

Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Terms Glossary

1. Accommodation (CIL)

An accommodation or reasonable accommodation is a change that helps a person with a disability do things more easily in everyday life. At a Center for Independent Living, this can mean making housing, transportation, or public places easier to use. The goal is to remove barriers so the person can live more independently in their community.

Example

Aiden uses a power wheelchair and wants to move into an apartment. The front door is too heavy for him to open by himself. The CIL helps Aiden ask the landlord to add an automatic door opener as a reasonable accommodation. Once it's installed, Aiden can come and go from his home on his own, which helps him live more independently.

2. Appropriate Modes of Communication

These supports help a person with a disability understand information and share their ideas. This can include things like interpreters, captions on videos, special phone or computer tools, Braille or large-print materials, simple-language handouts, pictures, or devices that help someone communicate.

Example

Sharron is deaf and goes to a job interview, an interpreter comes with her to help her understand the questions and share her answers. That interpreter is a support that helps Sharron understand information and communicate her answers, questions and ideas.

3. Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs

Finding out what a person is good at, what they care about, what they enjoy doing, and how their disability affects work. It also looks at what support they need to be successful in a job.

Example

Fran's VR counselor asks questions about or notices that Fran loves helping animals, is really patient, and enjoys being outdoors. These clues show what Fran is good at, what she cares about, and likes doing. Her VR counselor may also ask Fran to complete a few online assessments to get more information.

4. Benefits Counseling

A trained person who helps people understand the benefits they can get and how work incentives can support them when they want to work. It explains programs like SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, housing help, and other kinds of public or private assistance so people can use them with confidence

Example

Tico meets with a trained benefits counselor who helps him understand how working will affect his SSI or SSDI check. The counselor explains things like how much money he can earn, how Medicaid or Medicare can stay in place, and what work incentives can help him keep more of his benefits. This meeting helps Tico feel more confident about working and making decisions about his future.

5. Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are community programs that help people with disabilities live more independently in all parts of life—not just work or school. They are run by people with disabilities, and they help with things like learning daily living skills, finding housing, getting information, and connecting with peers. CILs serve people with all types of disabilities. They are paid for by both federal and state money, along with some local and private funds.

Example

Pam wants to live more independently in her own apartment. She goes to her local Center for Independent Living (CIL), which is run by people with disabilities. A peer mentor helps her learn cooking and budgeting skills, and another staff member helps her look for safe housing. Pam also joins a peer support group to meet new friends. The CIL offers these services and supports Pam in many parts of her life—not just work or school.

6. Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)

Working full-time or part-time in a regular job, earning the same pay as others, with opportunities for advancement while being included with coworkers who do not have disabilities.

Example

Ava works part-time as a barista at a neighborhood coffee shop. She earns the same pay as everyone else doing the same job, works on a team with coworkers who do not have disabilities, and has the chance to learn new skills so she can move up to shift lead someday. This is Competitive Integrated Employment because Ava is included, paid fairly, and has real opportunities to grow.

7. Comprehensive Assessment

Purpose

To learn about a person's strengths, interests, and support needs so they can plan for work.

What's Included

Only the information needed to build a job plan that fits the person.

What We May Look At

- Health and daily living needs
- School and work experiences
- Skills and interests
- Supports that help with work
- Tools or technology that make tasks easier

Example

Lena wants to find a job, but she isn't sure what kind of work fits her best. VR does a Comprehensive Assessment to learn more about her. They talk with Lena and her family about what she likes, what she's good at, and what support helps her. They look at things like her school and work history, her daily routines, and any tools or technology that make tasks easier. VR only gathers the information needed to build a job plan that fits Lena. Most of the information comes from what Lena and her family choose to share.

8. Disclosure

Sharing information about your disability by choice, so you can ask for the supports or accommodations you need at work, in school, or in the community.

Example

Ann tells her boss, "I have a vision condition that makes it hard for me to look at screens for long periods. I may need a screen filter to do my job well." She shares only what she needs so she can get the right support at work.

