

Assistive Technology

June 2016

Purpose:

To provide staff with information on assistive technology (AT) and how it can be used throughout the DVR case process to assist consumers towards achieving their employment goals.

Rationale:

Assistive technology is sometimes called rehabilitation technology but in recent years has been more frequently described as assistive technology or AT. AT promotes greater independence by helping consumers to complete tasks that they may have been unable to complete by modification of the environment, use of devices or improved methods achieved through specialized training. AT services, accommodations and devices are intended to provide help with disability related needs. If a consumer has a need at any time during the VR process for AT to assist in the participation of services or towards achieving their IPE goal, AT services should be explored and provided as needed.

Information Covered:

- [Best Practice Suggestions](#)
- [Referrals](#)
- [Specialized Areas](#)
- [Service Provider Types](#)
- [Purchasing](#)
- [Reports](#)
- [Training](#)
- [Follow-Up](#)
- [Definitions](#)
- [Resources](#)

Best Practice Suggestions

- Assistive Technology needs should be addressed as early in the process as possible so that the options are understood to inform the rest of the process.
- When referring a consumer for an assistive technology assessment, the purpose for the referral, the employment or training goals and specific tasks to be addressed should be provided.
- Seek out professionals familiar with many types, varieties, and brands of technology.
- Some assistive technology service providers may provide assessments and recommend specific equipment they are selling without regard to other types of equipment and brands that may better suit the needs of the consumer. This would be an example of a non-neutral provider.

- Neutral providers do not typically sell equipment or represent a specific company or brand of equipment. Some neutral providers do sell equipment but represent a variety of brands and are free to recommend devices that meet the consumer need.
- When at all possible it is recommended that a neutral provider be selected.
- Assessments should recommend technology based on the specific need of the consumer and the functionality of the item.
- The assessment results and recommendations should be reviewed together with the consumer, DVR staff, and service providers prior to purchase.
- Feel free to consult with your local AsTech team member for additional information on services and accommodation needs of consumers.

Referrals

The need for and utilization of assistive technology must be considered throughout the DVR process. Times when assistive technology may be needed and appropriate would include:

- **During the assessment for determining eligibility** (e.g., evaluator providing accommodations during an assessment, renting assistive technology items allowing consumer to participate in assessment for determining eligibility, etc.)
- **Assessment of VR needs** (may be repeated based on need.)
- **Development of the IPE**
- **During IPE Services**
- **Annual reviews of ineligibility decisions**
- **Annual review of extended employment**
- **Post-employment services**

Specialized Areas

There are several different types of specialized assessments that may need to be used to provide a full picture of a consumer's needs. These can be used in combination as needed.

Communication accommodation - The consumer requires a disability related adaptation or device to communicate i.e.; communication board, or computerized speech device.

Computer based accommodation - The consumer requires a disability related adaptation to use a computer, or the computer hardware/software itself is the accommodation.

Existing business accommodation - The consumer requires a disability related accommodation to obtain, maintain or advance in employment within an existing business.

Hearing accommodation - The consumer requires a disability related adaptation or device(s) to accommodate a hearing loss that affects specific work tasks.

Low Vision accommodation - The consumer requires a disability related adaptation or device(s) to accommodate a vision loss that affects specific work tasks.

Mobile Devices - The consumer requires a disability related adaptation or mobile device to accommodate a specific work task i.e.; phone, tablets or applications.

Mobility accommodation - The consumer requires devices or modification related to seating, ergonomics or movement within the workplace.

Vehicle modification - The consumer requires modifications to a vehicle and the vehicle is required to reach the employment goal.

Workplace accommodation - The consumer requires a disability related adaptation to the workplace environment/work tasks or device(s) to effectively complete tasks in the workplace.

Service Provider Roles

There are a number of different types of providers for assistive technology devices and services. These include medical equipment dealers, manufacturer representatives, private sales agents or non-profit agencies. The provider that is selected by the consumer for an assessment may not be the same provider for devices or for training. It is important to understand the role of an Assistive Technology provider in these three different scenarios:

Assessment-This type of provider completes assessments to determine what accommodations, devices or training is recommended specific to the consumer and employment goal.

Device Purchase-This type of provider sells and may repair recommended devices. These devices may include specialized and custom equipment or "off the shelf" devices to be used to provide an accommodation for the consumer.

