
----- Knowing the Road -----



ADVOCACY CENTER

SERVING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND SENIOR CITIZENS

“Knowing The Road” is a guide to the services offered by Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS). Each step of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) process is described. These steps include:

- referral & application
- evaluation / assessment
- eligibility
- services
- planning
- employment

This information will help you make informed choices and decisions as you follow the road to your employment goal. We hope your questions are answered as you read through this booklet. Please use “Knowing The Road” as a guide and refer back to it as often as necessary.

Whether the road is long or short – full of bumps or fairly smooth – this booklet will assist you as you move through the LRS process. It is a good idea to consult LRS if you have questions about LRS or your experiences as an applicant or consumer.

If you continue to have questions or concerns, contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at 1-800-960-7705 (Voice) or 1-855-861-3577 (TTY). CAP staff are ready to assist you as you travel the road to employment.



UNDERSTANDING VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The mission of LRS is to help you get a job and keep a job. The services you receive will be based on your individual strengths, resources, abilities, interests and informed choices.

You are eligible for LRS services if you:

- have a significant mental or physical disability;
- have problems getting and/or keeping a job because of your disability; and
- need LRS services to help prepare for, obtain, retain or regain an employment outcome.

An “**employment outcome**” is full-time or part-time competitive employment that is consistent with your individual goal. Types of employment include:

- competitive employment
- supported employment
- self-employment
- telecommuting
- business ownership
- homemaking

Order of Selection/Functional Capacity Areas

LRS follows an **order of selection** to make sure that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected to receive services before individuals with less significant disabilities.

Your placement in an Order of Selection category will be based on the number of limitations you have in eight areas: mobility, motor skills, communication, self-care, self direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance and work skills.

If you do not receive services because of your placement in the Order of Selection, LRS must:

- explain your Order of Selection placement,
- provide information regarding appeal rights,
- make referrals to other agencies for possible assistance.





APPLICATION FOR SERVICES/ INITIAL INTERVIEW

To apply for LRS services, call the LRS office closest to your home. You will need to provide the following information:

- Name
- Address
- Telephone Number
- Disability
- Date of Birth
- Social Security Number
- Accommodations Needed

You should hear from the LRS counselor (by phone or in writing) within 7 calendar days. An initial appointment should be scheduled within 30 calendar days from the date LRS received your referral.

During the initial interview, your LRS counselor will:

- review and complete the application,
- explain LRS services,
- ask questions about your disability, work history, education, financial status, etc.,
- explain your rights,
- answer any questions,
- make sure you have signed the application for services.

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If you have a disability and believe this disability creates barriers to employment you have the right to apply for LRS services. Do not be discouraged if someone at LRS says they do not think LRS can help. LRS must process all applications and make a formal determination of eligibility for services. Contact the CAP for more information on the LRS application process.

Your initial interview will run smoother if you:

- bring your Social Security card with you,
- have copies of your medical reports, educational transcripts and resume,
- are prepared to explain to the LRS counselor how your disability affects your ability to work,
- can describe what help you need to reach an employment goal.





EVALUATION/ ASSESSMENT

Your LRS counselor will use a variety of information to help determine your eligibility for services. Medical information is used to evaluate the effects of your disability on your ability to work. Psychological and vocational evaluations are used to learn more about your abilities, skills, interests and needed services.

Your counselor will explain what evaluations you need and why. Sometimes existing information can be used. You and your counselor can determine if existing information can be used to determine eligibility and service needs.

If you need further evaluations, LRS can schedule and pay for any type that is necessary. LRS contracts with a variety of medical and other professionals. You will be given a list to choose from based on the type of information needed.



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- Discuss the evaluation process. Ask about anything you don't understand.
- Make sure you keep all scheduled appointments. Let your counselor know as soon as possible if you need to re-schedule.
- The counselor should contact you within three weeks of your final evaluation to schedule a meeting to discuss these reports.





ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES

Your counselor should determine eligibility for LRS services within 60 days of your original application. If a decision takes longer than 60 days, the counselor must:

- explain why the eligibility process is taking longer,
- give you a specific date (beyond the 60 days) for a determination decision, and
- provide information regarding appeal rights if you do not agree to an extension.

If you are **eligible** for LRS services you and your counselor will begin to work together to develop a vocational rehabilitation program that meets your individual needs and leads to your employment goal.

An **extended evaluation** may be necessary if your disability is so severe that LRS cannot determine your potential for an employment outcome. Trial work periods will be used to evaluate your ability and capacity to succeed in work situations.

