

**INFORMED CHOICE**  
**BEST PRACTICE REFERENCE FOR COUNSELORS**  
**April 2001 - Update**

North Dakota Vocational Rehabilitation believes that informed choice is an intrinsic function of good vocational rehabilitation counseling, based on a partnership between the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and client. Informed choice is practiced through on-going discussion, exploration and analysis of all available options.

Informed choice begins during the initial visit and continues through the **assessment** phase, the selection of the **vocational goal**, on-going assessments and evaluations, and the identification and **selection of services and providers** through closure of the case. The practice of informed choice supports sound decision-making.

The following pages contain examples of the discussion, the topics and decision points that occur during the rehabilitation process. They are to be used as a menu of tools and activities that assist the client and counselor to make maximum use of opportunities for informed client choice.

The points covered are by no means all inclusive and should not be considered as such. This document is intended to be used as a best practice reference. To provide additional information the following attachments have been included:

- *Informed Choice Counselor Role and Responsibilities*<sup>1</sup> (Attachment 1)
- *Informed Choice Consumer Roles and Responsibilities*<sup>2</sup> (Attachment 2),
- *Scope of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Individuals with Disabilities*<sup>3</sup> (Attachment 3), and
- *Achieving Reasonable Choices: Balancing the Rights and Responsibilities of Consumers with those of Rehabilitation Counselors*<sup>4</sup>, a research paper (Attachment 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Operationalizing Consumer Decision Making and Choice in the VR Process. March 1995, Research and Training Center, University of Wisconsin-Stout Menomonie, Wisconsin

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> 34 CFR 361.48

<sup>4</sup> Rehabilitation Education. Vol. 6, pp 195-205, 1992 National Council on Rehabilitation Education

**ASSESSMENT**

- Explore the client's decision-making capacities, ability to self-advocate, their self-assessment and job-seeking skills.
- With the client, choose the appropriate assessment tools. (i.e. functional assessments, formal evaluations, work (career) exploration, or others.)
- Explore how familiar the client is with the career planning process.
- Discuss disclosure of information and confidentiality requirements.
- Identify what information is currently available from the client or other agencies.
- Determine and discuss the purpose of assessments.
- Agree who will make the referral for the assessment, the counselor, the client, someone else?
- Discuss the impact of work/training programs on the client's current eligibility for other benefit programs, the "benefits cliff", impact of welfare reform, and so on.
- Continue to assess the need for assistive technology with the client throughout the rehabilitation process.
- Consider and discuss how cultural concerns and values may factor into the rehabilitation plan.

## **VOCATIONAL GOAL**

- Explore, with the client, what the rehabilitation needs are.
  
- Discuss with the client, are the goals realistic & attainable, when considering:
  - interests
  - abilities
  - values
  - physical limitations
  - capabilities
  
- Discuss with the client:
  - Is relocation required and/or desired?
  - What impact will that have on development of a vocational goal?
  
- What does the client value in work?
  - earnings
  - fringe benefits
  - flexibility
  - hours
  - variety of duties
  - work environment: for example; quiet, outdoors, clean
  
- Other points to be considered and discussed:
  - job availability
  - market limitations
  - potential incomes
  - job requirements
  
- Have related occupational and career clusters been identified?

## **SERVICES & SERVICE PROVIDERS**

- Is there a clear and mutual understanding of the purpose of the IPE?
- Does the client have a good understanding of the services VR can offer them to assist in achieving their vocational goal? (Consider providing the client with information regarding the Scope of VR Services. Sec. 103 of the Act or 34 CFR 361.48 of the VR regulations)
- Have responsibilities—client, counselor, other agency/program—for service implementation, including placement activities, been clearly defined?
- Have the costs, duration, accessibility (is there a waiting list?), and other factors relating to the provision of services been discussed?
- Does the client understand the admission criteria for different service providers?
- Have you discussed the available information regarding provider performance? (i.e. wages, hours worked, types of jobs secured, placement rates, speed of placement, other pertinent factors)
- Does the client have information regarding the qualifications of providers (licensure, accreditation, and so on)?
- If there is information concerning consumer satisfaction regarding a service provider, has the client been provided this information?
- Is the client aware of the different programs/providers that offer similar services and where they are located?
- Does the client have knowledge of the type of funding and similar benefits that are available in addition to vocational rehabilitation funding? (comparable benefits)