Training-This type of provider completes recommended training for a consumer to reach specified levels of proficiency in use of a device or application of an accommodation.

General Qualifications of Providers

Service providers must have sound knowledge of anatomy, physiology, disabling conditions and disease processes relevant to the technical aspects of the equipment they provide. In order to gain and maintain this knowledge, service providers will regularly engage in self-guided study and/or attend courses, seminars, trade shows, and other continuing education activities. *Sound knowledge* can be defined as having the educational background, professional or personal experience or a combination thereof to provide comprehensive information and services to the consumer. This may be in the form of formal education, professional certification or in-depth training by a product manufacturer. Providers may have a credential called an Assistive Technology Professional Certificate. This credential is considered a hallmark of a trained professional in the provision of assistive technology services.

General Responsibilities of Assistive Technology Providers

- Gather comprehensive background information about the individual's disability, functional limits and needs, as well as the individual's goals related to assistive technology.
- Explain the range of options that could meet the needs of the consumer, including free technology, no-tech to high tech options, commercially available technology or custom-fabricated technology.
- Be transparent: scope of products, services and manufacturer relationships.
- Remain objective when providing comparisons of the technology options.
- Use appropriate tools and measurements to assure proper fit and function of the equipment.
- Provide delivery, fitting and adjustment of equipment.
- Provide complete instruction of proper use.
- Provide maintenance and repair information, including who can provide these services and who pays for these services.
- Provide information about when the consumer may be eligible for an equipment update from a funding source, where applicable.

Purchasing

AT services are exempt from comparable benefits however, DVR purchasing policies still apply (e.g., price comparisons). [DVR Rate of Payment Determination Chart.](#)

Staff should take the time to ensure that assistive technology items are identified and coded properly. Whether a specific item or service is considered assistive technology depends upon the purpose of the item. This identification is important because assistive technology services are exempt from comparable benefits. However, if there is a funding resource that is readily available from a different source that it can be accessed, DVR can ask the consumer to use the resource if there will not be an undue delay in the service. In some cases, a cost share may be appropriate and arranged with the consumer, a local resource or the employer.

DVR should assist providing resources, and expertise in the coordination of AT services and use of devices when another entity is responsible for providing an AT service or device under other laws (i.e., IDEA, or ADA). This type of situation may occur when a consumer is still in high school or when a consumer is working.

The purpose of the service needs to be determined on an individual basis. In one case, a particular item that is purchased may be for the purpose of assistive technology and in another case, the same item may be purchased but not be for the purpose of assistive technology. Entire services may be considered assistive technology while, with others, only part of the service may be considered assistive technology. Example: Modified computer with adaptive software; the software would be assistive technology and the computer is work related equipment that may be provided by the employing business.

Current coding information can be obtained using the [DVR Coding Manual](#).

For individuals who own an existing business, DVR does not purchase, provide maintenance, repair or replace equipment customary for the size and scope of a business. These are considered standard expenses and the cost of doing business. The business owner/consumer should plan for these in order to maintain their business. If an item cannot be adapted or modified and a new item or piece of equipment is recommended for purchase with the adaption or modification, DVR will only be responsible for the adaption or modification portion and the business owner/consumer will be responsible for the remainder. The business owner/consumer can trade in equipment to assist with defraying costs.

DVR may have financial participation in purchase of assistive technology services and equipment identified as necessary for the consumer to perform the essential functions of a job.

DVR cannot participate in purchase of services or equipment identified for business use only.

[DVR Fee Schedule](#)

Reports

Assessment reports should include the information required in available technical specifications or other published guidelines. In general, they should answer questions related to the disability and the work related task or tasks that require modification. The report should explain the reasons/need for each accommodation. Solutions should be provided that include a variety of approaches and consider the work or training environment.

Training reports should provide specific training targets, approaches to be used, progress and anticipated timeframes for completion. These reports should provide DVR and the consumer with information about expectations and responsibilities for the trainer and DVR consumer.

