# Vocational Rehabilitation Standards for Providers Manual Chapter 16: Project SEARCH

Contract Subject: Project SEARCH

The contractor and contractor staff that provide services described in this chapter also must comply with Chapters 1–3 of the VR Standards for Providers manual.

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## 16.1 Overview of Project SEARCH Services

Project SEARCH is an international initiative that supports partnerships among businesses (employers), local school districts, vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, and other entities that serve individuals with disabilities, including intellectual and developmental disabilities. Project SEARCH promotes the successful long-term employment of VR customers in jobs that are stable, meaningful, integrated, and competitively compensated.

The program takes place in business settings where total immersion in the workplace facilitates teaching and learning. The program enables participating VR customers to develop marketable work skills and increase their employability. Each customer has the opportunity to participate in three internships in order to explore a variety of career paths. The customer works with a team that includes the customer's family and partnering agencies. The team helps the customer create an employment goal and supports the customer during the transition from school to work.

All fees for services described in this chapter can be found in VR-SFP 16.6 Project SEARCH Service Fees.

Any request to change a Service Description, Process and Procedure, or Outcomes Required for Payment must be documented and approved by the VR director, using the VR3472, Contracted Service Modification Request for Project SEARCH Services, before the change is implemented. The approved VR3472 must be maintained in the provider’s customer case file. For more information, refer to VR-SFP 3.4.11 Contracted Services Modification Request.

## 16.2 Staff Qualifications and Training

The Employment Service Provider director must approve the VR3455, Provider Staff Information form completed by each staff member, before providing any services to customers and must submit the approved form to the provider's assigned TWC contract manager and regional program specialist. The VR3455, Provider Staff Information form, must document qualifications and provide evidence, such as transcripts, diplomas, reference letters, credentials, or licenses, of meeting all qualifications. The form and supporting documents must be retained and provided to TWC staff upon request.

Provider staff qualifications for each service are described below. If a qualification requires a University of North Texas Workplace Inclusion and Sustainable Employment (UNTWISE) credential, additional information can be obtained at [Texas Credential Training | Workplace Inclusion & Sustainable Employment](https://wise.unt.edu/crptraining).

Non-credentialed provider staff may provide services to a VR customer only when the Temporary Waiver of Employment Services Credential Standards are followed. For more information, refer to Chapter 3: Basic Standards, 3.4.5 Temporary Waiver of Staff Qualifications.

### 16.2.1 Skills Trainer General Qualifications

The following are the qualifications for skills trainers:

* A UNTWISE Job Skills Training credential is required.
* An additional UNTWISE Supported Employment credential is preferred.
* A High school diploma or GED is required.
* A Bachelor's degree or at least one year of documented experience working with individuals with disabilities is preferred.

### 16.2.2 Job Placement Specialist General Qualification

The following are the qualifications for job placement specialists:

* A UNTWISE Job Placement credential is required.
* An additional UNTWISE Supported Employment credential is preferred.
* A High school diploma or GED is required.
* A Bachelor's degree or at least one year of documented experience working with individuals with disabilities is preferred.

## 16.3 Project SEARCH Asset Discovery

### 16.3.1 Project SEARCH Asset Discovery Service Description

The process used to collect information from a customer who is selected as an intern in the Project SEARCH program is called "asset discovery." The skills trainer meets with the customer to collect information about the customer's skills, interests, abilities, learning styles, and support needs. The trainer also gathers information on the internship opportunities and needs of the participating host business. The skills trainer provides the collected information to the Project SEARCH team to help determine appropriate internships.

### 16.3.2 Project SEARCH Asset Discovery Process and Procedure

The provider receives VR5000, Referral for Provider Services, and a service authorization (SA) for asset discovery as soon as the customer is selected by the team to be an intern for the upcoming school year.

The assigned skills trainer:

* reviews the customer's Project SEARCH referral and, if available, the Project SEARCH application;
* schedules a meeting with the customer and his or her circle of supports to collect the information necessary to answer interview questions identified on the VR3361, Project SEARCH Asset Discovery Report; and
* completes a minimum of four observation sessions with the customer (one-on-one sessions, group sessions with other customers, or both) for a total of at least 20 hours to observe the customer's interests, skills, abilities, challenges, and support needs. Observation sessions may be completed at:
  + the customer's home;
  + places the customer goes for recreation;
  + business sites for tour;
  + environments where the customer's work skills may be simulated; and
  + places where the customer does volunteer work.

Any meeting among the customer, provider, customer's circle of supports, or VR staff may be conducted remotely.

