

# South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department Consumer Services Policy Document

## Policy Name: Postsecondary Training for Degrees

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### 1.0 POLICY STATEMENT:

The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD) supports postsecondary training services at a college or university that:

- A. Fosters viable career paths and life and family sustaining wages and benefits for consumers; and
- B. Increases consumer attainment of recognized postsecondary credentials (e.g. Associates, Bachelors, and graduate degrees, post-degree certificates) that are relevant for the skill needs of employers in the [labor market area](#) in which a consumer resides or intends to reside.

### 2.0 SCOPE / APPLICABILITY:

This policy provides guidelines for the SCVRD's provision of postsecondary training services when these services are necessary for a consumer to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain an agreed upon [employment outcome](#) that is consistent with the consumer's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, career interests, and informed choice. It applies to consumers who seek and participate in training that:

- A. Provides the following recognized postsecondary degrees:
  - (1) Associate degree;
  - (2) Bachelor's degree;
  - (3) Master's degree; and
  - (4) Doctorate degree;And
- B. Is provided by accredited, approved training providers including:
  - (1) State colleges
  - (2) Public universities
  - (3) Technical, junior, and community colleges;
  - (4) Private postsecondary institutions; and
  - (5) Health-related institutions.

### 3.0 STANDARDS:

#### 3.1 Counselor Responsibilities

The VR counselor must:

##### A. Provide Assessments

The VR counselor determines if the consumer has the strengths, resources, abilities and capabilities to succeed in postsecondary degree training in relation to the development of the employment goal as applicable.

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## **B. Informed Choice**

The VR counselor must assist the consumer, using [appropriate communication modes](#), through the informed choice process to explore postsecondary degree training needs and options.

## **C. Counseling and guidance**

At a minimum, the VR counselor must engage the consumer in counseling and guidance:

- (1) In assessment activities;
- (2) During informed choice discussions regarding postsecondary training necessity and options;
- (3) Before the beginning of any training term (e.g., semester, trimester, etc.);
- (4) A minimum of once during each semester or training term depending on the consumer's needs and progress;
- (5) Prior to and during any changes of degree program or courses; and
- (6) At the end of each training term in order to check grades and to plan for the next semester or training period.

## **D. Postsecondary Training on the IPE**

The VR counselor and consumer must include the appropriate postsecondary training service on the IPE when the SCVRD:

- (1) Will provide financial assistance; or
- (2) Will not provide financial assistance, but will help the consumer maintain stability and/or address accommodations during the training.

## **E. Training Progress Evaluation**

At the culmination of each semester or training term, the VR counselor must review the following, as appropriate:

- (1) The consumer's transcript, grade or progress report;
- (2) The consumer's degree plan and the progress made towards earning the credential;
- (3) The financial aid award and tuition bill; and
- (4) All courses that the consumer plans to take in the next semester or training term in order to confirm they are part of the consumer's required coursework.

When a consumer struggles to maintain satisfactory training progress, the VR counselor must ensure that the consumer addresses disability related and other concerns with available supports and accommodations (e.g., [disability resource centers](#) offered by training providers).

### **3.2 *Consumer Responsibilities***

A consumer's successful participation in postsecondary degree training requires the consumer's active involvement in all aspects of SCVRD assistance. This active involvement includes:

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### A. Research and Assessment

A consumer must actively engage in career exploration, labor market research and assessment(s) as necessary to determine if the employment goal and related postsecondary degree training is consistent with the consumer's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities and informed choice.

### B. Provide Required Documentation

The consumer must provide the following documentation to the VR counselor prior to the first academic period and annually thereafter where applicable which the VR counselor maintains in the consumer's electronic case (CMS):

- (1) Acceptance letter from the postsecondary training provider (provided only once or in the case of reinstatement);
- (2) Verification of [application for available financial aid](#);
- (3) The financial award letter, issued by the academic year attended (no later than 30 days prior to the start of the academic year or term if I start mid-year);
- (4) Documentation of any other grant(s), tuition waiver amounts, and non-merit based scholarship(s) awarded;
- (5) An individualized degree plan of study or comparable documentation as provided by the postsecondary training provider;
- (6) A course schedule for each training term (no later than 15 business days prior to the start date of the next training term);
- (7) Progress documentation from the postsecondary training provider for each training period, such as a grade report or transcript (no later than 10 business days after the completion of the latest training term);
- (8) School documentation of added and dropped courses (no later than 5 business days after dropping or adding the course(s));
- (9) Written justification for a change in the major course study (the consumer must discuss a change of major with the VR counselor prior to the change);
- (10) List of required books and supplemental items as indicated on coursework syllabus; and
- (11) Documentation of the certificate of completion (e.g., diploma, certificate, or licensure).