9. Eligibility for services at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

The requirements a person must meet to get services from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

- They have a disability. This means they have a physical or mental condition that limits one or more Major Life Activities (see below).
- The disability makes work harder. It gets in the way of getting a job, keeping a job, or moving up at work.
- They need Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to work. These services help them get ready for a job, find a job, keep a job, or return to work.
- They are expected to achieve employment. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) assumes a person can benefit from services.

Example

Leo applies for and wants Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. Leo has epilepsy, which can make it harder to stay safe and focused at work. He needs Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to learn job skills and find a job. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) also believes he can benefit from these services. Because Leo meets all four rules, he is eligible.

10. Eligibility at a Center for Independent Living (CIL)

The requirements a person must meet to get services from a Center for Independent Living (CIL).

- They have a disability. They have a condition that makes some parts of daily life harder. They want to live more independently and want help with things like daily living skills, housing, community life, or making their own choices.
- A Center for Independent Living (CIL) does not require doctor notes or medical papers.
- They can have any type of disability. A Center for Independent Living (CIL) serves people with all disabilities, including physical, mental, learning, sensory, or health-related disabilities.
- They live in the community the Center for Independent Living (CIL) serves. A Center for Independent Living (CIL) helps people who live in their service area. Some programs may focus on certain groups, like youth leaving school or people moving out of nursing homes.
- They are looking for support in areas such as housing, daily living skills, transportation, and community involvement. While the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) focuses only on employment and related education, a Center for Independent Living (CIL) can work in all of these Independent Living (IL) areas.

Example

Leo applies for and wants CIL services. Leo has epilepsy, which can make it harder to stay safe and when he is at home by himself. He needs CIL services to help him find housing, transportation and providers who can support him at home. The CIL also believes he can benefit from these services. Because Leo meets all four rules, he is eligible.

11. Employment Follow-Along/Stabilization

This begins after a person starts their job and continues until they have worked for at least 90 days. A person is considered “stable” when they can do the important parts of their job with the supports they already have. During this stage, the person and their Vocational Rehabilitation counselor stay in regular contact to make sure the job is a good fit and the employer is happy with their work. The goal is to make sure the job is lasting and not just temporary.

Example

After starting his new job at the plant nursery, Malik works with his job coach to learn the important parts of his job. After a few weeks, Malik starts having trouble keeping up with the watering schedule. His job coach and VR counselor talk with him and the employer to add a simple checklist and a reminder timer. With this extra help, Malik can keep doing his job well.

12. Extended Evaluation

Extended Evaluation is extra time and support that VR uses when they need more information to understand what kind of job will be a good fit for a person. It begins when the regular evaluation doesn't give enough information. During Extended Evaluation, the person can try different tasks, learn new skills, or use tools that make work easier. This helps the person and their team learn what they need at work and what VR services will support their goals.

Example

Lori wants to work, but the regular evaluation and the jobs she had before didn't give VR enough information. She couldn't explain what tasks she's good at and why it was hard to get things done.

During Extended Evaluation, Lori tries simple tasks at a new business - an animal shelter. She folds towels and fills water bowls. Her team adds using a picture checklist and a reminder timer. These help her learn what she needs at work and what VR services will support her goals.

13. Functional Limitations (Functional Capacity Areas)

Functional limitations are the specific parts of daily life or work that are harder because of a disability. They describe what the person struggles with, not the disability itself. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) uses these areas to understand how much support a person will need to work by looking at how many of the areas are affected and how strongly the disability impacts them. This information helps the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) decide the person's Priority Category (see below).

Areas looked at include things like:

- moving around
- staying focused long enough to finish a shift
- taking care of yourself before work
- using work skills
- talking or understanding others
- staying organized
- getting along with coworkers

Functional Capacity Areas help the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) decide how much support the person needs.

Example

Jasmine has a disability that makes some parts of work take more effort. She can do her job, but she needs extra time to move between work areas, has trouble staying organized during busy shifts, and sometimes finds it hard to explain what she needs to her coworkers. These are examples of functional limitations—areas where her disability affects how she gets things done at work.

