# PART B, CHAPTER 2.1: OVERVIEW OF THE VR PROCESS

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| **Policy Number** | **Authority** | **Scope**  | **Effective Date** |
| Part B, Chapter 2.1 | 34 CFR [Part 361 Subpart B](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-361#subject-group-ECFR8c5f55ccf5c0da2), and TWC Rule [§856 Subchapter B](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac%24ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=5&ti=40&pt=20&ch=856&sch=B&rl=Y) | All TWC-VR staff | 04/01/2025 |

## PURPOSE

In accordance with the authority (Federal and State) listed above, this policy is issued by the Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Division (TWC-VR). Adherence to these rules and regulations issued under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), supports Texans with disabilities in gaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment (CIE).

Specifically, the purpose of this policy and these procedures is to ensure adherence to TWC-VR's process from program entry to program exit. Part B includes the linear process individuals with disabilities will follow, including how TWC-VR services are provided with the goal of CIE. Though the process is linear, TWC-VR provides individualized services to all customers in which circumstances and needs may change over time.

## DEFINITIONS

Admin PIN: A five-digit code used by authorized TWC-VR staff, typically management. The Admin PIN is used in ReHabWorks (RHW) to confirm that a customer, their representative, and/or legal guardian has provided a handwritten signature, digital signature, or Semi-Autonomous Research Assistant (SARA) email in lieu of a signature.

Good Faith Effort: When TWC-VR staff make three or more attempts to contact the customer, on more than one date, and by using more than one method of contact (e.g., phone, email, SARA).

Informed Choice: The means by which a customer chooses their rehabilitation path, from options based on their needs and circumstances and the VR program's rules, as the choice relates to all stages of the VR process.

Managing Conservator Signature: Customers who are minors and under the care of a foster parent are assigned a managing conservator who has the legal authority to sign documents.

Personal Identification Number (PIN): A four-digit number utilized by a customer, representative, and/or parent guardian to sign documents in RHW electronically.

Vocational Rehabilitation Team: A group of individuals who share responsibility for informing, educating, advocating, facilitating, and encouraging the customer to make informed decisions to reach their employment goal.

## POLICY

### General Overview

TWC-VR is an eligibility-based program which includes a basic process for referral, application, eligibility, Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), service provision, and exit. TWC-VR staff must convey the program's purpose, process, and roles and responsibilities at the first meeting with a customer and throughout the life of the case. The VR Counselor should clearly explain that the expectation for partnership between the VR Counselor and the customer, through informed choice, is to achieve the goal of CIE.

At each step of the process, the VR Counselor takes the customer through a series of decisions about goals, services, and providers to achieve outcomes upon which the VR Counselor and the customer have agreed.

### Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

TWC-VR uses an individualized model that involves counseling methods and parameters within which the VR Counselor operates. VR Counselors with specialized skills and training to make decisions that support CIE outcomes for customers are the cornerstone of successful rehabilitation.

VR Counselors are required to meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) standard under the Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (QVRC) Program.

### Roles and Responsibilities

TWC-VR works as a team and is comprised of a group of individuals who share responsibility for informing, educating, advocating, facilitating, and encouraging the customer to make informed decisions to reach their employment goal. TWC-VR team members will change as the customer's needs and services evolve; however, the team will always include the customer and the VR Counselor. TWC-VR team members include the following as appropriate:

