# Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual C-400: Training Services

Revised January 15, 2020

## C-422: Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is an international initiative that supports partnerships among businesses (employers), local school districts, VR agencies, and other entities that serve individuals with developmental disabilities. Project SEARCH promotes successful long-term employment of VR customers in jobs that are stable, meaningful, integrated, and competitively compensated.

The program takes place in business settings where immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as well as the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills. Project SEARCH customers participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths. The customers work with a team that includes family and partnering agencies to create an employment goal and support the customers during this important transition from school to work.

Project SEARCH services are provided through a collaborative process in which the Project SEARCH team—the VR provider, host business, school district, long-term support organization, and VR counselor—work together to help the customer achieve the goals of the internship and placement. The use of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Project SEARCH team members may be used to outline the roles and responsibilities.

## Legal Authorization

"…to heighten emphasis on the provision of services to students and youth with disabilities to ensure that they have meaningful opportunities to receive the training and other services they need to achieve employment outcomes in competitive integrated employment. WIOA expands not only the population of students with disabilities who may receive services but also the kinds of services that the VR agencies may provide to youth and students with disabilities who are transitioning from school to postsecondary education and employment." —Title I of the Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (29 USC §720 et seq.)

## Project SEARCH Requirements

To start a Project SEARCH site, a onetime fee is paid to the National Project SEARCH office. Either the school district covers the fee, or local community partners raise the funds. These funds pay for the team's training on the Project SEARCH model.

Project SEARCH service authorizations to the Employment Services Provider (ESP) may be issued using Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) funds for those eligible customers until they have obtained employment. Regular VR funds must be used to purchase Benchmarks A–C.

Planning is important to ensure that the appropriate amount of money is budgeted for each benchmark.

For the fee structure provided to ESPs, refer to VR-SFP Chapter 16: Project SEARCH Services, 16.5.4 Project SEARCH Services Fees.

## IPE Requirements

Project SEARCH customers must have an IPE that states their participation in the program and all additional services that the VR counselor approves for participation (for example, transportation assistance and purchase of work uniforms).

### C-422-1: Project SEARCH Phases

Project SEARCH comprises three phases, which are described below.

Phase 1: Customers participate in internships that allow them to learn employment-related hard and soft skills in a real-life work environment. They attend daily classroom instruction that the local school district provides and that follows the Project SEARCH curriculum.

Phase 2: Customers are placed in or find competitive integrated employment that pays the prevailing wage in the industry and that allows them to use the skills they have learned during their Project SEARCH internships. The job must be consistent with the services and goals outlined in the customer's IPE.

Phase 3: Customers receive retention services as needed for ongoing support after the customer has been employed for 90 days and the VR case is closed. The long-term support organization—the local authority for intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)—provides retention services during this phase.

### C-422-2: Steps to Establish a Project SEARCH Site

To start a Project SEARCH program, the VR counselor contacts a program specialist for Project SEARCH at the TWC-VR State Office. After contact with the program specialist, VR staff members ensure that the following partners agree to start a program.

* Education: the local independent school district (ISD)
* Long-term support: the local intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) authority.

The team, comprising VR, the ISD, and local authorities, and possibly the host business if it has already been identified, can begin without an identified host business or Employment Services Provider (ESP). The team, not VR, selects the ESP based on interviews with all team members. VR schedules interviews for interested ESPs that have a current VR employment services contract.

The national Project SEARCH office is contacted with a request to start a program by the state office program specialist. Project SEARCH requires that a local partner hold a licensing agreement with its office, stating that the team will follow its model. The ISD typically holds the license; VR does not hold this license.

Once the national Project SEARCH office approves the license, it schedules training for the team. After the formal training from the national office begins, the office supports the team by setting up monthly meetings for planning and maintaining the program. While the ISD and the ESP are involved in the daily operations of the program, VR staff members assigned to the team must maintain regular, at least monthly, communication through emails or conference calls in addition to the monthly planning meetings.

### C-422-3: Intern Selection Process

When the team receives applications for Project SEARCH, the names must be provided to VR. This allows VR time to complete applications on those not already receiving VR services.

The Project SEARCH team interviews the applicants using a rubric system to determine whom will be offered an internship at the host business. When VR has not yet determined a student's eligibility for VR services, the student may be selected for Project SEARCH, pending a VR eligibility decision.

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### C-422-4: Asset Discovery

VR customers must have been determined eligible for VR services before they begin Asset Discovery.

The service authorization for the Asset Discovery phase should be issued when the school year ends to allow the ESP time to meet with all the customers. This service must be completed by August 31.

### C-422-5: Skills Training

Since each Project SEARCH team determines the length of the rotations at the host business (eight–12 weeks), it is important that the team create a calendar showing when rotations begin and end. This ensures that VR staff members know when to issue service authorizations to the ESP.

### C-422-6: Job Placement

VR3373, Project SEARCH Job Placement Services Plan, must be developed by the end of the third rotation or at any time during the rotations that the team determines that job placement opportunities are available to the customer because of skills gained in the internships. Once VR3373 is complete, the VR counselor issues the Benchmark A service authorization for job placement services.

More than one service authorization may be open at the same time for internship rotations and job placement. The VR counselor attends the monthly steering committee meetings and the employment planning meetings each rotation to ensure that he or she is in regular communication with the Project SEARCH team and knows when service authorizations are needed.

If the customer needs job coaching to be successful in his or her employment, the ESP must provide the service and may not bill separately.

For additional information on Asset Discovery, Skills Training, and Project SEARCH Job Placement, see VR-SFP Chapter 16: Project SEARCH

### C-422-7: MSG Related to Project SEARCH

For an MSG to be recognized for customers that participate in Project SEARCH the customer must:

* Be enrolled in school
* Have an IPE goal that matches the training areas of their rotations
* Have Project SEARCH documented on the IPE as a service
* Receive a VR3371, Project SEARCH Progress Report

#### Documenting Project SEARCH in RHW

The customer’s training information must be documented in ReHabWorks (RHW) and the VR3371, Project SEARCH Progress Report must be in the paper case file to ensure adequate reporting of Measurable Skill Gains (MSG). Refer to A-505 Documenting Measurable Skill Gains for additional information.

For each Project SEARCH rotation, a Semester/Grading Period record must be entered identifying the rotation completed.

For additional information on entering training information in RHW, please see the ReHabWorks User Guide (RUG) chapter B-300.