### C. Participation in postsecondary degree training and other VR services

The consumer must demonstrate active participation through:

- (1) Sustaining financial aid eligibility;
- (2) Enrollment in courses and electives that are included in the training provider approved degree or training plan; and
- (3) Participation in other services as included on the IPE (e.g. maintain diabetes or other medical treatment regimens);

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### **D. Maintain Fulltime Status**

The consumer must maintain of a full-time course load as defined by the college, university, or training provider, unless the consumer is:

- (1)** A graduating senior (from a college or university);
- (2)** Attending summer school, mini-semester; or
- (3)** Subject to other documented extenuating circumstances that prevent the consumer from participating in a full-time course load to include:
  - (a)** Disability-specific limitations; and
  - (b)** Working on a full-time basis.

### **E. Maintain Satisfactory Training Progress**

- (1)** The consumer must:
  - (a)** Meet satisfactory training progress requirements, including the cumulative grade point average requirements, as defined by the school for each semester or grading period in order to receive VR funding for subsequent semesters or grading periods; and
  - (b)** Complete the postsecondary degree program within the timeframe allowed by the school as identified on the most current and approved IPE.
- (2)** VR will consider extenuating circumstances in situations when the consumer is unable to make satisfactory progress in order to provide the necessary resources and support based on the consumer's situation.

### **F. Communicate changes in a postsecondary degree training program**

- (1)** The consumer must discuss the following changes with the VR counselor prior to making the change:
  - (a)** A change of major or credentials to include adding a major (e.g. dual major) or a dual B.A./B.S. and Master's degree option; and
  - (b)** A change in college or university.
  - (c)** The VR counselor must document these changes and next steps in case notes.
- (2)** When a consumer makes these changes without discussing the need for and the specifics of potential changes with the VR counselor, the SCVRD is not obligated to provide financial assistance for degree training. The VR counselor and consumer must pursue adjustments to the IPE including postsecondary assistance.

## **3.3 Training Requirements**

The SCVRD may provide financial assistance for degree training at colleges and universities consistent with the following requirements:

### **A. Support the Employment Goal**

The training/education must be required for achievement of the employment goal on an approved, current Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

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### B. Labor Market and Legal Considerations

- (1) [Labor market information \(LMI\)](#) for the [labor market area](#) must support the employment goal (and related postsecondary training) in which a consumer resides or intends to relocate at the successful completion of the Postsecondary Training; and
- (2) The consumer must have no legal impediments that would prevent employment in the career fields related to the employment goal (and related postsecondary training) that the consumer seeks.

### C. Consumer Capabilities

- (1) The VR counselor needs no further assessment to support postsecondary education if the consumer has:
  - (a) Completed college or university training, within four years of adding a postsecondary degree goal to an IPE, supported by C average (2.00 out of 4.00) and no intervening factors are present; or
  - (b) A valid high school diploma supported by a B average (3.00 out of 4.00) and no intervening factors are present.
- (2) If the consumer has a valid high school diploma with less than a B average (less than 3.00 out of 4.00), the VR counselor and consumer must consider a vocational assessment or placement testing to confirm readiness for postsecondary education, as well as reviewing available SAT or ACT scores. Placement testing is available at [technical and community colleges](#) (see <https://www.sctechsystem.edu/colleges.html>).
- (3) If the consumer has a GED, the VR counselor may direct a consumer to vocational assessment or placement testing to confirm readiness for postsecondary education. Placement testing is available at [technical and community colleges](#). See <https://www.sctechsystem.edu/colleges.html>.
- (4) The VR counselor may review the following information in assisting the consumer to make an informed decision about pursuing postsecondary education:
  - (a) Psychological evaluations,
  - (b) School records,
  - (c) College transcripts,
  - (d) SAT and/or ACT scores, and
  - (e) Documentation of acceptance to a four-year college/university.
- (5) When a consumer presents intervening factors and/or has insufficient existing information that would be relevant for review, the VR counselor may guide the consumer to formal assessments that may include vocational assessments and placement testing.
- (6) For academic majors and graduate degrees, especially including higher level mathematics and science coursework, the VR counselor will review and evaluate information such as SAT or GRE scores, transcripts and other findings which support the consumer's ability to succeed in technical level and graduate course work.