During an extended evaluation you should receive all services necessary to help determine whether you can work. LRS must assess your progress every 90 days. This extended evaluation should not last longer than 18 months.

If you are found to be **ineligible** for LRS services your

counselor will explain why this decision was made and refer you to other community resources for assistance. If you disagree with this decision you may ask for an appeal.



RECEIVING LRS SERVICES

LRS can provide a broad range of services; all services must be necessary to reach your employment outcome and are based on your individual needs. The type of services you receive may differ from services other individuals receive. Some of the services offered are:

- **Vocational Evaluation**
 - assessment of your strengths and weaknesses related to employment
- **Counseling and Guidance**
 - vocational counseling
 - information about informed choice
- **Referral Services**
 - referrals to help you secure needed services from other agencies
- **Job-Related Services**
 - job search
 - placement assistance
 - job retention (helping you keep a job)
 - supported employment (job coaching)
 - transition from school to work

- small business enterprises
- occupational tools, equipment and licensing
- post-employment
- **Vocational and Other Training Services**
 - personal and work adjustment services
 - books, tools and other training materials
 - vocational training
 - college
 - on-the-job training
 - on-site training
 - orientation and mobility training
 - childcare during assessment or training
- **Physical and Mental Restoration**
 - diagnosis
 - treatment and medication
 - surgery
 - glasses
 - psychotherapy or mental health counseling
 - speech, physical and occupational therapy
- **Maintenance**
 - costs above basic living expenses incurred during training
- **Transportation**
 - training in use of public transportation systems
 - financial assistance needed to access transportation
- **Personal Assistant Services**
 - assistance with daily living activities
 - assistance on the job or during training

- **Assistive Technology Services/Devices**

- aids for daily living
- augmentative communication aids
- computers
- mobility devices
- hearing aids
- home and vehicle modifications

- **Special Services**

- interpreter, transliterator
- note taker, reader, scribe
- tutor
- computer access real-time translation

- **Other Services**

- any other service needed to reach your employment outcome





WHO PAYS FOR WHAT?

Some LRS services are provided at no cost to you – regardless of income. Other services may require your financial participation. Before you receive any services, LRS may need documentation to verify your financial situation.

You may be asked to provide:

- current income tax returns
- Social Security/FITAP/Food Stamp award letter(s)
- W-2 forms
- disability-related bills and payments
- bank statements

If you are receiving SSI, SSDI, FITAP or Food Stamps you will not be asked to contribute to the cost of any LRS services received. If your income is from work or some other source, a **financial need analysis** will be completed by the LRS counselor to determine how much you will have to contribute toward the cost of services.

The following LRS services are provided at no cost to you – regardless of income:

- evaluations
- vocational guidance and counseling
- referral to other agencies

- job placement
- assistive technology devices and services
- adjustment/mobility training
- personal assistant services (attendant, scribe, reader, etc.)

Based on your income you may be required to pay a portion of the cost of the following services:

- tuition and fees for college/vocational training
- physical and mental restoration
- maintenance
- transportation
- books, supplies, occupational tools, equipment, licenses, personal computers
- services to other family members
- small business costs (minimum capital contribution of at least 20% of total transaction)

Comparable Services and Similar Benefits are resources available under other programs, which may help pay for the services you need. You and your counselor will look for other available resources that will help to pay for some or all of the costs of your services. These resources must be of acceptable quality and must be available to you without delaying vocational services.

Examples of comparable services and similar benefits are:

- Medicaid, Medicare

- Veteran's Assistance
- Pell Grant, Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant
- Non-merit scholarships, waivers, tuition exemptions, fellowships
- Private health insurance

Awards and scholarships based on merit are not considered comparable benefits.





WRITING YOUR EMPLOYMENT PLAN

Determining your vocational goal and identifying the services needed to reach this goal is the most important part of your VR program. This information will be used to develop your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). You can choose to write your plan or request assistance from your LRS counselor in developing all or part of the plan.

Your completed plan should include:

- your chosen career field (your vocational goal will be documented in the case record),
- measurable goals,
- all services necessary to reach these goals,
- beginning and ending dates for services,
- identification of who will provide, purchase, arrange and/or pay for each service,
- a statement of how you were informed about and involved in choosing your employment outcome and LRS services,
- signed **agreement of understanding** which describes your rights and responsibilities as an LRS client.

Your IPE will not go into effect until it has been approved and signed by you, the LRS counselor, a district supervisor

and, if necessary, other LRS staff.

