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Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Service Specifications

The following are requirements for all Vendors providing this service. The MSP shall ensure that these are met by each Vendor/Subcontractor as stipulated per State requirements. Failure to meet the service or performance standards may result in corrective action, up to and including suspension and or removal from the Managed Service Provider's Network of Subcontracted Vendors.

1.0 SERVICE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 Benefits Planning and Counseling Services empowers VR Participants with the knowledge and resources needed to navigate complex financial decisions as VR Participants advance into competitive integrated employment and transition to self-sufficiency. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services aim to remove barriers to employment and promote informed decision-making. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services consist of the following:
1. Benefits Orientation Session(s): Delivers detailed information about disability benefits and work incentives to one (1) or more VR Participants, including but not limited to:
 - a. Public benefits (e.g., Social Security Disability Benefits, Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing benefits, etc.); and
 - b. Work incentives available (e.g., (e.g., Earned Income Exclusion, Student Earned Income Exclusion, Blind Work Expenses, Impairment Related Work Expenses, Plan for Achieving Self-Support, ABLE accounts, 1619(b) Continued Medicaid Eligibility, Trial Work Period, Extended Period of Eligibility, Expedited Reinstatement, etc.).
 2. Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries: A one-on-one (1:1) Benefits Planning and Counseling session that assesses the VR Participant's specific benefits circumstances. The Vendor shall verify the information gathered from the VR Participant and discuss the impact of employment earnings on their benefits.
 - a. After the Individual Benefits Counseling Session, the Vendor shall analyze the VR Participant's public benefits and/or work incentives available in relation to their employment goal and create an Interview Summary.
 3. Technical Assistance: Intended to enhance VR Counselors' capacity and understanding of public benefits and work incentives, Vendors shall provide technical assistance to VR Counselors, as requested and/or coordinated during quarterly meetings, to support informed decision-making as it relates to Benefits Planning and Counseling Services. Technical Assistance includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. Providing expertise to VR Counselors on public benefits and work incentives;
 - b. Providing a response to VR Counselors' inquiries when VR Participants are nearing the start of their employment; and

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- c. Notify VR Counselors of updates to the Social Security Administration rules as requested and/or coordinated during quarterly meetings.
- 4. Marketing and Promotional Services: Utilized to cultivate community awareness of the Benefits Planning and Counseling Services offered by DVR, the Vendor shall develop strategic marketing and promotional material and approaches for transition aged students, potential VR Participants, VR Counselors, and related groups (e.g., teachers, chambers of commerce, etc.) collectively referred to as the “target population”. Marketing and Promotional Services includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Special events with printed and electronic flyers; and
 - b. Multimedia approaches (e.g., Social media such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), YouTube promotional videos, etc.).
- 1.2 Eligibility for individuals to receive this service is determined by the VR Counselor. Referrals for this service are based on the VR Participant’s individual service needs and informed choice in conjunction with their VR Counselor.
- 1.3 This service is not intended to provide any other service not herein specified.

2.0 SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

The Vendor shall:

- 2.1 General Requirements
 - 2.1.1 Provide services that are culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate to the population to be served;
 - 2.1.2 Communicate, either directly or through the assistance of professional services, in modes of communication accessible to those who have limited speaking ability (e.g., Deaf/Hard of Hearing through American Sign Language) or in the native language of VR Participants for whom English is not their primary language and use all other appropriate and effective modes of communications used by VR Participants (e.g., Spanish language, American Sign Language, etc.).
 - 2.1.3 If the Vendor does not have the capacity/capability to communicate directly, the Vendor shall request professional interpreting services and approval from the VR Counselor.
 - 2.1.4 Vendor must coordinate with DVR to provide appropriate supports, including assistive technology devices and services and personal attendant services, to accommodate the rehabilitation needs of the VR Participant during Benefits Planning and Counseling Services.
 - 2.1.5 Make reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, to give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from program, services, and activities; and
 - 2.1.6 Ensure their physical facilities where Benefits Planning and Counseling Services are provided statewide meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.
 - 2.1.7 Provide all services only after receiving a written Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)

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Purchase Order (PO) from the DVR System of Record through the MSP. Verbal Purchase Orders, or any PO's not issued by the DVR System of Record through the MSP, are not valid.

