

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



VR&E School Certifying Official Handbook

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**VETERAN READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT (VR&E)
FOR VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS WITH SERVICE-CONNECTED
DISABILITIES (CHAPTER 31, TITLE 38 U.S. CODE)**

Veteran Readiness and Employment Program

The Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program is authorized by Congress under Title 38 of the United States Code, Chapter 31. The purpose of this program is to provide services and assistance necessary to enable Veterans with service-connected disabilities to achieve maximum independence in daily living and, to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment.

VR&E Home Page

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/>

A Service member may be eligible for VR&E benefits if he or she:

- Is hospitalized or receiving outpatient medical care, services, or treatment for a service-connected disability that will likely be compensable at a rate of 20 percent or more
- Has a memorandum or Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) proposed rating of at least 20 percent

A Veteran may be eligible for VR&E benefits if he or she:

- Has received, or will receive, a discharge that is other than dishonorable
- Has a service-connected disability rating of at least 10%, or a memorandum rating of 20% or more from the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)
- Applies for VR&E Services

The basic period of eligibility in which VR&E Services may be used is 12 years from the latter of:

- The date of separation from active military service, or
- The date the Veteran was first notified by VA of a compensable service-connected disability rating

VR&E helps Service members and Veterans with service-connected disabilities and an employment handicap prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable careers. Potential services include comprehensive evaluation, vocational counseling, employment services, On-the-Job Training, post-secondary education, supportive rehabilitation services, self-employment, or independent living.

Rehabilitation services provided by VR&E must meet requirements and guidelines.

How to Apply

VBA Home Page on How to Apply:

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

eBenefits:

- Log in to your eBenefits account
- Select "Additional Benefits" from your Dashboard
- Select "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program" - be sure to read the program information and to update your contact information - and apply for the "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program "

Paper Application:

- Download and complete [VA Form 28-1900 "Disabled Veterans Application for Vocational Rehabilitation"](#)
- Mail or drop off the application to your [local regional benefit office](#).

VetSuccess on Campus

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to develop innovative ways to help Veterans make the transition to college life. The VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program aims to help Service members, Veterans, and their qualified dependents succeed and navigate through a coordinated delivery of on-campus benefits assistance and counseling, leading to completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers. Refer to the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) fact sheet.

VSOC Web Page

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/VOCREHAB/docs/VetSuccessOnCampusFactSheet.pdf>
<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vetsuccess-on-campus/>

VR&E IDES Counselors

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to develop innovative ways to help Service members make the transition to civilian life. The VR&E Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) program aims to help Service members and Veterans and their eligible dependents succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery of benefits assistance and counseling during the transition from active duty, completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers. The VR&E IDES program provides a VA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) to each participating military installation. A VA Military Services Coordinator (MSC) is also available, co-located on many military installations to assist with application for benefits through the IDES, Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) or Quick Start pre-discharge programs.

IDES Web Page

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/ides/>

Subsistence Allowance Rates

Veterans participating in the VR&E program may receive a subsistence allowance while

they pursue an educational or training program in preparation for a future career. The subsistence allowance is paid each month and is based on the rate of attendance (full-time, three quarter time, or half time), the number of dependents and the type of training. If a Veteran qualifies for Post-9/11 GI Bill, he/she may be eligible to receive the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate for subsistence.

Subsistence Allowance rates are updated each Fiscal Year. For current rates, refer to VR&E's web site at:

https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/subsistence_allowance_rates.asp

Certification Process

1. VA Authorization

When the VRC and the claimant have agreed on a facility that meets chapter 31 regulations and related instructions and can provide the services needed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the rehabilitation plan, the VRC may authorize the Veteran to begin his/her program of services. For this authorization, the VRC shall create an electronic authorization. The authorization is used to:

- Notify the training facility that the Veteran is authorized to attend training at VA expense.
- Indicate the Facility Code or Sub-Facility Code of the approved program.
- Notify the School Certifying Official (SCO) that the training hours must be certified in VA-ONCE.
- Identify the VR&E point of contact.

The SCO will receive an electronically generated email which will provide notification that an authorization for a Chapter 31 claimant has been submitted. The SCO can access the electronic authorization by clicking a link in the email which will take them directly to the electronic authorization in the Tungsten Network.

Sample Electronic Authorization Notification Email

<This is an auto generated email. Please do not respond>

An Authorization for payment of training, services, books, and/or supplies at your facility for a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) participant is available in the Tungsten Network Support. If this is the first Authorization you are receiving, you will need to register using this link. The Tungsten Network is an electronic invoicing service that the VA uses to authorize and pay all invoices.

Chapter 31

The authorization approves required costs for Chapter 31 training including tuition, fees, books, and supplies for the program identified in the "Name of Service" section of the authorization. Please note that VA will pay all invoices for the required tuition, fees, books, and supplies directly to the institution in arrears. The authorization also serves as notification to the School Certifying Official that training time should be certified for Chapter 31 claimants. In addition, this notification, if applicable, must be forwarded to the responsible party at your facility to alert them of the available authorization in the system to initiate the certification

process using VA-ONCE.

