

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



VR&E School Certifying Official Handbook

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

A. 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 service members (SM) and 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.

1. VR&E Home Page

The website for the VR&E home page is accessible at

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

2. Eligibility Criteria

- a. A SM may be eligible for chapter (CH) 31 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; or
 - Has a memorandum or Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) proposed rating of at least 20 percent; or
 - Has a serious illness or injury incurred while on active duty status that is expected to result in other than dishonorable discharge.

- b. A Veteran may be eligible for CH31 benefits if he or she:
 - Has received, or will receive, a discharge that is other than dishonorable, and
 - 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), and
 - Applies for CH31 benefits.

- c. The basic period of eligibility in which CH31 benefits 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

Note: The basic period of eligibility does not apply to individuals who discharged on or after January 1, 2013.

3. Available Services

VR&E helps SMs and Veterans with service-connected disabilities and an employment handicap to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment. Services may include a comprehensive evaluation, vocational counseling, employment services, On-the-Job Training, post-secondary education, supportive rehabilitation services, self-employment, and independent living services. Services are individualized and based on the SM or Veteran's needs.

Rehabilitation services provided by VR&E must meet statutory and regulatory requirements, and procedural guidelines outlined in the M28C.

B. HOW TO APPLY FOR CHAPTER 31 BENEFITS

1. VBA Home Page on How to Apply

The website for the VBA home page is accessible at <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp>

Log in to the website above. This website provides information on how to apply for Chapter 31 benefits.

2. Paper Application

Download and complete [VA Form 28-1900. "Disabled Veterans Application for Vocational Rehabilitation"](#)

- Mail completed application to:
Department of Veterans Affairs
VR&E Intake Center
PO Box 5210
Janesville, WI 53547-5210
- Drop off the completed application to your local VA regional benefit office.

C. Principles of Excellence Program Requirements for Chapter 31 Only Training Facility

Beginning on August 1, 2021, the requirements for the Principles of Excellence (POE) program must be met prior to the approval of chapter 31 only training facilities per [38 U.S.C. 3679](#).

The POE requires the training facility to adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Provide the claimant a written personal summary of the total cost of the educational program, and other issues to include:
 - The costs covered by chapter 31 benefits.

- The financial aid the claimant may qualify to receive.
 - Other information to facilitate comparison by the claimant of aid packages offered by different educational institutions.
 - Information on the facility's acceptance of credits, including military credits.
 - Any additional requirements, including training, experience, or examinations, required to obtain the license, certification, or approval for which the course of education is designed to provide preparation.
 - Information regarding graduation rates.
 - Job placement rates for graduates of the course of education, if available.
 - Claimant's expected student-loan debt after graduation.
 - Inform the claimant of increase in tuition rates and fees within 15 days of the change.
2. Provide the claimant an educational plan with a timeline showing how and when the claimant can fulfill all requirements for graduation.
 3. Assign the claimant a point of contact to provide ongoing academic and financial advice including access to disability counseling.
 4. Allow the claimant both long and short periods for military service obligations for active-duty service members and Reservists.
 5. Ensure all training programs are accredited or officially approved before enrolling students.
 6. Ensure that the training facility's refund policies follow Title IV rules, which guide federal student financial aid programs.
 7. End fraudulent or deceitful and aggressive methods of recruiting.

Note: Training facilities that do not charge tuition and fees are not required to follow the POE guidelines.

D. VETSUCCESS ON CAMPUS PROGRAM

1. Purpose of the VetSuccess on Campus Program

VA continues to develop innovative ways to help eligible individuals make the transition to college life. The VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program aims to help SMs, Veterans, and their qualified dependents to 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 employment.

For more information, press "Control and click on this link, [VetSuccess On Campus.pdf](#).