- 2.1.8 Not provide services or make any changes to service level provision (e.g. increase or decrease of units of service or extension of expiration date) without notice of a written DVR Purchase Order through the MSP for the change at least five (5) business days prior to the expiration of the existing DVR Purchase Order. DVR Purchase Orders sent directly to the Vendor from the VR Counselor or other DVR personnel are not valid.
- 2.2 Service Provision – Provide services as follows:
 - 2.2.1 Have a written methodology to provide Benefits Planning and Counseling Services that includes strategies, techniques, and tools to be used to assist VR Participants in removing barriers to employment and to promote informed decision-making.
 - 2.2.2 All Benefits Planning and Counseling Services' material (e.g., Benefits Orientation Session material, templates for Individual Benefits Counseling Sessions, monthly and/or quarterly session schedules for Benefits Orientations and Individual Benefits Counseling Sessions, strategic marketing and promotion services plan, recruitment flyers, promotional videos, etc.) must be approved by DVR prior to being implemented.
 1. Benefits Orientation Session material: Material shall include topics about public benefits and work incentives including but not limited to Social Security Disability Benefits, Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and housing benefits, employer offered benefits, ABLE Account as approved by DVR.
 - 2.2.3 Review and be familiar with the referral information and disability-related issues submitted by the VR Counselor prior to the initial meeting with the VR Client, which may include but is not limited to:
 1. Social Security Administration Consent for Release of Information;
 2. Signed statements detailing whether the VR Participant allows DVR to receive a copy of the documented Social Security Benefits Planning Query (BPQY); and
 3. Confirmation if the VR Participant will allow the VR Counselor to be present during the Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s).
 - 2.2.4 Benefits Orientation Session(s)
 1. Within three (3) business days of receipt of an assignment from the MSP confirming the pre-scheduled Benefits Orientation Session, initiate the first of three (3) required communication attempts via email or phone call to confirm the VR Participant's attendance.
 - a. Benefits Orientation Session(s) may include up to ten (10) VR Participants.

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- b. Each communication attempt must be at least one (1) but no more than three (3) business days apart.
 - c. If the communication attempt was via phone call, send a follow-up email to document the communication attempt.
2. Provide the orientation folder to each VR Participant who has signed up for the Benefits Orientation Session within one (1) business day prior to the Benefits Orientation Session.
 - a. The orientation folder must contain, but is not limited to: the session's PowerPoint slide deck, Social Security handouts on disability benefits and work incentives, calculation tools to estimate change in benefits due to employment earnings, etc.
3. Conduct the Benefits Orientation Session and complete the Sign-in Sheet (Exhibit I3).

2.2.5 Benefits Orientation Session(s) Schedule

1. Submit the Benefits Orientation Session Schedule to the MSP for the upcoming quarter by:
 - a. September 1st for quarter one (1) of the Federal Fiscal Year (October 1-December 31);
 - b. December 1st for quarter two (2) of the Federal Fiscal Year (January 1-March 31);
 - c. March 1st for quarter three (3) of the Federal Fiscal Year (April 1-June 30); and
 - d. June 1st for quarter four (4) of the Federal Fiscal Year (July 1-September 30).
2. Conduct at a minimum, one (1) session per month per DVR Branch.
 - a. For the five (5) DVR Branches, conduct a total of eighty-four (84) Benefits Orientation Sessions per year.
3. Benefits Orientation Session(s) may be offered and conducted virtually, based on the VR Participant's needs, capabilities, and informed choice.
4. Additional monthly sessions may be provided, if approved by DVR.

2.2.6 Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries

1. VR Participants are eligible to participate in an Individual Benefits Counseling Session with an Interview Summary within three (3) months of attending a Benefits Orientation Session without additional DVR approval.
 - a. VR Participants are eligible to participate in one (1) Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries, unless pre-approved by DVR to participate in a second (2nd) Individual Benefits Counseling Session.
2. Pre-Scheduled Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries by VR Counselor:
 - a. Within three (3) business days of receipt of an assignment from the MSP confirming the pre-scheduled Individual Benefits Counseling Session, initiate the first of three (3) required communication attempts via email or phone call to confirm the VR Participant's attendance.

