



practice brief

vr&youth

Rehabilitation Research & Training Center



Summarizing Pre-Employment Transition Services and the Potential Role of Higher Education

Russell Thelin, Meg Grigal, and Jennifer Sulewski

In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandated significant changes to the workforce development and vocational rehabilitation (VR) systems. One of these changes was a requirement that state vocational rehabilitation agencies set aside at least 15% of their federal funds to provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Early evidence indicates that state VR agencies are providing these services through a mix of direct service provision by VR staff, contracts with community rehabilitation providers, and contracts with other entities such as high schools, community colleges, teachers, and social workers (Miller, Sevak, & Honeycutt, 2017).

Higher education programs currently play a small role in providing Pre-ETS, but have the potential for a larger role in partnership with state VR agencies. To facilitate such partnerships, this brief provides an overview of Pre-ETS and the potential role of inclusive higher education could play in the provision of Pre-ETS.

Who is Pre-ETS for?

Pre-ETS are targeted to students with disabilities. WIOA defines a student with a disability as an individual with a disability in a secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized education program who:

- Is not younger than the state's earliest age for the provision of transition services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; typically, 14 years old);
- Is not older than the state's maximum age for receipt of services under IDEA (typically 21);
- Is eligible for, and receiving, special education or related services under IDEA; and
- Is an individual with a disability, for purposes of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Students do not need to be determined VR-eligible to receive Pre-ETS. If a student meets the above criteria but has yet to complete an eligibility determination for VR, Pre-ETS are available to them. If a student is already VR-eligible, they may also receive Pre-ETS. However, if a student has completed an application for VR eligibility and is determined ineligible for VR, they cannot receive Pre-ETS.

Pre-ETS terminate or stop being available if one of the following four conditions is met: (1) the student no longer needs Pre-ETS services; (2) the student applies to receive VR services and is determined ineligible; (3) the student is no longer enrolled in a secondary, post-secondary, or other recognized education program; or (4) the student ages out (turns age 22 or reaches the state's maximum age of eligibility).

What are Pre-ETS?

Pre-ETS fall into three categories: required services, authorized services, and pre-employment transition coordination.

Required Services

Required services are those Pre-ETS that must be provided by each state’s VR agency, directly or by agreement with other entities. At least 15% of the agency’s federal allocation each year must be used in the provision of these services.

The VR agency cannot expand Pre-ETS to “authorized services” (discussed below) until required services are provided to all students with disabilities who need them.

Required Pre-ETS include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education; workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. Examples of each of these services are provided in Table 1. For a detailed description by the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) on each of these required services, see http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services#required_preemploymentnts.

Table 1: Examples of Required Pre-ETS Services

Job Exploration Counseling

Services provided in group settings:

Provision of the following in a classroom or group setting:

- Information regarding in-demand industry sectors and occupations, as well as nontraditional employment;
- Information about labor market composition;
- Administration of vocational interest inventories;
- Identification of career pathways of interest to the students.

Services provided individually:

Discussions pertinent to the particular student about:

- The student’s vocational interest inventory results;
- In-demand occupations;
- Career pathways;
- Local labor market information that applies to the student’s particular interests.

Work-Based Learning Experiences

May include:

- Coordinating a school-based program of job training and informational interviews to research employers;
- Work-site tours to learn about necessary job skills;
- Job shadowing;
- Mentoring opportunities in the community.

Paid or unpaid experiences including:

- Internships;
- Short-term employment;
- On-the-job trainings located in the community.

Table 1 (cont.)

Counseling on Opportunities for Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition or Postsecondary Educational Program

Providing information on:

- Course offerings;
- Career options;
- The types of academic and occupational training needed to succeed in the workplace;
- Postsecondary opportunities associated with career fields or pathways.

May include:

- Advising students and parents or representatives on academic curricula;
- Providing information about college application and admissions processes;
- Providing resources that may be used to support individual student success in education and training (i.e., disability support services).

Workplace Readiness Training to Develop Social Skills and Independent Living

These services may be tailored to an individual's needs in a work readiness training program in education or community-based settings through instruction, as well as opportunities to apply this knowledge.