* Customer: TWC-VR customers are expected to actively engage in all stages of the VR process by—
	+ Demonstrating motivation through active participation and consistent communication with the VR Counselor;
	+ Engaging in the process of informed choice and decision making; and
	+ Committing to following through with activities that lead to a CIE outcome.
* VR Counselor: VR Counselors have a unique skill set and specialized training to serve individuals with disabilities. This includes an extensive knowledge of disability and an understanding of the disability-related supports necessary to help TWC-VR customers reach their employment goals. This knowledge is combined with an understanding of the local labor market, business trends, and employment law.
	+ Partnerships: The VR Counselor partners with the customer, providers, employers, and community resources to help customers reach their employment goals.
	+ Purchasing: The VR Counselor must apply best value purchasing practices and use available comparable services and benefits to ensure effective use of public funds throughout the VR process.
	+ Caseloads: VR Counselors have caseloads that are either general (all conditions and disabilities) or specialized (only specific disabilities or conditions, such as visual impairment, hearing loss, or transition-aged youth).
* Courtesy Counselor: A Courtesy Counselor provides TWC-VR services to a customer who is receiving services outside the customer's home area. When a Courtesy Counselor is assigned to provide additional support for a customer, the Courtesy Counselor may have similar responsibilities and provide similar services as a VR Counselor. The Courtesy Counselor will also maintain constant communication with the assigned VR Counselor.
* Rehabilitation Assistant: The Rehabilitation Assistant (RA) supports both the VR Counselor and the customer throughout the process by coordinating services approved by the VR Counselor, collecting information, providing caseload support, and more.
* VR Supervisors and Managers: The VR Supervisor and Manager work together to provide support, direction, and oversight of direct customer services for their assigned unit.
* Unit and Regional Management, Specialists, and Support Staff: Unit and Regional Management, Specialists, and Support Staff also serve a vital role in the VR process, even though they may not work directly with VR customers regularly. The unit and regional staff ensure case movement, payment to vendors, leadership, professional development, subject-matter expertise, and more.
* Consultants: TWC-VR staff have access to both internal and external consultants for specialized support (e.g., medical, psychological) in decision making throughout the VR process.
* Providers: Descriptions of providers' roles and responsibilities are outlined in the VR Standards for Providers Manual (VR-SFP).

### Required Signatures

Customer signatures are required throughout the VR process. Depending on the customer’s age and circumstance, customers must provide their own signature, designate a representative to provide a signature on their behalf, or provide the signature of either a parent, or a legal guardian.

* Representative's Signature: A customer or their legal guardian may designate an individual to serve as their representative in all or part of the VR process. The representative may be authorized to sign documents, speak on the customer's behalf, or serve in other capacities indicated on the *Designation of Applicant or Customer Representative (VR1487)*. In some cases, a representative can help facilitate communication and help the rehabilitation process move forward to a successful outcome.
* Parent or Legal Guardian Signature: The signature of either a parent or legal guardian is required when the customer is—
	+ A minor (i.e., under 18); or
	+ Legally incompetent and assigned a legal guardian.

An exception to this requirement is an individual who is under 18 and legally married. Under Texas law, that individual is not considered a minor. Customers under 18 years of age must provide documentation of marriage if they assert that they are their own legal guardian.

Generally, a foster parent is not the legal guardian for their foster child and cannot sign an application for services, releases, or the IPE on behalf of the child. The child's managing conservator has the legal authority to sign these documents. Locate the conservator by contacting the nearest office of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

### Types of Signatures

TWC-VR customers, representatives, and/or legal guardians have multiple options to ensure required documentation is signed. TWC-VR staff will work with customers, representatives, and/or legal guardians to obtain their signatures through one of the following methods:

* Handwritten signatures (e.g., in person, photo, scanned copy);
* Digital signatures using a software option (i.e., Adobe and DocuSign, when available, on a TWC-VR form; SARA e-signatures);
* PINs as signatures entered in RHW by the TWC-VR customer, representative, and/or legal guardian; or
* SARA emailed agreement in lieu of handwritten signature.

### Frequency of Contacts

TWC-VR is committed to maintaining regular communication and to being responsive to the evolving needs of potentially eligible students with disabilities, applicants, eligible individuals, and customers receiving services in an IPE. The frequency of contact (FOC) is determined by the unique circumstances and needs of each customer. The minimum FOC requirement is established in an IPE for customers receiving services. The FOC and can be adjusted as necessary throughout the duration of the case. The VR Counselor must make a good faith effort to meet the established FOC for each customer.

In cases where there is a change in FOC resulting in more frequent contact, an IPE amendment is not required. However, if the change in FOC results in less frequent contact, an IPE amendment is required.