14. Independent Living Plan (ILP)

An Independent Living Plan (ILP) is a written plan that helps a person work toward living more independently. It lists their goals—like finding housing, learning daily living skills, managing money, or getting ready for work or school. The plan is made together with a support person from an Independent Living Center and includes the steps, services, and supports the person needs to reach those goals for their whole life.

Example

Nate is 20 and getting ready to move out of his parents' house. He meets with a counselor at the Center for Independent Living to make an Independent Living Plan (ILP). Together, they write down Nate's goals: finding an apartment he can afford, learning how to cook simple meals, making a weekly budget, and figuring out transportation to work. His ILP lists the supports he'll get, like help searching for housing, practicing cooking skills, and learning how to pay bills on time. Nate uses his ILP as a roadmap to help him feel confident and ready to live on his own.

15. Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

An IPE is a written plan that a person and their the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) counselor create together. It must be finished within 90 days after the person is found eligible. The IPE explains the person's job goal, the services they will receive, what they are responsible for, and when things will happen. It is a legal agreement that promises the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) will provide the support needed to reach that job goal.

Example

Maria wants to work with animals, so she and her the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) counselor make an IPE together. In the plan, they write her job goal: "animal care taker" The plan also lists what the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) will help with—like job coaching, practice interviews, and a class on animal care—and what Maria will do, like showing up for appointments and trying different tasks to see what she likes. They decide when each step will happen, and they finish the plan within 90 days. The IPE is their written agreement about how Maria will reach her job goal and what support she will get along the way.

16. Individualized Services

Services and supports that are chosen just for one person based on what they need to get, keep, or prepare for a job. They must be something the person truly needs, something that fits their own strengths and challenges, and something that is written into their IPE. These services can include things like testing to learn skills, medical or mental-health help, training for school or work, transportation, childcare, or assistive technology.

Example

Aiden wants to work at a local garden center because he loves plants, but he needs help staying calm when the store gets busy and sometimes forgets the steps for different tasks. So Aiden's IPE includes services chosen just for him: a short skills test to see what he's good at, a few sessions with a therapist to help with anxiety, and a job coach who teaches him how to water plants and restock pots using a picture checklist. These supports are written into Aiden's plan because they fit his needs and help him get and keep the job he wants

17. Job Retention Services

For: A person who already has a job but may lose it without extra support.

Job Retention Services are the supports given to a person who is working but at risk of losing their job because of their disability. These services help the person stay successful at work and keep their job.

Example

Chris works at a busy vet's office, but he may lose his job because he often talks to himself and to people he imagines are there, which makes it hard for him to stay focused. Job Retention Services give him extra support while he's working. A staff member checks in with him, helps him practice staying on task, and teaches him ways to manage his self-talk during busy times. They also help Chris talk with his supervisor about what he needs to keep doing well. These supports help Chris stay successful and keep his job.

18. Job Stabilization

A DVR stage of employment that starts on the first day of a person's new job. The goal is to make sure they have what they need to do well right away. VR may provide Job Coaching to help them learn their tasks or pay for tools or software they need for the job. Their counselor also checks in often to see if anything new is getting in their way.

Example

Robert starts his new job at a building supply store, and Job Stabilization begins on his first day. VR makes sure he has what he needs to do well right away. A Job Coach helps him learn his tasks, like finding items in the warehouse and helping customers, and VR can pay for any tools or software he needs. His counselor also checks in often to see if anything new is getting in his way. These supports help Robert settle into his job and feel confident as he learns the routine

19. Natural Supports

These are the everyday help a person gets at their job from a supervisor or co-worker. These supports come from the relationships they build at work and help the person do their job well and feel confident.

Example

Keesha works at a neighborhood bakery, and has natural supports with the people she works with. Her supervisor gives her reminders about the order of tasks when the shop gets busy, and a co-worker helps her learn the best way to package pastries. Another teammate quietly checks in with her if she seems unsure about what comes next. These everyday supports from her workplace help Keesha keep doing her job well and feel confident at work.