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- b. Each communication attempt must be at least one (1) but no more than three (3) business days apart.
 - c. If the communication attempt was via phone call, send a follow-up email to document the communication attempt.
 - 3. Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries initiated by the Vendor:
 - a. Within one (1) business day of completing the Benefits Orientation Session, initiate the first of three (3) required communication attempts via email or phone call to offer a one-on-one (1:1) Individual Benefits Counseling Session with Interview Summary to the VR Participant.
 - b. Each communication attempt must be at least one (1) but no more than three (3) business days apart.
 - c. If the communication attempt was via phone call, send a follow-up email to document the communication attempt.
 - 4. During the Individual Benefits Counseling Session, the Vendor will assess the VR Participant's specific benefits scenario, verify the information gathered, analyze the VR Participant's public benefits in relation to their employment goal, and discuss the impact of employment earnings on the VR Participant's individual benefits.
 - 5. Within ten (10) business days of completing the Individual Benefits Counseling Session, the Vendor will provide the completed applicable Interview Summary (Exhibits I4a-c), documenting the Interview Summary, to the VR Participant.
 - a. If VR Participant has provided the Vendor with a signed statement allowing DVR to receive a copy of the documented Interview Summary, submit the completed Interview Summary within five (5) business days of completing the Benefits Counseling Session.
 - b. For a VR Participant who attends a second (2nd) pre-approved Individual Benefits Counseling Session: a new Interview Summary is only required if there are changes to the VR Participant's benefits (including but not limited to annual adjustments) or if the previous Interview Summary was completed outside of one (1) year.
- 2.2.7 Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries Schedule
- 1. Submit the Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries Schedule to the MSP for the upcoming quarter by:
 - a. September 1st for quarter one (1) of the Federal Fiscal Year (October 1-December 31);
 - b. December 1st for quarter two (2) of the Federal Fiscal Year (January 1-March 31);
 - c. March 1st for quarter three (3) of the Federal Fiscal Year (April 1-June 30); and
 - d. June 1st for quarter four (4) of the Federal Fiscal Year (July 1-September 30).
 - 2. Conduct at a minimum, three (3) sessions per month per DVR Branch.

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- a. For the five (5) DVR Branches, conduct a total of two hundred fifty-two (252) Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries per year.

3. Individual Benefits Counseling Session(s) with Interview Summaries may be offered and conducted virtually, based on the VR Participant's needs, capabilities, and informed choice.

2.2.8 Technical Assistance

1. To support informed decision making as it relates to Benefits Planning, provide Technical Assistance to VR Staff, as applicable and/or as requested.
 - a. Technical Assistance may be requested by VR Staff for follow-up questions pertaining to a VR Participant's completed Interview Summary.
 - b. Technical Assistance may be provided to educate VR Staff on updates to the Social Security rules and/or to educate VR Staff on public benefits and work incentives.

2.2.9 Marketing and Promotional Service

1. Develop a strategic Marketing and Promotional Services Plan that includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. Special events;
 - b. Special activities;
 - c. Multimedia approaches; and
 - d. Marketing and promotional material(s).
2. Marketing and promotional(s) materials must identify DVR as the funder of the services and be approved by DVR prior to being implemented.
3. Approved marketing and promotional material(s) must be available to use or repackage for DVR to place the content on their website(s), social media account(s), and allow VR Staff to share directly with VR Participants.
4. DVR reserves the right to brand any and all materials developed under these Service Specifications and reserves unlimited use of approved marketing and promotional material(s).

2.3 Service Provider (Vendor) Qualification Requirements

- 2.3.1 Utilize personnel or subcontractors who supervise the service, approve admission and progress reports, and conduct direct participant service provision who meet the following documented criteria:
 1. Hold a certification through Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) as a Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC); or
 2. Hold a certification through Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) as a Community Partner Work Incentive Coordinator (CPWIC); or
 3. Hold a certification through Cornell University as a Work Incentives Practitioner (WIP).