TWC-VR staff must adhere to the guidelines outlined in the TWC Privacy Manual and throughout the VRSM. Additionally, while text messages and emails from SARA are secure, TWC-VR staff must refrain from transmitting sensitive information, such as personal identifying information (PII), to customers through non-secure channels. Text messaging, even when sent from an agency device, is not considered a secure form of communication.

### Exceptions to Policies

When necessary to meet the VR needs of a customer, TWC-VR staff may request exceptions to policies and procedures through their chain of management up to the Deputy Division Director of Field Services Delivery, or designee. However, exceptions to policies and procedures based on Federal and State laws, statutes, and rules or regulations are not allowable.

## PROCEDURES

### Signature Procedures

TWC-VR has signature procedures to ensure proper documentation and compliance. Under no circumstances does the Individualized Trial Work Plan (TWP), Individualized TWP amendment, IPE or IPE amendment take effect or allow for payment of any service until it is agreed to and signed by the customer or their representative and the VR Counselor.

When a representative signature is obtained, VR staff must ensure the Designation of Applicant or Customer Representative (VR1487) is completed and signed authorizing the representative’s authority to sign on behalf of the customer.

* Handwritten Signature: A TWC-VR customer, representative, and/or legal guardian can use a handwritten signature throughout the VR process wherever signatures are required. This includes signatures obtained in person and electronically when the customer has the equipment necessary to print, sign, and return an electronic copy of the signed form (such as a photo or scanned copy).

The customer, representative, and/or legal guardian must—

* + Review the document and contact VR if there are questions or disagreements;
	+ Sign the document indicating their agreement; and
	+ Return the document to VR staff upon completion of the signature.
* Digital Signatures: A TWC-VR customer, representative, and/or legal guardian can use a digital signature throughout the VR process wherever signatures are required. A digital signature can be created using software such as Adobe or DocuSign which allows customers to securely sign. SARA also allows customers to provide digital signatures.

The customer, representative, and/or legal guardian, must—

* + Review the document and contact VR if there are questions or disagreements;
	+ Sign the document indicating their agreement using a digital software option (i.e., Adobe and DocuSign, when available, on a TWC-VR form; SARA signatures); and
	+ Return the document to VR staff upon completion of signature.
* PIN as Signature: A TWC-VR customer, representative and/or legal guardian, can use an electronic PIN as a signature throughout the VR process whenever PINS are required.

When the TWC-VR customer, representative, and/or legal guardian, sets or resets their PIN, TWC-VR staff should encourage the customer to use a number that is both easy to remember and meets the PIN requirements within RHW. When the PIN is reset by a member of the unit management team, TWC-VR staff document the action in a case note.

TWC-VR staff are prohibited from knowing or recording the customer’s unique PIN. TWC-VR staff must not ask the customer for their PIN or document any type of prompts or hints that could inadvertently compromise the confidentiality of the PIN.

* SARA Emailed Agreement in Lieu of Handwritten Signature: A TWC-VR customer, representative, and/or legal guardian, can use a SARA email in lieu of handwritten signature throughout the VR process wherever signatures are required if TWC-VR staff cannot obtain a handwritten signature, digital signature, or have the customer enter their PIN.

When using an e-mail in lieu of a signature, the email to the customer can only be sent through SARA to ensure encryption. TWC-VR staff sends an encrypted e-mail through SARA to the customer using the email address provided by the customer listed in RHW. The TWC-VR staff attaches the document and copies and pastes an approved e-mail template in the body of the email.

**SARA Email Templates**

Dear (Applicant, Customer, Parent, Guardian, or Representative Name),

Please read through the attached documents and statements below. To proceed with your case, please reply directly to this encrypted email. In your reply, please state whether you agree to the statements listed below and include your name and date.

* VR5060, Permission to Collect Information

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, I authorize (list provider name) to disclose the protected health information and other personal information listed under “Information Subject to Disclosure” to Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR). I authorize the following types of records to be disclosed: (list types). I authorize the VR counselor to complete this document on my behalf.

* VR5060, Permission to Collect Information from The Work Number

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, I authorize The Work Number to disclose the protected health information and other personal information listed under “Information Subject to Disclosure” to Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR). I authorize the following types of records to be disclosed: Equifax The Work Number, including all employment information (i.e. wages and work history). I authorize the VR counselor to complete this document on my behalf.