Remember that your IPE is your road map to services. It is an ongoing and flexible document that charts the services you will receive and the progress you make toward an employment outcome. If your choices or needs change, the IPE should be amended to reflect these changes.

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- You may need to negotiate with your counselor as you identify your employment outcome and needed services. If there is a disagreement, justify your requests by explaining your needs.
- Ask questions about your IPE.
- Take someone with you to meetings with LRS staff.
- Discuss any barrier or problem you anticipate having in the future related to getting a job so that possible services to correct the problem can be planned ahead of time.
- Don't sign the IPE until you are satisfied with it and it is complete.
- Get a copy of the signed plan and any later amendments for your files.



EMPLOYMENT

Each LRS service you receive is part of your road to employment. After receiving the services outlined on your plan, you should be ready to begin your search for employment.

Placement services provided by your counselor may include:

- providing job leads,
- contacting employers,
- assisting with resume and cover letter development,
- identifying necessary job accommodations,
- registering with the local One-Stop,
- counseling on work ethics, job-seeking skills and networking,
- advising potential employers of tax credits,
- referral to a job placement specialist or agency.

It is your responsibility to actively participate in finding employment. Make sure you and your counselor have identified the placement services needed and have agreed on your role in the job search. Follow the suggestions of your counselor and develop job leads yourself.

It is very important that you actively look for a job. Reaching your employment outcome is a job in itself. The more effort put into your job search, the better your chances of finding suitable employment.

Once you have started working, your counselor will keep your case open for 90 days. During this time your counselor will meet with you (and your employer if requested) to make sure you are in an appropriate work setting.

Be sure to notify your counselor immediately if you need to make adjustments or changes in your job or work environment. If something happens and you are at risk of losing your job, contact your LRS counselor at once.

If your LRS case has been closed as **successfully rehabilitated** and you need additional short-term services in order to keep your job you may be eligible for **post-employment services**. Contact your LRS counselor as soon as you identify any further necessary services. If you need long-term assistance or a variety of services you should contact LRS and they will re-open your case.

Knowing the Road

- Notify your counselor as soon as possible once you start work.
- Keep in touch with your counselor after you start work.
- If problems come up (or you think they might) or you need further services, meet with your counselor to discuss possible solutions. Contact your counselor as soon as you recognize a problem. Don't wait for the problem to become a crisis.



YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Client-Counselor Relationship

You and your counselor have certain expectations of one another. This relationship should always be constructive and cooperative. You should be treated with respect and dignity and your counselor should establish a meaningful relationship with you. Be motivated to fulfill your part of the IPE.

Participation In The VR Process (Client Choice)

The purpose of **informed choice** is to ensure your full participation throughout the rehabilitation process. From application to employment and beyond you should always be informed about all available options. Your counselor should provide enough information so that you can make an informed choice

- during assessments for eligibility and service needs,
- in the selection of an employment outcome and services needed to achieve this outcome,
- in the selection of who will provide these services,
- in the methods used to pay for these services.

Always clearly state your needs and desires to your counselor so that the entire LRS process is a joint effort.

Confidentiality and your LRS Case Record

LRS will develop a case record to serve as written documentation of your rehabilitation process. This information is confidential and is released only for purposes directly connected with your LRS program. This means information from your case record may be shared only with other agencies involved in providing services to you through LRS.

It is a good idea to be aware of the information in your case record so you can make informed choices throughout the LRS process. You can review your case record at any time by scheduling an appointment with LRS staff

Prompt, Equitable and Quality Services

You should receive all LRS services in a timely and fair manner. You can expect to move toward your employment outcome at a pace favorable to you. Remember that delays might occur. If this happens, contact your counselor and discuss the delay and determine how it can be resolved. Be actively involved in your services. Making regular contact with LRS will allow you to ask questions and minimize delays.

Knowing the Road

Working With Your Counselor

A common problem you might encounter is a delay in the delivery of needed services. If you experience delays, you may want to take the following action:

- Stay in frequent contact with LRS.
- Ask your counselor what you can do to make sure your case moves forward promptly.
- Take an active role in learning as much as possible about your chosen employment outcome and the services you'll need to reach this goal. Do your own research and make this information available to your LRS counselor.
- If you foresee a problem, let your counselor know immediately. Don't wait until it is too late to address the issue.

Communicating With Your LRS Counselor

You and your LRS counselor should be in frequent communication throughout your rehabilitation. Make sure you return all calls to your counselor and respond to any written communication as necessary. If you have trouble reaching your counselor, keep calling until you make contact. If you are unable to reach your counselor after several days, ask to speak to the counselor's supervisor. Explain the problem to the supervisor and ask that your counselor contact you as soon as possible.