Chapter 35

This authorization approves training, education, and services for Chapter 35 claimants under Specialized Vocational Training or Special Restorative Training. VA will pay only for the Special Restorative Training services listed in the “Name of Service” section of the authorization for Chapter 35 claimant. If applicable, detailed information for specific training courses and services during the authorized period may be listed under the specific “Notes” section of the authorization.

Chapter 18

The authorization approves required costs for Vocational Training for Certain Children with Spina Bifida or Other Covered Birth Defects under Chapter 18, which include tuition, fees, books, and supplies for the program identified in the “Name of Service” section of the authorization.

If you have any questions regarding the authorization, you may contact the case manager listed in the “VR&E Case Manager Email” section of the authorization. For procedures on electronic invoice processing, you may contact Tungsten directly at 1-877-752-0900 and notify the VR&E Case manager about your concerns.

Thank you.

2. SCO Certification

After retrieving the electronic authorization, the SCO uses VA-ONCE to certify the Ch31 Veteran’s enrollment. VA-ONCE allows training facilities to electronically certify attendance and includes number and type of hours, beginning and ending dates, and changes in enrollment. The SCO must use the facility code or sub-facility code, if applicable, indicated in the authorization when certifying training time.

The SCO should certify enrollment in VA-ONCE prior to the drop-add period. Once the SCO certifies enrollment, the VRC can process the Veteran’s subsistence allowance. The SCO should identify whether the training is semester, quarter hours, or clock hours, and if it is in residence or distance learning hours.

The use of VA-ONCE is mandatory. Training facilities electing not to use VA-ONCE must provide documentation to the local VR&E Officer.

Note: If an authorization is issued for a Chapter 31 Veteran who is currently enrolled under Chapter 33, Post 9/11 GI Bill, the certification for Chapter 31 cannot begin until the start of a new semester or term. A change in the election of VA benefits is not allowed in the middle of a semester or term.

Financial Aid, In-State Tuition, and Billing

VR&E staff has primary responsibility for ensuring that tuition and fees are authorized so that the Ch31 Veteran may begin training or continue his or her training program without delay or distraction.

VR&E's policy regarding tuition and fees is controlled by VA Acquisition Regulation (VAAR) 48 CFR 831.7001-1. The following guidelines are derived from VA policy and regulations:

1. VR&E pays all invoices in arrears, directly to the institution for the Veteran's tuition, required fees, books, and supplies. Therefore, VR&E must not be billed for a term or semester until after any Drop/Add period for that term closes.
2. Any Veteran under Chapter 31, or child under Chapter 18, should not have his or her registration cancelled for non-payment of these expenses, since VR&E has obligated payment for that term.
3. VR&E should be billed only for the actual cost for tuition and fees assessed by the institution for the program of education after the application of:
 - Any waiver of, or reduction in, tuition and fees; and
 - Any scholarship, or other Federal, State, institutional, or employer-based aid or assistance that is provided directly to the institution and specifically designated for the sole purpose of defraying tuition and fees, with the following exception: Loans and any funds provided under section 401(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070a), such as Pell grants, should not be used to reduce the amount billed to VR&E.
4. If the Chapter 31 Veteran receives assistance that is not specifically designated for tuition and fees (funds that may be disbursed directly to the Veteran) from a Federal, State or private contribution, the tuition and fees must not be reduced unless the Veteran requests to apply the funds to the tuition and fee charges. If the Veteran chooses to apply such assistance to tuition and fees, the school should then reduce its bill to VR&E by an equal amount.
5. Reimbursement of duplicate funding or errors in accounting: All errors in accounting or disbursing of funds should be corrected by the school and any funds that are unused by, or recouped from, the Chapter 31 Veteran or another source should be returned to the appropriate funding source, including VR&E. It is the responsibility of the school to contact the agency that created the duplication and arrange the return of any unused funds. All refunds to VR&E should be initiated in Tungsten as a Credit Memo.

In accordance with Public Law (Pub. L.) 115-251, Section 301, public institutions of higher learning (IHL) must comply with the requirement that Veterans who reside in the state and are using educational assistance under title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) Chapter 31, will be charged the resident rate regardless of whether the Veteran meets the state's residency requirements. This includes Chapter 31 Veteran previously covered in 38 U.S.C. 3679(c). The expectation is that as soon as the Veteran can establish residency, he or she will do so. If the IHL has other requirements to meet the standard for in-state tuition and fee rates, Chapter 31 Veterans must adhere to those requirements to qualify for in-state tuition and fee rates.

Requesting Supplies

Whenever possible, VR&E will use IPPS to authorize the purchase of required books and supplies from the Service member's or Veteran's training facility bookstore. This

method ensures that supplies are available and can be secured in a timely manner. Any restrictions and/or dollar limitations on bookstore purchases will be noted in the Line Item Detail section of the electronic authorization form. The VRC must only authorize books and supplies for approved periods and can only authorize the purchase of required books and supplies. If the training facility does not have a bookstore or if an individual is requesting additional books or supplies, please refer them to their VRC.

