

Guidance for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Support of Participants in Florida's Project SEARCH

Technical Assistance Paper (revised 11/16/2018)

This Technical Assistance Paper is offered as guidance for VR staff authorizing, reviewing or supporting VR services delivered to Project SEARCH participants. It covers background on the Project SEARCH model used in Florida, services that may be provided by VR to support eligible participants, and provisions for reimbursement.

Florida Project SEARCH Background

Project SEARCH is a nationally recognized internship program that delivers employment training and education for students with disabilities. This hands-on training for employment model is protected under an international trademark and copyright. Each program requires the use of braided funding streams and sharing of partner resources to ensure long-term sustainability. Licensing is required through the national office based in Cincinnati, OH for every Project SEARCH program to ensure fidelity to the model. Florida began delivering Project SEARCH services in 2007.

The Project SEARCH model includes:

- A business driven program design imparting students with the work and social skills needed for meaningful careers
- Marketable skills acquired through total immersion in host site occupations
- Success measured by the intern transitioning into year-round, competitive integrated employment in an inclusive setting
- Collaboration between the business, school system, VR, and partners

Intern Characteristics include Students:

- With a wide range of disabilities, often with multiple conditions who require Supported Employment Services
- Between the ages of 18 and 21 years old
- Being served by the school district through an Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- Finished with HS credit/graduation requirements
- Who use public transportation or other independent means

Classroom Instruction for Skill Acquisition:

- Team Building
- Technology
- Navigating a Worksite
- Workplace Safety
- Communication
- Health & Wellness
- Social Skills
- Money Management
- Employability Skills

Internship Rotations:

The host site provides a series of three targeted internships. Interns do not displace current employees. Interns work alongside employees and interact directly with their supervisors. Department mentors provide additional direction. Mastering the core skill set enables the intern to be hired in an entry level position at the host business or in the community. Additional skills are developed once core skills are mastered.

VR Support of Participants in Project SEARCH

The Project SEARCH model has been highly effective in assisting students with the most significant disabilities make the transition from high school to meaningful employment. The model provides students the opportunity to engage in various work experiences in different career fields. This allows student interns to identify the opportunity that best matches their individual strengths, aptitudes, and interests. The goal of the program is competitive integrated employment. Any student may elect to exit the program whenever they receive a job offer. About a third of the students are hired at the host site. The remaining students begin placement services immediately after completing their last rotation.

An approved VR Supported Employment (SE) Individualized Plan for Employment (SE IPE)* is required for VR assistance. Specific VR services are based on the individual's unique situation as it relates to the employment outcome identified in the IPE or its amendments. VR is able to provide Project SEARCH participants the supports listed below effective July 1, 2017:

Provisions for Reimbursement

Authorizations:

The VR Counselor will authorize payment to the VR Provider for the following approved SE IPE services delivered to all **Project SEARCH** participants:

Benchmark	Billing Code	Specifications
Situational Assessment	Y10751	Information obtained during the first rotation is used to complete the evaluation
OJT Training Plan & Agreement**	Y10403	Payable for each of the 3 rotations
OJT Training Final Report	Y10407	Payable on completion of <u>each</u> OJT rotation

The Employer:

The VR Provider may serve as the “employer of record” contracting with Vocational Rehabilitation for Project SEARCH OJT services. Providers will complete all paperwork and sign VR required forms when serving as the “employer of record” while delivering OJT services.

The Host Business:

The host business site is where the VR customer completes Project SEARCH OJT activities. The host business site and its employees will provide information so that the VR Provider may complete the required reports and invoices that will be submitted to VR for approval and reimbursement.

**Before including any service on an SE IPE, the counselor must assure that the VR Provider is registered in RIMS and is approved to deliver the service in question.*

***Provider and Counselor must sign an OJT Agreement before the OJT rotation begins.*

Supported Employment Referral and Services:

Before a student is hired or placed, the VR Counselor will make the appropriate referral*** for Supported Employment Services. VR will provide Supported Employment Services to Project SEARCH participants who are hired by the host business or with another Employer.

Replacement of Benchmarks and Services:

Specific services provided through Project SEARCH take the place of the Supported Employment Individual Career Plan. This service will not be authorized for Project SEARCH participants.

Project SEARCH Benchmark	Takes the place of...
Situational Assessment****	Supported Employment Individual Career Plan

Support Services:

Services required for students to access or participate in Project SEARCH services may be provided by VR if unavailable through the school district.

- **Transportation-** A letter from the school district indicating they are unable to provide public transportation (i.e. other than school vehicles) will serve to document the need for VR assistance in preparation of employment.
- **Assistive Services or Devices-** VR will provide assistive services or devices needed by students to participate in the OJT/work experience portions of Project SEARCH.

Student Selection:

Participant selections are made based on the need for the intense services and supports available through Project SEARCH. This need will be documented in both the IEP and the IPE. Priority should be given to those students that are closest to exiting the school system.

OJT Wage Reimbursement:

VR will not provide wage reimbursement for Project SEARCH participants as part of this transition training program.

Workers' Compensation:

Students participating in any Work Experience Activity (WEA) including Project SEARCH will be deemed employees or the state for Workers' Compensation only and will be covered under the State of Florida, Department of Education, Division of Workers' Compensation plan. VR Staff will follow the FSOP for Work Experience Activities – Workers' Compensation which includes the following information.

Before the rotation start date, the VR Counselor will:

1. Orient the host business to the WC state coverage for the individual participating in a WEA and provide:
 - Amerisys reporting instructions,
 - WC contact information card with their VR Area WC Liaison identified, and
 - FAQs for Employer and for Claimant

2. Educate the individual participating in the rotation and provide:
 - WC card with their VR Area WC Liaison contact information identified,
 - Amerisys reporting instructions,
 - Claimant FAQ, and
 - Discussion as to what to do should a work-related illness or injury occur.
3. For each rotation complete a new electronic form to initiate WC coverage and update, if necessary. Gather and enter into the WC tracking tool all details, including, but not limited to:
 - Employer contact information,
 - Start and ending date of rotation, and
 - The number of hours planned to work each week.
4. Document in RIMS case notes the date the electronic WC initiation form was submitted.

Each VR Area has a Workers' Compensation Liaison who will be the point person for further reporting, tracking, and injury event recording. Counselors can find the person for their respective areas in the *Work Experience Activities-Workers' Compensation* Field Services Operating Procedure which is posted on the Field Services Page of the VR-iNet.

Project SEARCH Provider Responsibilities:

VR must receive all required documentation before making payment to the VR Provider.

Questions or Comments:

Contact the Project SEARCH Liaison at (850) 245-3471 or VRTransionYouth@vr.fl DOE.org.

****The VR Supported Employment Services Referral Form must have been received and accepted by the Provider before employment services are performed.*

*****This service is currently being programmed in the computer system. If it is not available during the first rotation, providers may substitute the OJT evaluation if they are registered to provide that service. If not registered, please contact Regina Rice at the number above for additional guidance.*