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### D. Further Analysis of Consumer Capabilities

#### (1) SCVRD Trial Semester with SCVRD financial assistance

- (a) If review of school achievement, academic background and/or placement testing indicates the consumer may have difficulty succeeding in college degree courses (e.g., if placement testing indicates a need for a semester of developmental courses), the SCVRD may consider financial support for a trial semester or training term.
- (b) The VR counselor will work with the consumer and the academic advisor at the college or university to identify appropriate courses to be taken during the trial semester or training term, on a full-time basis unless disability factors require part-time attendance.
- (c) The SCVRD's financial assistance for a subsequent semester or training term will depend on the consumer's grades and academic eligibility.

#### (2) Trial Semester without SCVRD financial support

- (a) If review of school achievement, academic background and/or placement testing indicates the postsecondary degree training is not a realistic goal for the consumer (e.g., more than two semesters of developmental courses needed), the VR counselor shall provide vocational guidance and counseling to assist in exploring:
  - Employment options that do not require postsecondary education; and
  - Adult Basic Education resources in the community.
- (b) If the consumer still wishes to pursue postsecondary education and demonstrates an ability to succeed, the consumer must attend a trial semester or training term at the consumer's expense. The VR counselor will coordinate with the consumer and the academic advisor of the college or university to identify appropriate courses to be taken during the trial semester or training term, on a full time basis unless disability factors require part-time attendance.
- (c) The SCVRD's financial assistance for a subsequent semester or training term will depend on the consumer's grades and academic eligibility.

### 3.4 Training Provider Approval.

- A. The SCVRD will fund postsecondary degree training only at colleges or universities approved, as appropriate, by the [South Carolina Commission on Higher Education](#) (SCCHE);
- B. If the consumer attends a postsecondary training program outside the state of South Carolina, an equivalent agency's standard in the state where the school is located will be used to determine appropriateness for approval.
- C. All colleges and universities that provide degree outcomes must qualify for federal financial aid so that its students are eligible to participate in Federal Student Financial Assistance programs under Title IV regulations (see the provider [OPE ID](#)).

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### 3.5 Dual Enrollment for High School Students

The SCVRD supports and encourages dual enrollment in college courses for high school students when the courses are necessary for the achievement of the employment outcome as stated in the consumer's IPE.

### 3.6 Financial Aid and Comparable Services and Benefits

- A. The VR counselor must apply all comparable benefits, including Pell Grants, to the cost of postsecondary services before VR funds are used.
- B. The SCVRD provides no exceptions to the use of the Pell Grant as a comparable benefit. If the Pell Grant award is greater than the cost of tuition and fees owed, the VR counselor will apply the remaining funds to the cost of other educational expenses, such as books, supplies, room and board, and transportation, under the terms of the grant.
- C. The VR counselor and consumer must explore comparable benefits during every period of tuition renewal.
- D. The SCVRD does not consider merit based scholarships and funding to be a comparable benefit. Consumers may apply these funds to any training costs as they decide and according to scholarship stipulations.
- E. If a consumer has a [student loan default](#), the consumer must develop a debt repayment plan with the loan servicer and provide this documentation to the counselor.

Once the consumer has moved from default to loan compliance, the SCVRD may assist the consumer.

- F. The SCVRD does not require or encourage consumers to secure a student loan in order to receive SCVRD financial assistance. The choice to take out a student loan is the consumer's decision and does not involve the SCVRD.
- G. On an annual basis, the consumer must submit a [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) at least 60 days prior to the first day of the academic period.

### 3.7 Timeframe Considerations

#### A. Timeframes

(1) The SCVRD will provide degree training for:

- (a) Technical, community or junior college training that leads to an associate degree up to 60 credit hours to be completed in 36 months (3 years);
- (b) Four-year training leading to a bachelor's degree up to 120 credit hours to be completed in 60 months (5 years); and
- (c) Graduate training leading to a master's degree up to 60 credit hours to be completed in 36 months (3 years).