20. Natural Supports (CIL)

Natural supports are the people already in someone's life—like family, friends, neighbors, classmates, or community members—who help them feel included and connected. At a Center for Independent Living, natural supports are built to help a person be part of their community, reduce loneliness, and get everyday help in ways that feel natural and comfortable.

Example

Lily wants to spend more time in her community but feels shy going places alone. The CIL helps her think about people she already knows—like a neighbor who walks her dog at the same time each morning. Lily and her neighbor start walking together, and soon Lily feels comfortable joining a local walking group. These natural supports help her feel connected, make friends, and be more involved in her community.

21. Ongoing Support Services

For people using the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) services, these are special short-term supports for up to 24 months. Includes job coaching and help with things outside of work, this ends when the person's job is steady.

Example

Clay works at a local feed store, and he receives Ongoing Support Services to help him stay successful on the job. A Job Coach checks in with him regularly to help him stay organized, learn the routine, and handle busy times without getting overwhelmed. He also gets help with things outside of work, like planning his bus route and keeping a steady morning routine. These short-term supports continue until Clay's job feels steady and he no longer needs extra help.

22. Post-Employment Services

These are supports an individual can ask for after the individual's case is closed. The supports help with changes in the individual's disability or new work requirements, and the individual can receive these supports without starting a new application.

Example

Jake works at a local climbing gym, and after his VR case is closed, he begins having more frequent seizures. He asks for Post-Employment Services so he can keep doing his job safely. VR steps back in to help him and his employer make a plan, which may include adjusting his tasks, adding safety steps, or providing training for co-workers. Because these supports come after case closure, Jake does not have to start a new application. Post-Employment Services help him stay confident and successful at work even as his needs change.

23. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

Early transition services for students with disabilities, typically ages 14–21, who are still in school. Pre-ETS helps students prepare for life after high school by exploring careers, learning workplace skills, understanding education and training options, and building self-advocacy skills. Rather than focusing on immediate job placement, Pre-ETS helps students learn what they do well, identify the supports they may need, and explore what steps to try next as they plan for future employment, education, and independent living.

Example

Emily is a high school student who wants to see what it might be like to work with kids someday. Through Pre-ETS, she gets to explore this interest in small, low-pressure ways. She visits an after-school program to observe how staff help students with homework, learns about the skills needed for childcare jobs, and practices workplace basics like communication and staying organized. Her counselor also helps her look at training programs she might try after graduation. These early experiences help Emily learn what she enjoys, what she's good at, and what she might want to explore next—without needing to choose a specific job right away.

24. Re-employment

For: A person who loses a job even after getting support to keep it.

Re-employment is when VR helps a person find a new job after their first job does not work out. DVR looks for a job that fits the person's current needs and abilities, and supports them as they start again.

Example

Carla works at a beauty salon, but she loses her job after being late too many times, even with support to help her stay on track. She asks VR for Re-employment services so she can start again. VR talks with Carla about what happened, what she needs now, and what kind of schedule would work better for her. Together, they look for a new job that fits her current abilities and helps her be more successful. VR supports Carla as she learns from her past job and moves into a new one that is a better match.

25. Secondary Disability

Another condition that also affects a person's daily life or work, but it is not the main reason they need support or services.

Example

Matt has a brain injury that affects his memory and attention, and this is the main reason he needs help with work and daily tasks. He also has mild hearing loss, which makes it harder for him to follow conversations in busy places. His hearing loss is considered a secondary disability because it adds to his challenges but is not the main reason he needs support. VR keeps both conditions in mind when planning services, but the brain injury is the primary basis for his work limitations.

26. Substantial Gainful Employment (SGA)

A Social Security Administration term defining how much a person works and their earning levels that may impact their eligibility for disability benefits like Social Security, and Medicaid.