### 16.3.3 Outcomes Required for Payment

The skills trainer must include the following information in descriptive terms on the VR3361, Project SEARCH Asset Discovery Report:

* The case information
* The date, time, location, and summary of all asset discovery sessions completed with the customer;
* Evidence of at least four asset discovery sessions and a total of at least 20 hours of contact with the customer, either individually or in a group setting
* A description of the customer's abilities
* Confirmation that services provided comply with all applicable standards
* Customer satisfaction and service delivery, which may be verified by VR staff contact with the customer or the customer's signature on the form

For information on signatures refer to VR-SFP sections 3.2.14 Documentation and 3.2.16 Signatures.

Payment for Project SEARCH Asset Discovery is made when the VR counselor approves a complete, accurate, signed, and dated VR3361, Project SEARCH Asset Discovery Report, and an invoice.

## 16.4 Project SEARCH Skills Training Services

### 16.4.1 Project SEARCH Skills Training Service Description

Project SEARCH services are based on experiential learning at a host business with support from the business and Project SEARCH team and are most effective when provided in person. When a host business does not allow interns or staff on-site for safety or other reasons, the Project SEARCH team may develop an alternate training method that must be noted by the VR counselor on VR5000, Referral for Provider Services. If the change in service delivery happens after the referral form was submitted, then an updated referral form should be completed and provided to the Employment Service provider. Remote services must follow guidance in VR-SFP 3.4.8 Remote Service Delivery.

Skills Training Services include training and establishing accommodations and/or compensatory techniques as needed to increase a customer's independence and improve the customer's ability to demonstrate soft and hard skills to meet the expectations and production standards of a host business.

Examples of Skills Training Services include:

* providing skills training as needed throughout the internship;
* establishing compensatory techniques and accommodations; and
* training individuals who are supporting the customer at the host business.

The skills trainer must provide services in coordination with:

* a teacher from the local school district;
* a paraprofessional from the school district; and
* designated supervisors from the host business.

Skills trainers must provide goal-directed services and support as outlined in VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report.

### 16.4.2 Project SEARCH Skills Training Process and Procedure

The customer, customer's legal guardian or representative (if applicable), VR counselor, and Project SEARCH team must meet to develop goals for the customer and document these goals on the VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report.

The skills trainer must:

* work with the customer, the customer's mentors, and the Project SEARCH team to help the customer achieve his or her goals;
* attend meetings related to the customer, as established by the Project SEARCH team, and indicate relevant customer updates on VR3362;
* work as an active team member with the other partners to ensure that the most suitable internship is provided to enhance the customer's employability skills; and
* help the Project SEARCH team with providing training to the host business.

No invoice may be paid until the VR counselor receives and approves a complete and accurate VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report, with an invoice.

Any meeting among the customer, provider, customer's circle of supports, or VR staff may be conducted remotely.

### 16.4.3 Project SEARCH Skills Training Outcomes Required for Payment

VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report, is submitted:

* at the conclusion of each internship rotation or throughout the rotation if the provider has arranged this with the VR counselor; and
* any time a change in the customer's needs or circumstances affect the customer's ability to continue participating in the internships.

For payment, the skills trainer must:

* document in descriptive terms all the information on VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report, including:
  + evidence that goals were established and addressed for the reporting period;
  + information describing the current internship;
  + the date range of the start date, end date, and total hours provided during that date range;
  + a summary of the services the skills trainer and Project SEARCH team provided and the customer's performance toward his or her goals for each date range entry;
  + affirmation that at least three hours of training were provided each week for the eight–12 week internship rotation;
  + evidence that the customer's soft and hard skills were evaluated and scored during the internship; and
  + customer satisfaction and service delivery, which may be verified by the customer's signature on the associated form or by VR staff contact with the customer.

For information on signatures refer to VR-SFP sections 3.2.14 Documentation and 3.2.16 Signatures.

No invoice may be paid until the VR counselor receives and approves a complete, accurate, signed, and dated VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report, and an invoice.

## 16.5 Project SEARCH Job Placement

### 16.5.1 Project SEARCH Job Placement Service Description

When the customer has participated in at least one internship rotation or, at any time during the rotations, the team determines job placement opportunities are available to the customer, the job placement specialist and Project SEARCH team help the customer find employment.

The goal is to place the customer in a competitive and integrated work setting either with the host business or a business in the community that:

* meets the customer's employment goal and employment conditions;
* allows the customer to apply his or her unique strengths, interests, abilities, and capabilities;
* is permanent, rather than temporary or seasonal; and
* pays a customary wage for the same or similar work performed by employees who do not have disabilities.