(2) In situations when it is apparent that the consumer will exceed a college and university training timeframe, the VR counselor must secure area supervisor approval before specifying and adding a timeframe extension.

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## **B. Prorated Time Frames**

When a consumer has earned college or university credit before VR sponsorship, the VR counselor must apply the credit to the current degree plan and adjust the required timeframe for completion based on full-time enrollment.

### **3.8 Developmental Courses**

**A.** If a consumer requires developmental courses (also known as remedial courses) to strengthen academic skills, the VR counselor must consider comparable benefits to provide this training, including:

- (1)** Adult basic education programs;
- (2)** Other tutorial programs; and/or
- (3)** Other development courses provided at no cost.

**B.** If comparable benefits are unavailable or unworkable, the SCVRD may pay for developmental courses for a maximum of two semesters or grading periods, unless there are extenuating circumstances where the VR counselor and consumer agree to an extension of these timeframes.

### **3.9 Measurable Skill Gains and Credential Attainment**

The VR counselor must record progress in postsecondary degree training and degree attainment SCVRD's internal Federal Elements application system according to the policies, Measurable Skill Gains and Credential Attainment.

### **3.10 Postsecondary Training Purchases**

#### **A. Payer of Last Resort**

The VR counselor must apply all comparable benefits and required consumer participation in the cost of postsecondary services before VR funds are used.

#### **B. Least cost options**

**(1)** The SCVRD will pay for the least expensive postsecondary degree options offered including related services and goods and elective courses unless there are extenuating circumstances that may warrant an exception to policy.

**(2)** The SCVRD's least cost options includes the VR counselor and consumers review of [bridge programs](#), partnerships between technical colleges and four-year institutions to provide a seamless transition from one institution to the other. This collaboration serves students by providing program support and services which facilitate the transfer process as well as prepare students desiring to matriculate for a successful transition.

#### **C. Private or Out-of-State Colleges or Universities**

**(1)** When a consumer chooses to attend a private (independent) or out-of-state college, technical or state college, university, or health-related institution and a comparable degree is available at public training institution in South Carolina, the SCVRD will pay tuition and fees rates for in-state tuition and fees. The SC Commission on Higher Education (SCCHE) lists in-state tuition and fees in a [Tuition and Fee Schedule](#).



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(2) When a consumer considers postsecondary training program at an out-of-state college or university that is not available at a public institution in South Carolina, the VR counselor must refer the consumer to the [Academic Common Market](#), a program that may help a consumer qualify for in-state tuition to study at an out-of-state institution. The VR counselor must document in a case note the ACS decision concerning the consumer.

### D. Previous training purchases by the consumer

The VR counselor must staff requests to pay for courses previously paid for using VR funds with the Area Supervisor. The VR counselor and supervisor will consider the consumer's circumstances, including the disability-related reasons for the request.

### E. Prepaid Costs

(1) The SCVRD may prepay for the cost of postsecondary training in advance for the first semester or training term only when a consumer's Pell Grant award is pending.

(2) The SCVRD must seek repayment of prepaid costs of postsecondary training when the consumer receives a Pell Grant award.

### F. Academic Probation

The SCVRD will not provide support for tuition, books, housing, transportation or maintenance in the second and additional semesters (or training term) of a consumer's academic probation status.

### G. Repeat and Dropped Courses

The SCVRD will not provide financial assistance for repeated courses if the consumer:

(1) Repeats a course due to a failing grade; or

(2) Withdraws from the course(s) following the designated drop period for the college or university.

### H. Off-campus Housing and Meals

The SCVRD:

(1) May provide support for off-campus housing and meals when the consumer must live off campus when the school has no dormitory space available;

(2) May pay for off-campus housing and meal costs only at an amount equivalent to the cost of a shared dorm and campus meal plan as part of an approved postsecondary degree program during the academic year if the consumer moves from their primary residence.

### I. Application of Financial Need Criteria

The VR counselor must use the *SCVR 4b* for applying financial need criteria for books, course related supplies, general school supplies, maintenance support and transportation services.