2. VSOC Web Page

The website for information on the VSOC program is accessible at

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

E. INTEGRATED DISABILITY EVALUATION SYSTEM PROGRAM

1. Purpose of the Integrated Disability Evaluation System

VA continues to develop innovative ways to help SMs make the transition to civilian life. The VR&E Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) program aims to help SMs, and Veterans succeed 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 employment.

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 and is 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.

2. IDES Web Page

The website for information on the VSOC program is accessible at <https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/ides/>

F. SUBSISTENCE ALLOWANCE RATES

Veterans participating in the CH31 program may receive a subsistence allowance while they pursue an educational or training program in preparation for a suitable employment. 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. A Veteran, who qualifies for Post-9/11 GI Bill while participating in the CH31 program, may be eligible to receive an alternate amount that is equal to the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH).

Subsistence allowance rates are updated each fiscal year. Current rates are accessible at the VR&E's web site at:

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

G. CERTIFICATION PROCESS

1. VA Authorization

When the VRC and the claimant agree on a facility that meets CH31 regulations for instructions, which will provide the services needed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Veteran's rehabilitation plan, the VRC will authorize the Veteran to begin his/her program of services. The VRC will create an electronic

authorization that will:

- 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 notification that an authorization for a CH31 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.

2. Sample of an 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.

3. SCO Certification

After retrieving the electronic authorization, the SCO must use VA-ONCE to certify the Veteran's CH31 enrollment. VA-ONCE allows training facilities to electronically certify attendance, which includes number and type of hours, beginning and ending dates, and changes in enrollment.

The SCO should report the first scheduled date of classes, for any standard term, quarter, or semester in which the student is enrolled. If the course begins within seven calendar days, then the SCO should certify the course using the first day of the term. If the standard term is taken concurrently with a nonstandard term, the two must be certified separately.

In addition, the SCO must use the facility code or sub-facility code as indicated in the authorization when certifying training time.

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

The use of VA-ONCE is mandatory. Training facilities electing not to use VA-ONCE must provide the appropriate VR&E Officer a written documentation that outlines the reason for use of VA-ONCE is not an option, and how the SCO will communicate required enrollment information to the VRC.

Note: If an authorization is issued for a CH31 Veteran who is currently enrolled under chapter 33, Post 9/11 GI Bill, the certification for CH31 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.

4. Certifying Graduate Coursework

On August 13, 2021, SCOs were issued a revised guidance by Education Service, which was discussed during the August 2021 Office Hours Webinars. The information explained how an SCO should calculate the full-time requirement for standard and non-standard terms for graduate programs when the school has an individually defined full-time modifier (IDM) and when the school does not have an IDM. This means that the SCO must report the number of full-time hours, regardless of whether the school has an IDM or not.

This change in procedure also applies to the CH31 program for terms beginning on or after September 1, 2021. Hence, the SCO must follow the same procedures to

certify graduate programs for CH31 SMs and Veterans the same way as CH33 as outlined in the Education Procedural Advisory issued on August 13, 2021.

For detailed information, press "Control" and click on this link, [Procedural Advisory - Guidance for Certifying CH33 Graduate Training.pdf](#).

5. 48-Month Rule Changes

Effective April 1, 2021, Education Service stopped counting entitlement used in CH31 toward the potential 48 months of entitlement available under two or more VA education programs, as specified in title 38 of the United States Code (U.S.C.) section 3695. However, VR&E will continue to count entitlement used in other VA education programs, such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill, towards the potential 48 months of entitlement under CH31. Based on Education's new interpretation, it is generally best for an SM or Veteran to use his or her CH31 benefits prior to using other VA education benefits.

An SM or a Veteran, who previously used another VA education benefit and who meets specific criteria outlined in title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) section 21.282(c), may be eligible for a retroactive induction (RI). An RI is an authorization for a period of training previously completed under another VA education program, or a period where the SM or Veteran self-paid, and the SM or Veteran requests to use his or her CH31 benefits.