Job placement specialists are responsible for:

* providing initial instruction;
* providing assistance to reinforce learned skills;
* monitoring the customer to ensure that the customer is demonstrating the skills learned; and
* using resources or tools necessary to help the customer secure employment.

Project SEARCH Job Placement Services may not be purchased with on-the-job training services, Job Skills Training, Non-bundled Job Placement Services, Bundled Job Placement Services, Work Experience Services and/or Supported Employment.

There are times when participation in Work Experience or Supported Employment Services may benefits a customer after participation in Project SEARCH skills training. If this service is needed for a customer to help increase his or her employment opportunities, then an approved VR3472, Contracted Service Modification Request, is required. Job placement specialists are paid only once for each benchmark completed by a Project SEARCH customer, even if the customer loses a job after the completion of a benchmark.

The customer must work 90 days in the same position. If a customer loses a job before the 90-day benchmark, the customer's progression towards completion of the benchmark ends. When the customer becomes employed again, the day count will start at day 1 for the new position.

Each benchmark is paid only once for each customer between Active Status (customer has an Individualized Plan of Employment (IPE)) and Closure Status of a VR case. On a case-by-case basis, when the VR counselor determines the provider should be paid for making a second placement a VR3472 must be approved by the VR Director prior to the service authorization being issued.

The job placement specialist:

* verifies a customer's employment through employer or customer contact; and
* documents the verification on the appropriate form when invoicing VR.

If the employer has classified the customer as an employee during an orientation period, the orientation period counts as part of the customer's 90 days of cumulative employment. The time spent in a Project SEARCH internship rotation cannot be included in the job placement's 90-day count.

### 16.5.2 Project SEARCH Job Placement Process and Procedure

#### Job Placement Planning Meeting

The customer, VR counselor, job placement specialist, and any other Project SEARCH team members, meet to develop and complete VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan:

* at the end of the third internship rotation; or
* at any time during the three rotations when the team determines job placement opportunities are available to the customer because of skills gained in the internships.

VR3363 must only be completed one time and updated as needed.

The purposes of this meeting are to:

* review and clarify employment-related support and training that the customer needs to find employment;
* identify the customer's skills, abilities, experiences, training, education, attributes and/or barriers related to employment;
* identify negotiable and nonnegotiable employment conditions; and
* document the customer's identified employment goals and the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes and O'NET description of the job tasks responsibilities for each employment goal.

Any meeting among the customer, provider, customer’s circle of supports, or VR staff may be conducted remotely.

VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan, explains how services may be provided either in person, remotely, or a combination of both.

Remote services must follow guidance in VR-SFP 3.4.8 Remote Service Delivery.

All parties attending the meeting must sign VR3363 at the end of the meeting. Signatures on the VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Plan, may be obtained by following the steps in VR-SFP sections 3.2.14 Documentation and 3.2.16 Signatures.

After the Project SEARCH job placement plan meeting, VR staff:

* issues an SA to the provider for Benchmark A; and
* files the VR3363 in the customer's file.

The SAs for Benchmarks B and C are issued after the customer achieves Benchmark A.

#### Job Placement

The job placement specialist uses resources and tools necessary to help the customer find a job that meets the criteria outlined in the VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan.

Once the customer is employed, the job placement specialist monitors the customer's progress on the job by:

* providing initial job coaching instruction to reinforce learned skills;
* monitoring the customer to ensure that the customer is demonstrating the skills that he or she learned and to ensure that the customer is successful; and
* determining whether there is a need for the Project SEARCH team to provide the employer with training and/or education on disability and accommodation issues.

If Job Skills Training is necessary to supplement the training provided by the employer, the Project SEARCH provider includes it as part of Job Placement Services and may not bill it separately.

The customer must work 90 days in the same position.  When a customer is placed in a new position with the same or new employer, a new 90-day count of employment is required to complete Project SEARCH Job Placement Services.

If a customer loses a job before the 90-day benchmark, the customer's progression towards completion of the benchmark ends. When the customer becomes employed again, the day count will start at day 1 for the new position.

The 90-day count for successful closure will start over anytime a customer:

* Loses their job;
* Changes employers;
* Changes positions with same employer;
* Receives a promotion; or
* Quits their job voluntarily.

Each benchmark is paid only once for each customer between Active Status (customer has an IPE) and Closure Status of a VR case. On a case-by-case basis, when the VR counselor determines the provider should be paid for making a second placement a VR3472 must be approved by the VR Director prior to the service authorization being issued.