* VR5061, Notice and Consent for Disclosure of Personal Information

I, the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, have read the VR5061, Notice and Consent for Disclosure of Personal Information. I authorize Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to disclose personal information or records to other individuals for purposes directly connected with the administration of my rehabilitation program. I authorize the VR counselor to complete this document on my behalf.

* VR1517-2, Authorization for Release of Confidential Customer Records and Information

I, the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, authorize the records or information to be released to the individuals listed on the VR1517-2, Authorization for Release of Confidential Customer Records and Information. I authorize the VR counselor to complete this document on my behalf.

* VR1510, Request for Computerized Criminal History (CCH) Search

I, the customer, have read the VR1510, Request for Computerized Criminal History Search and acknowledge that a Computerized Criminal History (CCH) check may be performed by accessing the Texas Department of Public Safety Secure Website and may be based on name and DOB identifiers. I authorize the VR counselor to complete this document on my behalf.

* VR1487, Designation of Applicant or Customer Representative

Sent to customer:

I, the applicant or customer, hereby designate (list name of person designated as the representative) to act as my representative for the purpose of rehabilitation services. He or she may act as my representative for the following purposes (list all that apply). I authorize my VR counselor to sign on my behalf.

Sent to designated representative:

I, designated representative for customer (enter customer’s name), agree to act as a representative for the purpose of rehabilitation services for the following purposes (list all that apply). I am/am not an attorney. My telephone number and address are (enter information). I authorize (enter customer’s name) VR counselor to sign on my behalf.

* VR5062, Permission to Collect and Notice to Disclose — Mutually Served Medicaid Waiver and VR Customers

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, I authorize Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VR) to exchange with Texas Health and Human Services the information selected in the “Information Subject to Disclosure” box. I authorize the VR counselor to complete this document on my behalf.

* VR5063, Permission to Collect and Notice to Disclose — National Student Clearinghouse

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, I authorize Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VR) to exchange with the National Student Clearinghouse the information selected in the “Information Subject to Disclosure” box. I authorize the VR counselor to complete this document on my behalf.

* VR 5057, Application Statement

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative I confirm that I have read and agree to the application statements as listed in the VR 5057 Application Statement and would like to proceed with applying for Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

* VR1680, Opportunity to Register to Vote

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, I confirm that I have been provided with information regarding Voter Registration as described in the VR1680 Opportunity to Register to Vote. Please respond Yes, No or No Response to indicate if you are not registered to vote where you live now, would like to register to vote today.

* VR5161, Individualized Trial Work Plan/ VR5157 Individualized Trial Work Plan Amendment

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, I agree that I have been fully involved and used informed choice in the development of this program and have received a copy of this Trial Work Plan. This program will be reviewed by me, my designated representative, if any, and my VRC as often as necessary, but at least annually. Any change in this program will require collaboration between me, my designated representative, if any, and my VRC.

* VR5163, Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)/VR5159 Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Amendment

As the applicant, customer, parent, guardian, or representative, I agree that I have been fully involved and used informed choice in the development of this program and have received a copy of this IPE. This program will be reviewed by me, my designated representative, if any, and my VRC as often as necessary, but at least annually. Any change in this program will require collaboration between me, my designated representative, if any, and my VRC.

After receiving the customer’s email confirmation, TWC-VR staff will request assistance from authorized staff to complete an Admin PIN.

* Admin PIN – Use by TWC-VR Staff: The only circumstances under which authorized TWC-VR staff can enter an Admin PIN in RHW on behalf of the customer are as follows:
	+ The customer, representative, and/or legal guardian completed and signed a paper document. The following signed paper documentation must be uploaded into the electronic case file:
		- Application;
		- Voter registration;
		- Individualized Trial Work Plan (TWP);
		- Individualized TWP amendment;
		- IPE; and
		- IPE amendment.
	+ A digital signature is obtained from the customer, representative, and/or legal guardian when a PIN is required in RHW;
* The customer cannot enter a PIN due to the limitations caused by a physical disability; or
* The customer, representative, and/or legal guardian cannot provide a handwritten signature, digital signature, or enter the PIN and they send an email through SARA indicating agreement for their signature on the form.