6. Training period previously completed under Chapter 33

Once a VRC approves a request for retroactive induction (RI) for a training period previously completed under Chapter 33, the SCO can expect an authorization in the Tungsten Network for the previous enrollment period(s) only if the facility is a Yellow Ribbon program. VR&E will only reimburse the training facility for the portion of the Yellow Ribbon program that the facility contributed after submitting invoice(s) to VR&E. The facility will be responsible for reimbursing the SM or Veteran for any tuition or fees contributed over the Yellow Ribbon cap after payment from VR&E is received. The SCO must not certify enrollment in VA-ONCE for the past enrollment period(s) since the authorization has only been provided for tuition or fees purposes. If the facility is not approved for the Yellow Ribbon program, an authorization for the retroactive enrollment period(s) will not be provided and VR&E will directly reimburse an SM or Veteran for all costs over the amount provided under Chapter 33.

a. Service Member or Veteran Self-Paid for Previous Training

Once the VRC approves an RI for a previous enrollment period(s) that the SM or Veteran self-paid, an SCO can expect an authorization in the Tungsten Network for the previous enrollment period(s). The SCO is responsible for certifying the previous enrollment period(s) in VA-ONCE and the training facility must bill VR&E for the tuition and fees incurred for those previous enrollment period(s).

b. Training Period Previously Completed Under CH30, CH35, or CH1606

The procedures for an RI for training previously completed under CH30, CH35, or CH1606 are being established. The handbook will be updated to reflect information that the SCO can expect once the procedures are finalized.

7. Changes in Enrollment

When an SM or Veteran changes enrollment, such as adding credit hours, reducing credit hours, or terminating enrollment, the SM or Veteran should notify the SCO of the changes. SCOs must report changes in enrollment within 30 days from date of the enrollment change to avoid unnecessary delays in payments or a potential overpayment in subsistence allowance that the Veteran will be responsible to repay VA.

8. Mitigating Circumstances

An SM or Veteran, who reduces or terminates enrollment, may be granted mitigating circumstances. Mitigating circumstances are unanticipated or unavoidable events that interfere with the pursuit of training that exempt an SM or Veteran from the requirement to return subsistence allowance paid prior to the enrollment reduction or termination. The SM or Veteran must provide the reason for the reduction or termination of enrollment to the VRC to determine if the reason meets the criteria for mitigating circumstances.

The law also provides a one-time six-credit hour exclusion from the requirement to establish mitigating circumstances during the first instance of enrollment reduction or termination. Reduction or termination to avoid an unsatisfactory grade is not considered a valid reason. If mitigating circumstances cannot be established to explain the reduction or termination, an overpayment may be created from the beginning of the term that the SM or Veteran will be responsible to repay VA.

H. FINANCIAL AID, IN-STATE TUITION, AND BILLING

VR&E staff has primary responsibility for ensuring that tuition and fees are authorized so the CH31 participants can begin or continue his or her training program without delay.

VR&E's policy regarding tuition and fees is governed 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 CH31 tuition, required fees, books, and supplies. Therefore, VR&E must not be billed for a term or semester until after the drop/add period for that term closes.
2. Any SM or Veteran under CH31, or child under CH18, 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 CH31 SM or Veteran receives assistance that is not specifically designated for tuition and fees (funds that may be disbursed directly to the SM or Veteran) from a Federal, State, or private contribution, the tuition and fees must not be reduced unless the SM or Veteran requests to apply the funds to the tuition and fee charges. If the SM or Veteran chooses to apply such assistance to tuition and fees, the school should then reduce its bill to VR&E for an equal amount.

5. All reimbursement of duplicate funding and errors in accounting or disbursing of funds must be corrected by the school and any funds that are unused by, or recouped from, the CH31 SM or Veteran or other source must be returned to the appropriate funding source, including VR&E. The school is responsible for contacting the agency that created the duplication and arranging the return of any unused funds. All refunds to VR&E must be initiated in Tungsten as a Credit Memo. For procedures on creating a credit memo in Tungsten, press "Control" and click on this link, [How to Create a Credit Memo for Service Providers](#).