Example

Jordan receives SSI and wants to start working more hours at his job in a plant nursery. His counselor explains that Social Security has something called Substantial Gainful Activity, or SGA. This means that if Jordan earns more than a certain amount each month, Social Security may decide he is doing enough work that he no longer qualifies for disability benefits. Jordan and his counselor look at his schedule and pay rate together so he can understand how his earnings might affect his benefits and make a plan that works for him.

27. Supported Employment

Extra help for a person with significant support needs to get, learn, and keep a regular job in the community. This support may include things like job coaching, training, or other services that help the person succeed at work. It is mainly for people who need ongoing support to find or maintain employment.

Example

Tara gets a job folding towels at a hotel where the Job Coach has an ongoing partnership. Several other people with disabilities could be working there too because the employer knows the provider and is comfortable with job coaches. Tara learns the job with coaching support, but the job itself wasn't created or changed for her.

28. Ticket to Work (TTW)

Special supports that help a person work without losing their benefits right away. These supports can protect their medical status, help them keep Medicare or Medicaid, make it easier to restart benefits if they need to stop working, and let them try working for a while while still getting their SSDI check. A person can stay in TTW as long as they keep making yearly progress toward their work goals.

Example

Cooper wants to work, but he is nervous about how that might affect his disability benefits. His counselor tells him about Ticket to Work, a program that gives him special supports while he tries working. With TTW, Cooper can keep his Medicare or Medicaid, protect his medical status, and restart his benefits more easily if he has to stop working because of his disability. He also gets time to try working while still receiving his SSDI check. This helps Cooper feel safer and more confident to try working and keeping a long-term job.

29. Transferable Skills

A set of skills a person has learned from past jobs, school, training, or life activities—like hobbies or volunteering—that they can use in new kinds of work.

Example

Renee has learned many skills from different parts of her life. She helps her younger cousins with homework, organizes supplies for her art club, and volunteers at her church's food pantry. Even though these activities are not paid jobs, Renee has built strong skills like staying organized, helping others, and solving problems. These are called transferable skills because she can use them in many different kinds of work in the future.

30. Transportation Services

This provides help with travel costs so a person can get to their VR appointment and employment services, training, or job activities. It is used when the person cannot afford or access the transportation they need to reach work or training.

Example

Renee has a meeting with her VR counselor and also attends a weekly training class to learn new job skills. There is no bus route that goes to the training site, and she does not have another way to get there. Her counselor helps her use Transportation Services, which can pay for rides so she can get to her VR appointments, training, and other work activities. This support makes sure Renee can keep moving toward her job goals even when transportation is hard to access.

31. Transportation Services (CIL)

Transportation Services at a Center for Independent Living help people learn how to travel safely and independently in their community. This can include travel training to use the bus, paratransit, or other local transportation, as well as helping someone find accessible rides for things like medical appointments, shopping, classes, or social activities. The goal is to make sure the person can get where they want to go and be part of their community.

Example

Omar wants to visit the library, go to his doctor's appointments, and meet friends at the park, but he isn't sure how to use the city bus. A staff member at the CIL teaches him how to read the bus schedule, plan a route, and safely get on and off the bus. After a few practice trips, Omar feels confident traveling on his own. Now he can go where he wants, when he wants, and be more independent in his community.

32. Trial Work Experience (TWE)

For: People with high support needs.

A short tryout in a real community based job where a person can show what they can do. It helps the counselor understand the person's strengths and what supports might help them succeed at work.

Focus: Eligibility — “What does this show about what the person can do at work and whether working is a possibility for them right now?”

Example

Eli has high support needs, and his counselor wants to understand what he can do at work to help decide if he is eligible for VR services. They set up a short Trial Work Experience at the front desk of a national hotel chain. Eli tries simple hospitality tasks like greeting guests, handing out room keys, and checking that the lobby area stays tidy. A job coach stays close to give support when he needs it. During this tryout, the counselor watches how Eli communicates with guests, follows steps, and responds to help. This information shows what Eli can do in a real workplace and helps the counselor decide if work is a good possibility for him right now.

