

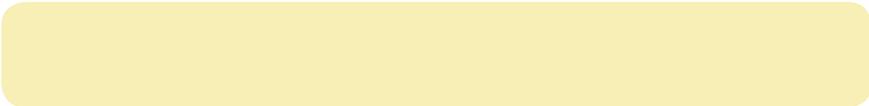


**VFPS**

**Vocational Futures  
Planning & Support  
Participant Guide**

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*an employment planning process  
driven and directed by the participant*



# What is VFPS?

This guide was created to help individuals participating in the Vocational Futures Planning and Support (VFPS) process.

## **VFPS Defined**

The VFPS process is a comprehensive, team-based, participant-directed employment strategy for individuals with physical disabilities.

The process is based on the premise that individuals with disabilities do not lack the aptitude or motivation to pursue their employment goals. Rather, it's the presence of multiple barriers and the lack of opportunity that prevents people with significant disabilities from going to work.

## **The Purpose of this Guide: You're in Charge!**

This guide will help you better understand the VFPS process and empower you to be an active participant in guiding and shaping your career choices and decisions.

# Is VFPS Right for You?

People with disabilities can, and do, work in all areas of the workforce. To find out if the VFPS process is right for you, check the boxes below that are true for you:

- I want to work, but I have a physical disability that makes it difficult for me to find or keep a job.
- I'm not sure what I want to do.
- I'm confused about how working will impact my benefits.
- I'm not sure about what support I will need to reach my employment goal.
- I'm motivated to be an active participant in achieving my job goals.

*If you said yes to any of these, VFPS may be a good choice for you. VFPS is designed to provide support to individuals with physical disabilities who want to become employed, start a business, or maintain current employment.*

*As a VFPS participant, you are expected to take an active, leadership role. All decisions, from the job goal to the composition of the resource team, are made by you with input and guidance from your team.*

# How VFPS Works

## Start

### Driving Force

The process is led and directed by the participant. Each person takes an active role in the process, with the support of an Employment Specialist.

Participant

### Mapping & Navigation

Barriers & Assets Identification is a crucial step where the Employment Specialist and Benefit Specialist learn about the barriers and assets to employment as perceived and explained by the participant.

A Resource Team is developed and composed of people who can provide direction and assistance in managing, reducing, or eliminating the barriers to employment that have been identified. The Resource Team continues to meet regularly throughout the VFPS process.

Barriers  
& Assets  
Identification

Resource  
Team

### *What to do if the process isn't working?*

*Since VFPS is flexible and you are in the driver's seat, you can take the lead in changing your goals or services. Your resource team and the employment planning process can change to best meet your needs and goals.*

## Flexible Journey

VFPS offers a variety of strategies that help the participant's in the career search. The strategies that are used will depend on the barriers and assets identified by the participant.

## Destination

The objective of the VFPS is to build a career not just find a job. Once a career is established, ongoing support can be individualized to ensure success.

### VFPS Strategies

- Benefits Analysis
- Assistive Technology
- Career Exploration & Goal Validation
- Job Seeking Preparation
- Guided Job Search

### Career & Ongoing Support

*VFPS offers a variety of strategies that help you in the career search. The strategies that are used will depend on the barriers and assets you identify. Following are some typical strategies.*

# VFPS Strategies

*The participant may use any of these and other strategies during the process to reach the employment goal:*

- **Benefits Analysis:** A thorough analysis of the benefits, entitlements, subsidies and services and the impact that earned income will have on payment and eligibility; ongoing support with using work incentives and managing changes in benefits.
- **Career Exploration and Goal Validation:** Discussion of interests, hobbies, strengths, and exploration of potential job fields. Vocational/educational assessments, networking, informational interviews, job shadowing, mentoring, business advisory group, and work experiences are some of the strategies used during this step.
- **Assistive Technology:** Identification of adaptive equipment, software, etc. needed to perform essential functions of the job.
- **Job Seeking Preparation:** Developing a plan of action, resume/cover letter, interview skills training.
- **Guided Job Search:** Employment specialist assists in whatever way the individual desires, including contacting employers, helping with resume development, providing interview skills training, negotiating accommodations, providing sensitivity training to employers, etc.

# What You Need to Know

Following are some of the tips, tricks and tools to help you navigate the VFPS process.

## Getting Started

The first step in the Vocational Futures Planning and Support process is to meet and talk about what prevents or hinders you from working. This is known as the **Barriers & Assets Identification** Process. This is where you get the opportunity to really “think big” about what you want to do with your life or what your “dream job” is. Don’t worry if you are not sure, these first meetings will be all about exploring your interests and goals.

## Working with Your Team

Prior to the first meeting with your **Resource Team**, think about who you would like to be involved in your employment planning process. You can invite anyone you think would be helpful. You can also change your team members as you go along.

## Ongoing Support

The work of the **Employment Consultant** and the **Resource Team** does not end once you get a job. The nature of the support that is provided post-hire will depend entirely on your needs and the needs of your employer and coworkers. Therefore, there are no strict guidelines on how to provide ongoing support. Once you secure employment, it is important to address barriers that may interfere with your success. You should think about, and be prepared, to identify new barriers that might prevent you from maintaining employment.