6. In accordance with Public Law 115-251, Section 301, public institutions of higher learning (IHL) must comply with the requirement that SMs or Veterans who reside in the state and are using educational assistance under CH31, will be charged the resident rate regardless of whether the SM or Veteran meets the state's residency requirements. The expectation is that as soon as the SM or Veteran will establish residency as soon as he or she can do so. If the IHL has other requirements to meet the standard for in-state tuition and fee rates, CH31 SMs or Veterans must adhere to those requirements to qualify for in-state tuition and fee rates.

I. REQUESTING SUPPLIES

Whenever possible, VR&E will use the Invoice Payment Processing System (IPPS) to authorize the purchase of required books and supplies from the SM'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 purchase of required books and supplies for approved training periods. If the training facility does not have a bookstore, or if an individual is requesting additional books or supplies, the participant should be referred to their VRC.

J. INVOICING

All invoices must be electronically completed by the appropriate school staff member within the Tungsten Network. A separate invoice must be provided for each SM or Veteran, which must be directly related to an existing VA Authorization.

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

For more information on invoicing in the Tungsten Network and Support, press "Control" and click on this link, [Modernization Drumbeat](#).

K. GRADES, TRANSCRIPTS, PROGRESS REPORTS

CH31 SMs and Veterans are evaluated regularly to determine if he or she is satisfactorily completing his or 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 SM or Veteran is having at school that may be disrupting his/her training. The SCO should inform VR&E staff if the SM's or Veteran's program requirements have been changed to properly adjust and plan their VR&E services.

L. ROUNDING OUT FOR LAST TERM ENROLLMENT

An SM 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 SM's or Veteran's employment goal outlined in his or her Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP).

M. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) BY CHAPTER 31 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 Supervisor. Someone will 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 SM's or Veteran's rehabilitation program. Supplies necessary to accomplish the purposes of a SM'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 SMs 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 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 an alternate subsistence allowance rate that is equal to the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate associated with the zip code of the training facility. VR&E refers to this alternate rate as the “Post 9/11 Subsistence Allowance” (P911SA) rate. In most cases, the P911SA rate is higher than the regular CH31 subsistence allowance rate. To elect the P911SA rate, the Veteran must have remaining eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and must formally choose (or “elect”) the P911SA rate. Your VRC can help you with the election.

Unlike the Post 9/11 GI Bill, Veterans participating in the CH31 Program who elect the P911SA rate are paid at the 100% of the rate, which is then prorated based on the rate of pursuit.

For example, 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 CH31 Program, such as payment of all required books, fees and supplies as well as other supportive services.

N. VR&E OFFICER CONTACT LIST

For contact information of current VR&E Officers in each regional office, press “Control” and click on this link, [VR&E Officers Contact Information.pdf](#).

NOTE: The SCO should contact the VR&E Officer at least once a year to obtain a current list of each VRC and their contact information.

O. EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL COUNSELING SERVICES

1. Web Page

The website for information on VR&E education and vocational counseling services is accessible at

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

VA offers free educational and vocational counseling services to:

- SMs within six months prior to discharge from active duty.
- Veterans within one year after discharge from active duty.
- SMs, Veterans, and qualified dependents receiving or eligible for educational assistance under Chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, or 1606.

2. How to Apply:

a. Online Application

The online application is accessible on the website provided above by clicking “Apply Now” under “Educational and Career Counseling” on the navigation pane on the left side of the webpage.

b. Paper Application

Download and complete VA Form 28-8832 “Educational/Vocational Counseling Application”.

- Completed application may be mailed to:
Department of Veterans Affairs
VR&E Intake Center
PO Box 5210
Janesville, WI 53547-5210
- Completed application may be dropped off at the local regional benefit office.

3. Services

- 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.