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- 2.3.2 Utilize personnel or subcontractors who develop strategic marketing and promotional services, meet the following documented criteria, and who must be under the direction and supervision of personnel who meet the criteria in 2.3.1:
1. Have a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D) with documentation of one (1) year of full-time employment working in a related field of marketing and promotional services.
- 2.4 Administrative Requirements
- 2.4.1 Establish and maintain a VR Participant case file that includes:
1. Assignment of service(s) to the VR Participant, including referral information;
 2. DVR Purchase Order(s);
 3. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Intake Form (Exhibit I1);
 4. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Service Provision & Communication Log (Exhibit I2);
 5. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Sign-In Sheet (Exhibit I3);
 6. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Dual Interview Summary (Exhibit I4a);
 7. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services SSDI Interview Summary (Exhibit I4b);
 8. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services SSI Interview Summary (Exhibit I4c);
 9. A record of the Vendor's personnel time spent providing service;
 10. Supporting documents for all costs incurred for the service provision; and
 11. Other documents relevant to the Service Specifications.
- 2.4.2 Have a Quality Management Plan (QMP) in order to continuously monitor the delivery of services and to ensure that the service provision meets the VR Participant's objectives to include the following:
1. Incident management, corrective action and preventions;
 2. Complaints and grievances;
 3. Monitoring and evaluation of the service provision, e.g., measurement of outcomes as it relates to the VR Participant's objectives, and the improvement of the quality of services; and
 4. Routine monitoring of its personnel and subcontractors to ensure the effectiveness of the relationship between the VR Participant and direct service personnel.
- 2.4.3 Adhere to the Vendor Code of Conduct (Exhibit C).
- 2.4.4 Adhere to the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act and its implementing regulations 34 CFR 361.51 "Standards for facilities and providers of services".

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3.0 VENDOR PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

- 3.1 Service Outcome: Provide Benefits Planning and Counseling Services to empower VR Participants to make informed decisions when navigating federal and state assistance programs as the VR Participant advances into competitive integrated employment, transitioning to self-sufficiency.
- 3.2 Performance Standards. The Vendor shall meet the following minimum acceptable performance standards during the quarter:
 - 3.2.1 **Performance Standard #1** - At a minimum, ninety-five percent (95%) of the following sessions shall be offered, and if applicable, conducted monthly:
 - 1. One (1) Benefits Orientation Session per DVR Office location; and
 - 2. Three (3) Individual Benefits Counseling Sessions per DVR Office location.
 - 3.2.3 **Performance Standard #2** - The Vendor will issue a complete and accurate Interview Summary (Exhibit I**) for ninety-five percent (95%) of VR Participants for which purchase orders are received within ten (10) business days of completing their Individual Benefits Counseling Session.
 - 3.2.4 **Performance Standard #3** - The Vendor shall submit no less than ninety percent (90%) of their initial Reporting Packets completely and accurately, as defined by the MSP, by the established timelines identified within these Service Specifications.
- 3.3 The MSP and DVR will analyze the Vendor's progress in achieving the overall minimum acceptable service standards.
 - 3.3.1 Information for evaluating the Vendor's effectiveness and performance will be gathered from the MSP, Vendor's monthly reports, and the DVR case management System of Record.
 - 3.3.2 The results of the data analysis may be shared with VR Participants and VR Counselors as part of informed choice in selecting the services among available Vendors.

4.0 PAYMENT

- 4.1 Payment rates are all inclusive, which means they include the Vendor's staff time, administrative cost, research, report preparation, marketing and promotional services, travel time and mileage, time lost due to VR Participant missed appointment ("no shows"), and any other costs associated with the service provision. DVR will not pay for these costs separately.
- 4.2 Payment Unit(s)
 - 4.2.1 One (1) Benefits Orientation Session where one (1) or more VR Participant attended.
 - 4.2.2 One (1) Individual Benefits Counseling Session with Interview Summary for one (1) individual VR Participant.

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1. The Payment Unit is one (1) Hour, which equals sixty (60) minutes of actual time spent providing an Individual Benefits Counseling Session with Interview Summary for one (1) VR Participant. A partial hour may be billed in increments of a quarter of an hour (15 minutes). The Vendor may round the total time spent with the VR Participant to the nearest quarter of an hour (15 minutes). Example: 22 hours and 15 minutes = 22.25 hours; 22 hours and 19 minutes = 22.25 hours; 22 hours and 26 minutes = 22.5 hours; 22 hours and 30 minutes = 22.5 hours; 22 hours and 45 minutes = 22.75 hours.