Invoicing

All invoices must be completed by the appropriate SCO electronically within the Tungsten Network. Separate invoice must be provided for each Service member or Veteran and must be directly related to an existing VA Authorization.

If a school/training facility invoices VA in any other manner other than through the Tungsten Network, the receiving VR&E office will return it for re-submission through the Tungsten Network.

Grades, Transcripts, Progress Reports

Service member's and Veteran's participation are evaluated regularly to determine if the he or she is satisfactorily completing his/her program. Grades, transcripts, or other progress reports from the training facility are part of this evaluation. SCOs must provide grades, transcripts, or progress reports to VR&E staff by the end of each term or by request. The SCO should also notify VR&E staff of any problems the Service member or Veteran is having at school that may be disrupting his/her training. If the program the Service member or Veteran is enrolled in has changes to its requirements, the SCO should inform VR&E staff so appropriate adjusting and planning can take place.

Rounding Out for Last Term Enrollment

A Service member or Veteran, who is attending degree courses taken on a quarter, semester, or term basis, may add non-required classes to increase his/her course load up to a full-time rate during his/her last term only. However, the non-required courses must contribute to the Veteran's employment goal outlined in the Veteran's Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP).

Note: The rounding out procedure will be phased out for terms beginning on or after August 1, 2021.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) by VR&E participants

Q. I can't get in contact with my VRC and need books, supplies etc. What should I do?

A. If you are unable to reach your VRC, call or visit your VA Regional Office and ask to speak to the VR&E Office Supervisor. Someone will be able to assist you in your VRC's absence

Q. I need books and supplies for my classes. What will VR&E pay for?

A. VR&E will pay for all supplies that VA determines are necessary for the Service member's or Veteran's rehabilitation program. Supplies necessary to accomplish the purposes of a Service member's or Veteran's rehabilitation program may include, but

are not limited to, the following: books, office supplies, tools, consumable goods, computer packages and other material.

- Pre-approval is required prior to obtaining needed supplies. Your VRC is solely responsible for determining the need for supplies.
- VR&E will only provide supplies for Service members or Veterans who are participating in an active plan of service.

Q. I am experiencing medical/emotional/dental issues that are impacting my schoolwork. What should I do?

A. Contact your VRC to ask about a referral for FREE care at the nearest VA Medical Center to address the issue that is impacting your training. VR&E participants may be eligible for services for a wide range of medical, counseling, or dental services if enrolled in a plan of service, and the medical service is needed for you to continue your training.

Q. How can I get paid the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate for my Vocational Rehabilitation program?

A. A Veteran participating in the VR&E Program who qualifies for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits can elect to receive the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate of pay instead of the regular chapter 31 subsistence allowance. In most cases, the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate is higher than the regular chapter 31 rate of pay. To elect the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate, the Veteran must have remaining eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and must formally choose (or "elect") the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate. Your VRC can help you with the election. Veterans participating in the VR&E Program who elect the Post-9/11 rate are paid at the 100% rate level for their school and training time, even if their Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility is less than 100%. Note, if you are not attending school at the full-time rate, the actual subsistence allowance paid will be based on the 100% rate but reduced based on the percentage of training time you are attending. Additional benefits are also available through the VR&E Program, such as payment of all required books, fees and supplies as well as other supportive services.

VR&E Officer Contact List

Below is a list of current VR&E Officers in each of the Regional Offices. At least annually, the SCO should contact the VR&E Officer to obtain a list of each VRC and their contact information.

Albuquerque, NM (340)

Corliss De La Garza, VR&E Officer

Mailing Address

Department of Veterans Affairs

VR&E Division (28)

P.O. Box 900

Albuquerque, NM 87103

Office Location

500 Gold Ave SW

Albuquerque, NM 87102

office tel. 505-346-3780

office tel. 505-346-4860 (VR&E Officer direct)
office fax. 505-346-4861
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Vacant, VR&E Officer
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VA Regional Office
P.O. Box 100024
Decatur, GA 30031-7024

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Decatur, GA 30030-7024)
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EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL COUNSELING SERVICES

Web Page

<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/education-and-career-counseling/>

VA offers free Educational-Vocational Counseling services (also called Chapter 36 counseling) that are available to:

- Service Members within six months prior to discharge from active duty.
- Veterans within one year following discharge from active duty.
- Individuals receiving or eligible for educational assistance under Chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 1606, 1607.
- Veterans and qualified dependents who are eligible for and have entitlement to education assistance under Chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 1606, 1607.

Services include:

- Counseling to facilitate career decision making for civilian or military occupations.
- Educational and vocational counseling to choose an appropriate civilian occupation and develop a training program.
- Academic and adjustment counseling to resolve barriers that impede success in training or employment.

How to Apply:

eBenefits:

- Log in to your eBenefits account
- Select "Additional Benefits" from your Dashboard
- Select "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program" - be sure to read the program information and to update your contact information - and apply for the "Educational and Career Counseling"

Paper Application:

- Download and complete [VA Form 28-8832 "Educational/Vocational Counseling Application"](#)
- Mail or drop off the application to your [local regional benefit office](#).