Programming to assist students with disabilities to develop social skills and independent living skills necessary to prepare for eventual employment, such as:

- Communication and interpersonal skills;
- Financial literacy;
- Group orientation and mobility skills (i.e., to access workplace readiness training or to learn to travel independently);
- Job-seeking skills;
- Understanding employer expectations for punctuality and performance, as well as other “soft” skills necessary for employment.

Instruction in Self-Advocacy, Including Peer Mentoring

Generalized classroom lessons in which students:

- Learn about their rights and responsibilities;
- Learn how to request accommodations or services and supports;
- Communicate their thoughts, concerns, and needs, in order to prepare them for peer mentoring opportunities with individuals working in their area(s) of interest.

Individualized opportunities such as:

- Informational interviews;
- Mentoring with educational staff such as principals, nurses, teachers, or office staff;
- Mentoring with individuals employed by or volunteering for employers, boards, associations, or organizations in integrated community settings
- Participating in youth leadership activities offered in educational or community settings.

Authorized Services

VR agencies may use the funds reserved for Pre-ETS on additional authorized activities, after demonstrating that funds are available after required services have been provided to all students with disabilities who may need them. While required Pre-ETS provide specific individualized information to students to help in directing a career course, authorized services are directed at higher-level operations. Authorized services such as targeting strategies for improving outcomes, training, demonstration projects, partnerships, and information dissemination are defined to be more system-focused.

For a full list of authorized services, see the WINTAC website: http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services#authorized_preemployements.

Pre-Employment Transition Coordination Activities

Pre-employment transition coordination activities are essential for arranging and providing the “required” and “authorized” pre-employment transition activities. These activities relate to coordination of efforts across VR, education, workforce, and developmental disability services. A full list of coordination activities can be accessed at: http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services#preemployements_coordination.

Pre-ETS and Higher Education

Many states’ VR programs are choosing to contract out some or all Pre-ETS delivery. There is a natural alignment between Pre-ETS required services and existing higher education programs that are enrolling transitioning youth. In many cases, these programs are already providing the required services of job exploration, work-based learning, counseling on postsecondary education opportunities, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy. Inclusive higher education programs and VR agencies could enhance their services and student outcomes by partnering in the provision of Pre-ETS services.

Should a VR agency expand to authorized and collaboration services, there is potential for expanded engagement of institutions of higher education (IHEs). For example, VR and IHE partnerships could:

- a. Facilitate cross-training opportunities between IHE and VR staff to find common ground and share innovative practices.
- b. Share data on placement rates, earnings, and job retention of youth transitioning from high school to document employment achievements of students served.
- c. Develop a transition committee with representation from VR, businesses, and other organizations serving individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or autism (ID/A).
- d. Establish a memorandum of understanding or Cooperative Agreement between the IHE and the VR agency to provide students meeting the definition of a student with a disability with work experiences and employment skills attainment.

Conclusion

The WIOA requirements around Pre-ETS establish new avenues for VR to prepare students with disability for eventual employment. Higher education programs that enroll students with intellectual disabilities currently focus on all of the required Pre-ETS services and thus may be viable partners in the provision of these services. As VR continues to create and refine its collaborative endeavors around Pre-ETS, higher education institutions can and should be a part of the equation.

The author(s) would like to acknowledge and thank the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) for their work on detailing Pre-ETS. A significant portion of this brief was developed using the Pre-ETS materials from the WINTAC (www.wintac.org).

Language in this brief has been adapted from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and in some cases has been simplified for clarity. For more information about WIOA, go to: <https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/>.

About the Authors

Russ Thelin is a senior policy fellow at the Institute on Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Meg Grigal, Ph.D. is the principal investigator of the TPSID National Coordinating Center, co-director of Think College and a senior research fellow at the Institute for Community Inclusion at University of Massachusetts Boston.

Jennifer Sulewski is a senior research associate at the Institute on Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She conducts research and evaluation on employment, higher education, and other forms of community life engagement for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Funding & Citation

By the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, Grant Number: 90RT5034.

Thelin, R., Grigal, M., & Sulewski, J. (2019). Summarizing Pre-Employment Transition Services and the Potential Role of Higher Education. VR and Youth Rehabilitation Research and Training Center Practice Brief, Issue No. 03. Rockville, MD: TransCen, Inc.