***Attachment 1***

**Informed Choice Counselor Role and Responsibilities**

- To use his/her valuable counseling skills to encourage and support the reluctant, hesitant, insecure, doubtful, and defeated consumer to become a partner.
- To make certain the consumer is aware of all relevant options
- To share responsibility for identifying options with the consumer - "*partnership at work.*"
- To be aware of the consumer's dream - to seek it out if it's not apparent.
- To involve the parent if the consumer is a minor, or a legal guardian if the consumer has one, or any other person selected by the consumer in the choice process.
- To recognize that, in a partnership, the consumer has an equal responsibility to do the "*research*" necessary to identify and analyze options.
- To make certain the consumer is aware of the implication of each option.
- To consider options from the consumer's point of view.
- To understand choices are not "*informed*" choices unless they are based on the pool of options remaining after the possibilities have been identified, considered, and the less preferable options discarded by the consumer.
- To give the consumer the benefit of the doubt when things are "*iffy.*"
- To be sure the choices consumers make are truly their choices; that choices have not actually been made for them; or that consumers have not been consciously or unconsciously conditioned by a family member, guardian, teacher, or other well-meaning individual.

**Informed Choice Counselor Role and Responsibilities  
(Continued)**

- To allow and encourage the consumer to stretch, to take some risks, to actualize potential.
- To avoid letting severity of disability stand in the way of believing the consumer has choices and the choosing should still be the consumer's, and to remember that there are accommodations and high-tech solutions to many difficult obstacles and it may be only a matter of seeking them out.
- To include the effect of wages on benefits now being received as they assist consumers in making informed choices.
- To advocate on behalf of the consumer when needed to ensure access to other programs and resources.
- To remember that every consumer is different and that individuals who share the same characteristics, whether gender, race, age, culture, or disability, are unique and should not be stereotyped.
- To say "no" when "no" is needed and to help the consumer understand that the universe of choices is not infinite. It is important for the consumer to understand that funds, availability of resources, danger to self or others, legalities, or the job market may limit some choices.
- To always be learning and growing so that both consumers and counselors bring state-of-the-art knowledge to their role in partnerships.
- To share and to dare and to care.

**Informed Choice: Consumer Role and Responsibilities**

- To be an active participant in his/her own rehabilitation - *a true partnership* of skilled counselor and informed consumer.
- To be open to visions of what is possible in lifelong careers, rather than settling for less.
- To be trained in problem solving by counselors who *encourage* them to make informed choices among agreed upon options.
- To choose to include family, advocates, or service providers in identifying options.
- To be a self-advocate for access and equity in services and for culturally sensitive counseling, language, and information.
- To be an active partner in helping identify options.
- To educate counselors about his/her talents, strengths, values, resources, concerns, and career dreams as starting points to explore.
- To identify his/her own barriers in making informed choices.
- To learn to offset barriers through technology, natural supports, and reasonable accommodations.
- To identify and explore a range of career options.
- To prioritize viable options based on what is best for him/her.
- To make informed career choices consistent with identified strengths, resources, and abilities.

**Informed Choice: Consumer Role and Responsibilities  
(Continued)**

- To understand that he/she can disagree with his/her counselor and present additional information.
- To learn the skills needed to keep and advance in employment on his/her own in the future without the counselor.
- To take ownership of the decisions once they are made.
- To learn to become an active partner if not already prepared to be one.
- To recognize that the universe of choices is not infinite and that the counselor may need to say "no."