Guide.

**Question:** Does VR recommend contracted Job Developer/Job Coaching agencies to continue to provide services if able?

**Answer:** VR recommends that job developers and job coaches follow their business practice and Executive Order 20-12. Public Health has also issued guidance around this: <https://www.oregon.gov/DHS/SENIORS-DISABILITIES/DD/ODDS%20Resource%20Library/Novel%20Coronavirus%20Fact%20Sheet-English.aspx>

<https://www.oregon.gov/DHS/SENIORS-DISABILITIES/DD/ODDS%20Resource%20Library/Prevention%20Flyer-English.aspx>

**Question:** Does VR support remote job coaching/job development during COVID-19?

**Answer:** Job coaching is an individual service and it depends on the specific needs of the individual. We encourage our providers to work with their clients to find out what works best, and what is in the IPE.

**Question:** Can VR contracted Job Developer/Job Coach receive placement, retention, and job coaching funding through VR during the EO “stay at home order”?

**Answer:** Yes, if they are already in plan and the job meets the requirements of the plan.

**Question:** Will VR have funding assistance for contracted job developers/job coaches or special project (funding) to ramp up services when the EO “stay at home” order is lifted?

**Answer:** VR has been in national calls with RSA and other states. RSA has been clear VR is not able to pay for services that are not rendered. However, VR is continuing conversations around this.

**Question:** Can people who are receiving job coaching through VR be transferred to long term ODDS job coaching immediately?

**Answer:** Stabilization Policy/Guidance ([Worker Guide - Employment Stabilization](#)) need to be followed. If a person is not stable in the job then services (job coaching) through VR remain in place until stabilization is achieved. Best practice is for the employment team (individual, VRC, Job Coach Agency, SC/PA, employer, etc.) to work together to determine when stabilization is achieved. Once stabilization has been reached, job supports/services can be transferred to DD long term supports.

**Question:** What is expected of a job coach if person is sick?

**Answer:** It is the responsibility of the employer to set standards as well as team. There is a Powtoon YouTube video ([ODDS Covid 19 Video](#)) available on the ODDS website to show the individual and help them understand how to keep themselves safe.

**New/Update May 1, 2020**

**Question:** What is the best way for contracted Job Developer/Job Coach agency to get new authorizations (AFPs) for job coaching from VR?

**Answer:** Please remember local VR branches are always available for consultation ([Find a VR Office](#)). There has been update guidance developed [VR-AR-20-05 Temporary Authorization for Purchase Guidance under Executive Order 20-12 \(4/10/2020\)](#)

**Question:** If a person's job coaching need change due to employer restructuring work tasks, schedule, co-workers, supervisors, etc. is there an exception process to move someone back into initial or ongoing job coaching through ODDS? Should the team look at connecting with VR for Post-Employment Services or new IPE since the person's job changed enough that they are no longer stable in their current position?

**Answer:** At this time there is not an option to move back into another phase in job coaching in the same position. If person's position is not stable, the team should reach out to the local VR office to consult with a VR Counselor. If the job is identified as at risk, make a referral to VR for intake. Please refer to the [Worker Guide - Employment Stabilization](#)

**Question:** After the EO (stay home save lives) is lifted will remote/virtual job coaching continue to count as direct contact time for ODDS job coaching?

**Answer:** This will need to be explored through stakeholder input. VR and ODDS are looking at forming a stakeholder group in the future to consider refining remote/virtual job coaching supports. There have been positive results reported based on recent experiences being shared. VR and ODDS, with the help of stakeholders, would like to explore this as an option based on individual needs and circumstances.

### **Topic: General Covid Questions for ODDS and VR**

**Question:** What is the best way to contact VR with offices being closed to the public?

**Answer:** Through e-mail or phone is best right now. On the website there is a [local office tool](#) to get the best contact for the local office. VR is still open and still serving individuals.

**Question:** What is VR and ODDS guidance for helping people that might not have access to technology to do remote meetings virtually? Are telephone/conference calls okay?