Also, as changes in income or situation occur, a **Benefits Specialist** should be consulted to provide ongoing support to help you understand how changes in wages or salary can affect the your benefits and health care. The **Assistive Technology Consultant** can provide support by arranging and providing a workplace assessments and assuring that needed accommodations and adaptive equipment are obtained.

# Roles & Responsibilities

## Participant

Role: Individual receiving VFPS services.

### **You are responsible for**

- Being an active participant
- Helping run your meetings.
- Asking questions.
- Sharing your thoughts and being a part of the discussions.
- Talking about your interests and what you would like to do.
- Developing and making progress in achieving your employment goals.
- Communicating significant changes that may affect your goals and services to your team.

## Resource Team

Role: The members of your Resource Team are based on who you select. Resource Team members differ from participant to participant.

If you are not sure who should be on your resource team, the Employment Consultant will help with some ideas and suggestions.

Your Resource Team may change as the barriers and employment goal change. A Resource Team member may be part of the team during only one VFPS meeting or be an active member throughout the entire process.

### **The Resource Team can provide you with**

- Direction on how to resolve issues or manage, reduce, and /or eliminate barriers.
- Advice and assistance when the employment plan is written to help you achieve the employment goal.
- Connections to a network of friends, family, and colleagues that can lead to career exploration and job development efforts.

## Roles & Responsibilities Continued

### Employment Specialist

Role: Provides comprehensive, coordinated, and specialized vocational services that include career planning and support, education planning, job development, and training specific to persons with physical disabilities.

#### **An Employment Specialist should be able to**

- Assist in your career planning & job search by helping you develop your employment goals.
- Coordinate services with potential service funders.
- Connect you to resources that help you address employment barriers.
- Answer your questions in a timely fashion.
- Help ensure you are making progress toward your employment goal.
- Communicate with and coordinate resource team members.
- Help you in your job search by identifying potential positions, preparing for an interview, and approaching and negotiating with employers.
- Support you as needed and requested by you!

#### **Questions to ask a potential Employment Specialists**

- Describe your background, training and experience providing employment services to people with disabilities?
- How long have you been providing VFPS services?
- How long do you typically work with someone using the VFPS process?
- Give me examples of some of the things you've done with VFPS participants to help them reach their career goals?
- What kinds of jobs have you helped other VFPS participants to get?

## Roles & Responsibilities Continued

### Benefits Specialist

Role: Provide an initial, thorough analysis of how work will impact your benefits such as your Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and housing, food, energy, and long-term disability or private insurance benefits.

After the initial benefits analysis is complete, you will be able to receive ongoing counseling and information as your situation changes.

#### **A Benefits Specialist should be able to**

- Verify ALL benefits-related information with the various agencies/organizations administering that person's benefits.
- Establish a working relationship with representatives at agencies/organizations administering benefits and entitlements.
- Research unfamiliar programs or procedures.
- Identify "red flags" or inconsistencies.
- Explain the your benefits situation through verbal and written communication.
- Create a benefits "plan" based on that your vocational goals.
- Anticipate upcoming changes or challenges regarding your benefits and identify potential alternatives or solutions for that consumer.

#### **Questions to ask a potential Benefits Specialist**

- Has the Work Incentives Benefits Specialist completed training? Did this training include both federal and state specific information?
- Is the Benefits Specialist a member of a benefits specialist association which requires ongoing training and promotes and maintains statewide standards?

## Roles & Responsibilities Continued

### Assistive Technology Consultant

Role: Assistive technology helps individuals with disabilities with daily living tasks, communication, education, work or recreation activities.

In general, assistive technology helps individuals achieve greater independence and enhances their quality of life.

#### **An Assistive Technology Consultant should be able to**

- ☑ Identify how well you are able to perform or move around in an environment.  
A physical therapist or rehabilitation specialist experienced in this field may administer a functional assessment.
- ☑ Accommodate special needs computer access and use of accessible software and hardware.
- ☑ Determine appropriate computer systems and peripherals and perform general ergonomics assessments.
- ☑ Implement environmental control considerations for home and office.
- ☑ Provide specialized training on common software programs and perform computer repair and trouble shooting.

#### **Questions to ask a potential Assistive Technology professional**

- ☑ Has the AT specialist completed training in a health-related or engineering profession, e. g. Occupational Therapy, Engineering, etc.?
- ☑ Is the AT specialist RESNA certified?

### Others Roles and Responsibilities?

Other individuals may be involved in the VFPS process depending on your needs and goals.

**Comments? Suggestions?**

Email us at [VFPS@eri-wi.org](mailto:VFPS@eri-wi.org)



The ***Vocational Futures Planning and Support*** process was developed by Employment Resources, Inc. (ERI) in Madison, Wisconsin.



## **Resources**

### **PERC Related Materials**

Materials related to this topic can be found on the PERC website - these materials include free trainings, resources, and the latest research.

**[www.percthinkwork.org](http://www.percthinkwork.org)**

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