Training

In some cases, AT training is recommended for a consumer to learn how to use a specific device or devices or to learn alternative accommodation strategies as part of implementing assistive technology. This type of training should be time limited, include learning targets and outline a level of proficiency in use of the accommodation. It may be necessary for the VRC to monitor training approaches to determine if progress is being made and if the training should continue, end or an alternate process should be identified or outlined. Sometimes acquisition of skills to use accommodations can be challenging for consumers. Prior to authorization of training, there should be some discussion of the expected timeframes and ongoing time commitments necessary to reach proficiency. It would be best practice to include these types of timelines and progress measures in an IPE.

Follow-Up

Devices upon purchase become the property of the consumer. There should be discussion and some planning to address anticipated need for follow-up, maintenance, repair, equipment upgrades, replacement and how consumable supplies should be obtained, if needed.

DVR Responsibilities

DVR can be a great resource to educate employers on assistive technology, accommodations, and disabilities. Staff are encouraged to coordinate services and provide technical assistance to employers on modifications and/or architectural accessibility as a means of obtaining, maintaining, or advancing in employment for people with disabilities. It may be helpful to provide some resources or services related to budgeting, saving or financial literacy to consumers receiving AT services and/or equipment.

Once services under VR end and the case is closed, responsibility for the assistive technology falls to the employer or individual as applicable by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Any questions or concerns related to an employer's obligation can be directed to the Department of Justice (DOJ) or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Staff should discuss with consumers the availability of post-employment services as well as their ability to reapply for services as needed. Assistive Technology services can be provided under post employment.

Service Provider Responsibilities

- Provide clear information about their ability to provide long-term service and support for equipment, whether at the service provider or manufacturer level.
- Maintain knowledgeable and qualified staff to provide training.
- Maintain an adequate inventory of replacement parts in order to provide timely service or repair, if applicable.
- Provide a loaner device, if available, or assist with location of a loaner device if repairs are needed.
- Provide a written estimate of cost and time required for repair work, if applicable.
- Provide clear information about the equipment warranties and response times for services.
- Maintain adequate levels of professional liability insurance and/or product liability insurance, if appropriate.

Definitions

Accommodation-A change or adjustment to a job (including reassignment of duties), workspace (i.e., an ergonomic chair or workstation) or use of an item necessary to perform a job (i.e., steps on a tractor). An accommodation is further defined as a disability related item or service required by the worker not typically required by others doing the same job and necessary due to a limitation caused by the disability.

Assistive Technology- defined as technology designed to be utilized in an assistive technology device or assistive technology service.

Assistive Technology Device-Means any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

Assistive Technology Service- means any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.

High tech-Solutions that involve a high level of technology, customization and engineering. Examples may include a sip and puff controlled wheelchair, a computer with voice recognition software.

Low tech- A device or item used in an innovative manner to provide solutions to a problem. Examples may include use of a sponge roller on a pen to create a larger grip, use of an existing bookcase to create a raised workspace,

Rehabilitation engineering - Use of engineering sciences to design, develop, adapt, test, evaluate, apply and distribute technology solutions to individuals with disability.

Rehabilitation technology-Means the systematic application of technologies, engineering methodologies, or scientific principles to meet the needs of, and address the barriers confronted by, individuals with disabilities in areas that include education, rehabilitation, employment, transportation, independent living, and recreation. The term includes rehabilitation engineering, assistive technology devices, and assistive technology services.

Resources

ABLEDATA

<http://www.abledata.com/>

Breaking New Ground Resource Center-Purdue University

<http://abe.www.ecn.purdue.edu/ABE/Extension/BNG/index>

Great Lakes ADA Center

<http://www.nrrts.org/>

Job Accommodation Network

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>

National Public Website on Assistive Technology

<http://www.assistivetech.net/>

National Rehabilitation Information Clearinghouse (NARIC)

Website: <http://www.naric.com/>

Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America

<http://www.resna.org/>

Trace Center, University of Wisconsin- Madison

<http://trace.wisc.edu/>

Wisconsin Assistive Technology Program

<http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/disabilities/wistech/>

WisTech Resource Center

<http://www.uwstout.edu/svri/atrc/>

References/ sources for guidance piece:

- <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA/guidance/PD-91-03.pdf>
- <http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/rsa/tac-98-04.pdf>
- <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA/guidance/TAC-91-01.pdf>
- <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2001-1/011701a.html>
- <http://www.uwstout.edu/svri/atrc/>

Approved by SLT, AsTech Team, Policy Academy Spring 2016