33. Wait List or Order of Selection

This is when Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) doesn't have enough funding or staff to help everyone right away, so they must serve people with the most serious disabilities first. Everyone else may have to wait until resources become available.

Example

Dominic applies for VR services, but the agency is using Order of Selection because they don't have enough staff or money to serve everyone right away. After looking at Dominic's information, VR decides he

34. Work Incentives

Special rules from the Social Security Administration that help people with disabilities work without losing their SSI or SSDI money or their Medicaid/Medicare right away. These rules make it safer to try working, keep working, or return to work while still keeping the benefits they need.

Example

Eric receives SSI and starts a part-time job repairing cell phones at a local electronics store. He enjoys the work and hopes to someday run his own small repair business, but he worries that earning more money might make him lose his SSI check and Medicaid too quickly. His benefits counselor explains that Work Incentives allow him to keep most of his SSI while he earns money and let him keep his Medicaid even if his income goes up. With these rules in place, Eric can build his repair skills, gain confidence, and slowly work toward his goal of becoming self-employed, all while keeping the benefits he depends on during the transition

35. Work Incentive Benefits Services (WIBS)

One-on-one counseling sessions with a trained specialist who helps a person understand how Work Incentives apply to their benefits. The specialist reviews the person's benefits—such as Social Security, housing help, food assistance, or healthcare—explains how a job or earnings might affect them, and creates a clear plan to help the person work safely.

Example

Carol works at a pottery studio where she helps glaze bowls and run the front counter. She gets disability benefits and wants to work more hours, but she isn't sure how the extra money might change her Social Security check, her housing help, or her healthcare. Carol meets with a Work Incentive Benefits Specialist for a WIBS appointment. The specialist looks at all of Carol's benefits and explains how Work Incentives can help her work safely.

36. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

This is the 2014 federal law that guides Vocational Rehabilitation services. It focuses on helping people prepare for work, supporting competitive integrated employment, and providing strong transition services for students and youth.

Example

Albert is a young man who uses a wheelchair and loves working with his hands, but he gets bored easily in school. His teacher connects him with a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor, and because of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Albert can get transition services while he is still a student. His VR counselor helps him try different hands-on activities, like helping in the school's repair area and visiting a local workshop to see how tools are used. Albert also gets a short work experience where he helps assemble simple items, which helps him learn what he enjoys and what supports he might need on the job. WIOA makes sure students like Albert get real chances to prepare for competitive, integrated employment, so he has a clear path from school to a job that fits his strengths and interests.

37. Work Readiness Skills

This means the basic people skills and everyday behaviors a person needs to do well at any job. These include getting along with others, being responsible and on time, and taking care of daily tasks like hygiene, money, and transportation.

Example

Ben is a young man who wants to get a job, so his DVR counselor starts by watching how he does during his assessment. They notice that Ben sometimes forgets things he needs for the day and has trouble getting started on tasks. Because this pattern could make work harder for him, DVR adds Work Readiness Skills to his plan. Ben practices showing up when he's supposed to, keeping his clothes clean, and bringing what he needs, like his bus pass and lunch. At his volunteer job at a community center, he also practices getting along with coworkers, listening to directions, and staying focused long enough to finish his tasks. With DVR's support, Ben learns the everyday skills that help him be prepared, responsible, and ready to do well at a real job in the community.

38. Work-Trial Experience (WTE)

A short-term work experience that helps a person learn about their skills, interests, and support needs. It is used to see whether a specific job is a good fit before making a long-term employment plan.

Example

Ian wants to work as a videographer, so his DVR counselor sets up a Work-Trial Experience at a small film studio. For one week, Ian gets to try real tasks like setting up lights, holding the camera steady, and helping record short videos. During this tryout, Ian learns what parts of the job he enjoys and what feels hard, like keeping track of equipment or staying focused during long shoots. His DVR counselor watches to see what supports he might need and whether this type of work is a good fit for him. The WTE helps everyone answer the big question: Is this the right job?

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