## 4.0 PROCEDURES

A. IPE 9999 How to add a service to the IPE - Junior or Technical College;

B. IC 4.993 Setting up postsecondary degree for a consumer;

C. IC 4.995 Changes in Majors and Training Providers (complete procedure).

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## 5.0 CASE DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS:

### 5.1 Documents

The VR counselor must ensure that the consumer's case management record (CMS) includes the following documents related to a postsecondary degree:

- A. Assessments from other agencies, schools, colleges and universities including previous transcripts;
- B. Correspondence from the college or university (e.g. acceptance letters; disability services; and academic standing/probation);
- C. College and university degree plan and transcripts; and
- D. Degree Diplomas.

### 5.2 Case Notes

Case notes must include:

- A. Key conversations with the consumer related to postsecondary degree training including:
  - (1) Assessment activities;
  - (2) Clarifying training necessity;
  - (3) During informed choice discussions;
  - (4) Before the beginning of any training term (e.g., semester, trimester, etc.);
  - (5) Once during each semester or training term supporting the consumer's progress;
  - (6) Prior to and during changes to training program or courses; and
  - (7) At the end of each training term in order to check grades and to plan for the next semester or training period.
- B. Details of the consumer's progress including their major, GPA, the number of credits earned each term, and obtaining the degree.

## 6.0 EXCEPTIONS:

- A. The area supervisor will review and address all requests for exceptions to:
  - (1) Extend the degree training timeframes;
  - (2) Payment of fees not included in the financial aid award letter; and
  - (3) Purchase transcripts.
- B. The Consumer Service Unit may grant exceptions to permit SCVRD financial assistance (at in-state public tuition and fee levels) for a consumer's participation in degree training at a private or Out-of-State College or University when the degree program:
  - (1) Is unavailable at a South Carolina public institution (see [Academic Common Market](#)),
  - (2) Does not meet the consumer's disability related needs, or
  - (3) Is more cost effective than the program at a public institution in South Carolina.

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## 7.0 APPLICABLE FORMS / DOCUMENTS:

SCVRD staff may access the following forms in the SCVRD Documents Hub application:

- A. SCVR 85 Individualized Plan for Employment
- B. SCVR 87 Review or Amendment to IPE
- C. SCVR 88 Postsecondary Degree Training Responsibilities;
- D. SCVRD 135 Financial Aid Assessment
- E. SCVRD 4b Analysis of Financial Needwater
- F. SCVR 88 Postsecondary Degree Training Responsibilities
- G. FSSP 2.30 Rate Setting for Purchased Goods and Services

## 8.0 APPLICABLE REGULATIONS:

- A. [34 CFR §361.48\(b\)\(6\)](#) Scope of vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities
- B. [34 CFR §361.53](#) Comparable services and benefits
- C. [34 CFR §361.54](#) Participation of individuals in cost of services based on financial need;
- D. [RSA-PD-19-03](#) Instructions for the Completion of the Case Service Report (RSA-911) Attachment II, pages 13-15, Element Numbers 130-149

## 9.0 DEFINITIONS / ACRONYMS:

- A. *Consumer* refers to an [eligible individual](#).
- B. *Counselor* or *VR counselor* apply to a vocational rehabilitation counselor employed by the [SCVRD](#).
- C. *Fees*: The cost of attendance that indirectly supports a student's participation in their degree program. These fees include lab fees, technology fees, orientation fees, and health and wellness fees, campus transportation fees (for use of accessible college buses, etc).
- D. *School*: A postsecondary training provider such as state colleges, public universities, technical, junior, and community colleges, private postsecondary institutions; and health-related institutions. See [4 CFR 600.4](#) and [34 CFR 600.5](#).
- C. *Tuition*: The cost of attendance related directly to the student's degree program (courses; credit hours, etc.).
- D. See the appendices, *Glossary* and *Acronyms and Abbreviations* as you read this policy. SCVRD staff may access these appendices in the SCVRD Documents Hub application.

## 10.0 POLICY TRAINING, FEEDBACK, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

- The area supervisor will report staff training for this policy in the form, *SCVR 668 Group Training Roster*.
- Please send your feedback and recommendations to the mailbox, [CServices@scvrd.net](mailto:CServices@scvrd.net).