**Answer:** Yes, phones are acceptable.

**Question:** Will ODDS address employment staff being laid off or quitting?

**Answer:** [Temporary Emergency Policy for Employment and DSA Services APD-PT-20-039](#) outlines temporary emergency measures and some best practices along with providing information on ODDS contingency funding for Supported Employment. Further information on ODDS contingency funding is outline in [DSA and Employment Contingency Funding APD-AR-20-040](#)

**Question:** How should providers manage unemployment requests?

**Answer:** This is out of the scope of ODDS and VR. Questions may be directed to [Oregon Employment Department](#).

**Question:** Should programs close job coaching activity?

**Answer:** This is a provider decision. Consider what accommodations are being made for the person. Look at the individual job situation and see if there is an ability to take precautions for that specific job and situation. Ensure that the job coach isn't showing any signs of illness.

**Question:** What is the current mechanism for signing Service Agreements for coaching? Are Personal Agents and Services Coordinators using signature?

**Answer:** ODDS currently allows changes to be made via phone call with documentation of the approval. ODDS is looking into e-signatures.

**Question:** For individuals who are unemployed what aspects of the employment ISP should be completed?

**Answer:** This should be specific to the person and the team. If an ISP change is needed, an ISP change form should be generated remotely, etc.

**Question:** Can you address options for 18-21-year-old students who are aging out of school service?

**Answer:** Individuals 18-21 can still access employment supports as outlined in current policy. For ODDS this includes Supported Small Group, Discovery (if they want to work in the next year or so), and Job Coaching if they have a Competitive Integrated Job.

**Question:** Will Employment and DSA provider licenses/certificates be extended if they expire during the Stay at Home order? They are being extended for Foster Care and PSW's, just don't recall seeing anything for these providers.

**Answer:** Any licenses or certificates will be extended so long as the provider applies for the renewal and submits the fees.

### **New/Update May 1, 2020**

**Question:** What platforms can VR use for remote/virtual meetings?

**Answer:** VR can utilize Skype, Zoom, Facetime, or phone. Google Hangouts and other google platforms are not allowed. To explore other options, please contact your local office. In the event that a platform cannot be utilized, phone is always a good option.

**Question:** How is VR sharing information with individuals and Community Partners (CMEs, Provider Agencies, etc.) about their current services and delivery of services? If people haven't received any communication how do they find out?

**Answer:** VR is sending information to all VR contractors through email to ensure that they are up to date. Please send an email to [VR.ContractInquiries@dhsosha.state.or.us](mailto:VR.ContractInquiries@dhsosha.state.or.us) if you are a contractor and have not been receiving information.

For community partners such as CMEs, schools, etc. and individuals, local VR branches would be the best contact ([Find a VR Office](#)). There is also a VR [COVID-19 Information](#) webpage that you can [subscribe](#) to receive email updates from VR.

**Question:** What online resources are available to help with career exploration and interests that educators and employment providers can use with people virtually?

**Answer:** There are a variety of different Career Inventories, Interest Assessments, Career Videos, etc. available online. Some that have been shared are listed below as examples. VR Counselors and School Transition Programs may have recommendations. Connect with your local community partners to find out what they have found to be successful.

Examples:

<https://www.careeronestop.org/Videos/CareerVideos/career-videos.aspx>

[https://www.careerinfonet.org/careertools\\_intro.asp](https://www.careerinfonet.org/careertools_intro.asp)

<https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip>



<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Skills/skills-matcher.aspx/default.aspx>  
<https://www.onetonline.org/>  
<https://careerwise.minnstate.edu/>  
[https://www.cves.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Pictoral\\_Interest\\_Inventory\\_template\\_SHEN.pdf](https://www.cves.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Pictoral_Interest_Inventory_template_SHEN.pdf)  
[https://www.cves.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/PictureCareerInterest\\_Inventory.pdf](https://www.cves.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/PictureCareerInterest_Inventory.pdf)