You may prefer to communicate with your counselor by mail, fax or e-mail. An advantage to this type of communication is that you have a written record of your requests. You may even want to follow phone calls with a written communication. Make sure and keep copies of all correspondence between you and LRS.





YOUR RIGHT TO APPEAL

There may be times in the LRS process when you do not agree with the action, inaction or decision of LRS. You have the right to appeal any determination that affects the provision of services. Examples of decisions you may want to appeal are:

- being determined ineligible for services,
- delays in getting services,
- being denied requested services.

Prior to initiating an appeal, be sure to clearly discuss your issue with your counselor. If you and your counselor cannot resolve the problem, ask for a meeting that includes your counselor's supervisor. If the results of that meeting are not satisfactory, request a written explanation of why your request was denied.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

The next step in the informal review process is an **administrative review** with the LRS Regional Manager. Your request for an administrative review must be made in writing to the LRS Regional Manager. The request should briefly state the problem and the resolution you seek. You must make this request within 15 calendar days of the date LRS mails your letter of denial or ineligibility for services.

The regional manager will contact you to schedule the review. At the review you should:

- clearly state all concerns and possible solutions,
- have a clear idea of what you will or will not accept as a solution to the problem/request,
- bring documentation or witnesses that will support your position.

The review should be held and a final decision rendered within 15 calendar days of your written request for the review. Contact the Regional Manager if you have not received a decision within the 15-day period.

FAIR HEARING

If you are not satisfied with the decision received at the Administrative Review, you can request a **Fair Hearing** within 15 days after the Administrative Review decision is mailed.

To request a Fair Hearing write a letter to the Regional Manager (get the name and address from your LRS counselor). The letter should briefly state your problem and the outcome you hope to achieve. After receiving this letter the Regional Manager will notify the LRS State Office and you will be contacted and informed of the Impartial Hearing Officer (IHO) selection process. You will also be given information regarding the option of using **mediation** to resolve your issue (See MEDIATION below).

The IHO will contact you to set up a date and time that is convenient. The Fair Hearing will be held at the local LRS office.

The Fair Hearing is a formal appeal where you will present evidence supporting your position. You may bring an

advocate, attorney or other individuals with you to the hearing. You may also bring any witnesses who can support your claim.

After the hearing, the IHO will make a decision within 30 days. The IHO's decision is final unless you or LRS requests a **review** of the decision or files a **civil action**. A request for a review must be made within 20 days of the mail date of the Fair Hearing decision. This request must be made in writing to the Director of the Louisiana Workforce Commission. You can submit further evidence and information at this time. You must receive a final decision within 30 days of the date the review was requested.

MEDIATION

Mediation is a voluntary process that allows an impartial mediator to assist you and the Regional Manager in trying to resolve appeals issues.

If you choose mediation, a qualified and impartial mediator will conduct the mediation process. The entire mediation process is confidential and will give you and LRS the opportunity to come to a resolution prior to a Fair Hearing. If your issue is not resolved by mediation, you may then request a Fair Hearing (as outlined above).

FURTHER ACTION

If you are not satisfied with the IHO and/or review decision you may bring a civil action and ask an appropriate court to review your case.

Knowing the Road

Preparing for Appeals

- Review the information in your LRS case file. You or your representatives have the right to review most of your case record. Pay careful attention and make notes of information which relates to the appeal.
- Be prepared to clearly communicate what you need and want. Be assertive, not aggressive. Help set a positive and productive tone for the appeal.
- You may want to bring a friend or advocate with you and to rehearse your position prior to the appeal.
- To determine how to prepare for an appeal, contact the CAP. The CAP staff is experienced with federal and state LRS regulations and can help you determine if you should proceed with an appeal. They may also be able to represent you during the appeal process.

NOTES



**1-800-960-7705 (Voice) 1-855-861-3577
(TTY)**

advocacycenter@advocacyla.org

www.advocacyla.org

To request services in Vietnamese, call 1-800-960-7705, extension 4.
Để đòi hỏi những công tác (dịch vụ) bằng tiếng Việt, xin gọi 1-800-960-7705, mở rộng 4.

For information in Spanish, please call 1-800-960-7705, ext. 3.
Para información en español por favor llame 1-800-960-7705, ext. 3.

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a service of the Advocacy Center. The CAP program's special mission is to assist people with problems they have relative to receiving rehabilitation services.

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