When requesting an Admin PIN, staff send an email to authorized TWC-VR staff. The email must clearly specify the document for which the PIN is requested and attach the relevant document. The authorized TWC-VR staff confirms that a customer, their representative, and/or legal guardian has provided a handwritten signature, digital signature, or SARA email in lieu of a signature. Once the Admin PIN has been entered, RHW will create a system-generated case note that records the reason and use of the Admin PIN.

The document signed by the customer, representative, and/or legal guardian that was used for the Admin PIN request must be uploaded to the electronic case file.

VR Supervisors, VR Managers, Deputy Regional Directors, or a Regional Director are the authorized TWC-VR staff who may enter an Admin PIN.

### Approvals and Consultations Documentation

All required approvals, consultations, notifications, and reviews must be—

* Submitted through the requester’s direct chain of command;
* Considered incomplete until they are documented in RHW; and
* Documented before including the good or service on an IPE and/or issuing a service authorization.

Approval Request: The "Add to Topic" for a request should include the specific good or service. The case note content must include the following:

* What is being requested (include specific good or service, provider, and anticipated dates of service);
* Circumstances supporting the request; and
* Name and job title of requester.

Approval Response: The "Add to Topic" for an approval or denial should include the specific good or service and the decision (i.e., "approved” or "denied"). The case note content must include the following:

* Parameters of the approval or denial include specific good or service, provider, and when applicable, the date range of the approval.);
* Type of review completed in the Texas Review, Oversight, and Coaching System (TxROCS) if applicable; and
* Name and job title of staff making the decision.

As part of the approval decision, the TWC-VR staff approving or denying the request should ensure that—

* The good or service is clearly connected to and supportive of vocational objective;
* The purchase is included in the IPE, IPE amendment, or in a service justification case note for goods/services for potentially eligible customers or before an IPE;
* Exploration and application of available comparable benefits are documented; and
* Required consultations have been completed, when applicable.

Consultation/Review: The "Add to Topic" for a consultation should include the specific good or service. The case note content must include the following:

* Parameters of the consultation including specific good or service, provider, the date range of service (when applicable), and specific recommendations;
* Type of review completed in TxROCS (if applicable); and
* Name and job title of staff providing the consultation.

Required consultations and approvals must be documented in RHW by entering an Approval Response case note or completing the appropriate RHW Purchase Approval Workflow in RHW. Questions about required consultations and approvals can be submitted to vrsm.support@twc.texas.gov or the appropriate Regional or State Office Program Specialist.

### Delegating Required Actions

Required actions that are assigned to TWC-VR staff at the unit level must be completed by the identified TWC-VR staff member (i.e., VR Counselor, VR Supervisor, or VR Manager) or a TWC-VR staff member in an equivalent or higher level of supervision.

A Regional Director (RD) can delegate a required action to a TWC-VR staff member in an equivalent or higher level of supervision or the Deputy Regional Director (DRD).

State Office Management, including TWC-VR Executive Management, can delegate required actions to other State Office Management, regardless of their level of supervision.

If there is more than one approval needed for one service (e.g., VR Manager approval required for out-of-state training and VR Supervisor approval for an exception to the limitations on out-of-state training fees), TWC-VR staff may combine them into one approval with the highest level of supervision required providing the entire approval. However, if there are two distinctly separate services (e.g., out-of-state training and cochlear implant surgery), the approvals should be documented and submitted separately.

## APPROVALS & CONSULTATIONS

TWC-VR staff must follow the approvals and consultations listed in each VRSM chapter.

**REVIEW**

The Policy Planning and Statewide Initiatives Team, or designee, is responsible for reviewing this policy and these procedures and will update the Document History log if necessary.

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| **Date** | **Type** | **Change Description** |
| 09/03/2024 | New | VRSM Policy and Procedure Rewrite |
| 02/10/2025 | Revised | Revised signature requirements |
| 04/01/2025 | Revised | Updated the form number for the application statement. |