4.2.3 Technical Assistance provided to VR Staff:

1. The Payment Unit is one (1) Hour, which equals sixty (60) minutes of actual time spent providing Technical Assistance to VR Staff. A partial hour may be billed in increments of a half hour (30 minutes). The Vendor may round the total time spent with VR Staff to the nearest half hour (30 minutes). Example: 22 hours and 20 minutes = 22.50 hours; 22 hours and 26 minutes = 22.5 hours; 22 hours and 30 minutes = 22.5 hours; 22 hours and 40 minutes = 22.50 hours.

5.0 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Vendor shall report on the service provision as follows:

- 5.1 Submit to the MSP completely and accurately as defined by the MSP one (1) PDF Reporting Packet through the MSP's program for each individual VR Participant and/or Purchase Order within fifteen (15) calendar days following the end of each calendar month in which Benefits Planning and Counseling Services were provided.
 - 5.1.1 The Reporting Packet shall include the following reports, as applicable, for each VR Participant who received this service during a reporting period:
 1. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Intake Form (Exhibit I1);
 2. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Service Provision & Communication Log (Exhibit I2);
 3. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Sign-In Sheet (Exhibit I3);
 4. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services Dual Interview Summary (Exhibit I4a);
 5. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services SSDI Interview Summary (Exhibit I4b);
 6. Benefits Planning and Counseling Services SSI Interview Summary (Exhibit I4c).
 - 5.1.2 Incomplete or inaccurate Reporting Packets, report(s) or supporting document(s), will not be processed and will be returned to the Vendor. The Vendor will be responsible to submit a corrected request and/or a corrected reporting packet.
 - 5.1.3 Reporting Packets submitted with multiple PDF's will not be processed and will be returned to the Vendor. Vendor is responsible for submitting one (1) PDF Reporting Packet completely and accurately through the MSP's program for each individual VR Participant and/or Purchase Order.

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- 5.2 Submit to the MSP as appropriate:
 - 5.2.1 Verification of the qualifications of staff, using Exhibit I5, Affirmation of Qualifications.
 - 5.2.2 Formal written notification within five (5) business days of issuance of any actions from any of the applicable certifying entities, licensing, regulatory boards, and/or agencies in the State where the VR Participant is residing which may result in disciplinary action taken on their current licensure or certification.
 - 5.2.3 Current Certificates of Insurance, no later than ten (10) days following the expiration of the existing Certificate of Insurance.
- 5.3 Submit to the MSP and the referring VR Counselor:
 - 5.3.1 A notification of any unusual incident verbally within one (1) business day of the occurrence, followed by a thorough written report of the unusual incident within three (3) business days of the occurrence.

Unusual incidents include, but are not limited to:

 - 1. Death of a VR Participant;
 - 2. Alleged neglect, abuse, mistreatment or exploitation of a VR Participant (by anyone);
 - 3. Disappearance of a VR Participant. The Vendor shall report a missing VR Participant to law enforcement officials and the VR Counselor as soon as the Vendor suspects that the VR Participant may be missing;
 - 4. Suicide attempt(s) by the VR Participant;
 - 5. Sexual abuse against a VR Participant, including consensual sexual activity;
 - 6. Inappropriate sexual behavior toward a VR Participant;
 - 7. Any threat to the physical or emotional well-being of an individual or Vendor's staff member by a VR Participant; and
 - 8. Any unexplained VR Participant absence.
 - 5.3.2 Notification of the loss of or damage to equipment or property in writing, with an explanation of the circumstances of the loss or damage, within three (3) business days following the occurrence.
- 5.4 Other Reports
 - 5.4.1 DVR reserves the right to require that the Vendor submit additional or revised reports related to the service provision and performance.
 - 5.4.2 Reporting requirements, methods and/or formats (Exhibits, including Service Specifications) may be changed without amendment.
 - 5.4.3 The Vendor will be notified in writing about any change in reporting forms through the Managed Service Provision Contractor.