



Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Vocational Rehabilitation - Priority for Services

As of January 8, 2019

What is MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation program?

- MRC's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program helps people with physical, intellectual, and mental disabilities get and keep a job. VR services may include assistive technology, translation services, or education and job counseling based on an individual's interests and skills.

How do you enroll?

- As of January 8, 2019, MRC prioritizes vocational rehabilitation services for people with the "most significant disabilities." The federal term for this process is Order of Selection; within MRC, we refer to this process as Priority for Services. VR applicants are placed into categories of priority based on how their disability impacts their ability to work.

How does MRC determine an individual's "ability to work?"

- An individual's ability to work will be evaluated by specially-trained VR counselors who will review if an individual has a physical, intellectual, or mental disability that is a barrier to employment in one or more of the following seven areas:
 - Communication
 - Mobility
 - Self-direction
 - Work tolerance
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Self-care
 - Work skills

What are the three categories I could be placed in?

- MRC is serving individuals with the most significant disabilities first. Individuals will be placed in one of three categories based upon how many barriers to employment they possess. These categories include:
 - **Priority 1:** An individual is considered to have a **most significant disability** if there are substantial barriers in four or more of the seven areas described above.
 - **Priority 2:** An individual is considered to have a **significant disability** if there are substantial barriers in two or three of the seven areas described above.
 - **Priority 3:** An individual is considered to have a **disability** if there are substantial barriers in up to one of the seven areas described above.

What if I am currently receiving VR services from MRC?

- Nothing will change and your services will not be impacted.

How will I be notified?

- Individuals will receive a letter that includes their priority category assignment and if the priority category is currently open or closed.
 - **If a category is open:** Individuals can begin receiving services immediately.
 - **If a category is closed:** Services will not be immediately available. Individuals will be placed on a waiting list according to their application date.

Are all categories open?

- As of January 8, 2019, not all categories will be open because this is a federal program with limited resources. Individuals in a closed category will not receive any vocational services until their category is opened. A waiting list will be created in order of MRC VR application date. MRC staff will notify individuals when their priority category is open and they are eligible to receive VR services. Updates about open and closed categories will be provided monthly on the [MRC website](#).

Are there resources available to individuals in a closed category to help them identify and secure work?

- Individuals can attend regularly scheduled resource information sessions hosted by VR counselors in area MRC offices to learn about other available supports including [MassHire Career Centers](#), Independent Living Centers, or other community organizations. More information on statewide resources is available on the [MRC website](#).

What if I don't agree with my category assignment?

- Priority category assignments can be re-evaluated when new or additional information becomes available about how an individual's disability impacts their ability to work. This may include documentation that your condition has progressed or that you have received additional medical documentation that would support a re-evaluation.
- You can appeal a category assignment. Appeal instructions are [posted online](#) and will be provided in your eligibility letter. If you would like assistance with the appeal process, you may contact the MRC Ombudsperson at 617-204-3600 or 800-245-6543.

What if I am currently employed as a result of receiving VR services and lose/or at risk of losing my job? Is it possible that I will be reassigned under a new category?

- If you have been successfully employed and are at risk of losing your job due to your disability, you may be able to receive services from MRC to support you in keeping your job. This is known as job retention. If you receive only job retention services, you will not be subject to Priority for Services. Job retention services are dependent on the availability of federal funds.
- If you have been successfully employed and your case has been closed (as a result of being employed for at least 90 days), you will need to go through the Priority for Services process again. At that time, your priority category may change depending on whether or not your barriers to employment have shifted.

Why does MRC have a Priority for Services process?

- Federal funding challenges are a known obstacle for VR programs across the country, including MA. Thirty-five states, including NH, VT, RI, CT and ME, have a similar processes in place. The process aligns with MRC's goal of ensuring a sustainable vocational rehabilitation program that assists individuals with disabilities live and work independently.

Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns about my VR services?

- MRC is here to answer your questions. Please contact the MRC Ombudsperson at 617-204-3600 or call 800-245-6543.

Students and Young Adults**Does Priority for Services apply to students, transition age youth, and young adults?**

- Yes, this process applies to everyone.

What are pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS)?

- Pre-employment transition services are broken down into 5 categories: job exploration counseling, work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, counseling in post-secondary education and instruction in self-advocacy. Pre-ETS are available to any student with a disability aged 14-21 (up to their 22nd birthday). Students must have a documented disability and be enrolled in high school or postsecondary education/training. It is recommended that students receive at least one pre-employment transition service prior to applying to the VR program.

Can I receive pre-employment services without applying to the MRC VR program?

- Yes. Students can connect directly to a community pre-ETS provider to access 1 or more of the 5 pre-ETS services.

What if I am currently receiving pre-ETS and am deemed eligible for the VR program?

- Continuation of services depends on *when* the student began receiving services. If a student received at least one pre-ETS services before being deemed eligible for VR and is placed on a waitlist for a closed category, the student may continue receiving those services while on the waitlist.

Can I receive pre-employment services after I am deemed eligible for the VR program?

- If a student does not receive pre-ETS services before being deemed eligible for VR services and is placed on a waitlist in a closed category, they cannot receive pre-ETS services until they are removed from the waitlist and have developed an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/mrc-priority-for-services>