If the customer loses the job, the customer's progression toward completion of the benchmark ends and the job placement specialist must meet with the customer and VR counselor to:

* evaluate the reason(s) the customer lost the job and develop a plan to address any identified issues; and
* review and update a new VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan, when new employment conditions or goals need to be established.

When a job is lost, the customer begins with Benchmark A to secure another position.  The count begins over at day one and continues through the benchmarks until the customer reaches 90 days of employment in the new position. The provider must resubmit an updated VR3364 for each benchmark. Each Benchmark is paid only once for each customer.

Additionally, any extended support or long-term support services that the customer needs to maintain successful long-term employment must be established by the job placement specialist and Project SEARCH team before the customer achieves Benchmark C.

All fees for services described in this chapter can be found in VR-SFP 16.6 Project SEARCH Service Fees.

### 16.5.3 Project SEARCH Job Placement Outcomes Required for Payment

For a provider to be paid for services, the job placement specialist must:

* as described in VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Service Plan, ensure the customer has worked 90 days in the same position with the same employer and that the job meets:
  + 100 percent of the nonnegotiable employment conditions;
  + at least 50 percent of the negotiable employment conditions;
  + all six digits of one of the SOCs listed within the employment goals based on the job tasks the customer is performing which are included in the O'Net description (not based on the customer's job title); and
  + services delivered as indicated on VR3363;
* for Benchmark C, accurately document in descriptive terms on VR3364, Project SEARCH Placement Report, all extended services necessary for the customer to maintain long-term competitive integrated employment after VR closes the case; and
* verify customer satisfaction and service delivery by the customer's signature on the associated form or by VR staff contact with the customer.

For information on acceptable signatures refer to VR-SFP sections 3.2.14 Documentation and 3.2.16 Signatures.

No payment may be made for the achievement of a benchmark until the VR counselor receives and approves a complete, accurate, signed, and dated:

* VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan (This form does not need to be resubmitted for Job Placement if the VR counselor has obtained a copy earlier in the internship.);
* VR3364, Project SEARCH Job Placement Report; and
* an invoice.

Each benchmark is paid only once for each customer between Active Status (customer has an IPE) and Closure Status of a VR case.

## 16.6 Project SEARCH Service Fees

A provider cannot collect money from a VR customer or the customer's family for any service charged in excess of VR fees. If VR and another resource are paying for a service for a customer, the total payment must not exceed the fee specified in the VR Standards for Providers manual.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Project SEARCH Services** | **Unit Rate** | **Comments** |
| Asset Discovery | $613.00 | * Once per customer. VR3361, Project SEARCH Asset Discovery, must be completed. * Requires four observations with a total of 20 hours. * Partial payments are not allowed. |
| Skills Training | Must not exceed $1,684.00 per customer for an eight–12 week internship rotation | * No more than three rotations per customer for each school year. VR3362, Project SEARCH Progress Report, must be completed. * Partial payments are allowed. Divide the maximum amount ($1,684) by the number of weeks in the rotation. For example, the partial payment for one week of a 10-week rotation is $168.40. * Requires a minimum of three reporting hours each week per intern. |
| Job Placement and Arrangement of Retention Services (Benchmark A) | $919.00 | * Payable when the customer is placed in a job that meets the criteria on VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan, and the customer has worked five days on the job. * Submit an invoice for payment the day after the fifth day of employment. The Benchmark A section of VR3364, Project SEARCH Job Placement Report, must be completed. * Partial payments are not allowed. * Each benchmark is paid only once. |
| Job Placement and Arrangement of Retention Services (Benchmark B) | $919.00 | * Payable when the customer completes 45 cumulative calendar days of employment in the same position with the same employer in a job that meets the criteria in VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan. * Submit an invoice for payment the day after the 45th day of employment. The VR3364, Project SEARCH Job Placement Report, Benchmark B section must be completed. * Partial payments not allowed. * Each benchmark is only paid once. |
| Job Placement and Arrangement of Extended Services (Benchmark C) | $1,225.00 | * Payable when the customer completes 90 cumulative calendar days of employment in the same position with the same employer in a job that meets the criteria in VR3363, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan, and verification that the extended services are arranged and documented on VR3364, Project SEARCH Placement Report. These services are required for the customer to stay employed after VR closes the case. * Submit an invoice for payment the day after the 90th day of employment. The Benchmark C section of the VR3364, Project SEARCH Job Placement Report, must be completed. * Partial payments are not allowed. * Each benchmark is only paid once. * Customers must work 90 cumulative calendar days before achieving Benchmark C when the customer changes positions with the employer or obtains employment with another employer before achieving Benchmark C. |