



Referral to AIVRS Programs

Practice Guide

The American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC) will be producing Practice Guides, designed to be resources for American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) program staff. Practice Guides will be posted to the AIVRTTAC website and be available to anyone who can use the information. AIVRTTAC plans to produce Practice Guides on each of the steps and services typical of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) process, from referral and intake to consumer employment and case closure. This Practice Guide is the first and addresses referrals to AIVRS programs.

All VR programs, including AIVRS programs, have the responsibility to ensure prompt and equitable handling of referrals. When an individual with a disability refers him/herself or is referred to an AIVRS program, an application needs to be filled out to initiate the eligibility process. Medical, psychological, and/or vocational evaluations may be needed to determine the extent to which the individual's disability impacts his or her employment potential. Information gathered through evaluations help to make sure VR services are consistent with the individual's strengths, priorities, resources, abilities, and informed choice. Eligibility determination should take 60-days or less once the initial application is completed and signed.

Who should be referred to AIVRS programs?

AIVRS programs are designed to assist Tribal members with disabilities in obtaining and sustaining gainful employment. American Indians with physical or mental impairments, who would like to work, but who are currently not employed should be referred to AIVRS programs to determine their eligibility for VR services. Importantly, the severity of disability does not disqualify an individual from the Tribal VR intake process. During the application process, American Indians with disabilities will need to provide evidence of Tribal membership (e.g., CIB – Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood, membership/enrollment card, or any other proof that a Tribal Nation uses to demonstrate Tribal membership), proof of residence on a federal or state reservation (e.g., driver's license), and documentation of their disability, if it is available.

Who can make referrals to AIVRS programs?

Anyone can make a referral to an AIVRS program for American Indians and Alaska Natives with a disability. The referral source is typically someone who knows the individual and recognizes that he or she experiences one or more barriers to employment because of his or her disability. Almost 30% of all referrals are self-referrals, meaning the individual with a disability requests VR services. Family members, health care providers, employers, community leaders, and educators can also make the referral.

When should referrals to AIVRS programs be made?

Referrals to AIVRS programs can be made at anytime. However, there is some evidence to suggest that for individuals who have been injured and that injury caused a life-long disability, timely referrals are important. Blackwell et al., 2003 found that individuals with an injury-caused disability who were referred for VR within six months of the injury were more likely



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About the Institute

The Institute for Human Development is a research and training program located on Northern Arizona University. Our program is part of a national network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). In Arizona, we are designated as one of two Arizona University Centers on Disabilities (AzUCD).

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◀ *“Anyone can make a referral to an AIVRS program for an American Indian with a disability.”*

to return to work. If high school students with disabilities are referred early, the VR Counselor can work with the school counselor, student and parents to identify appropriate supports to help the student transition to post-secondary education or employment. Just as a timely referral to VR services is important for students with disabilities, prisoners with disabilities who are approaching their release should be referred to VR programs. The VR Counselor can provide necessary support during the transition.

How are referrals to AIVRS programs made?

Some AIVRS programs may have an established referral process. For example, there may be a referral form available on the Tribe's or program's website or a specific phone number to call. Many individuals, especially if they are self-referring, will visit the AIVRS program office or one of the program's field offices. Some programs may have a receptionist who is the individual's first contact when a referral is made. The receptionist may gather a little information so that he or she can schedule an appointment for the individual to meet with a VR Counselor. It is recommended that all AIVRS programs have a regular process for collecting and responding to referrals, whether that involves an online form, telephone calls, or walk ins.

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How can AIVRS programs increase the number of referrals they receive?

AIVRS programs can conduct outreach efforts intended to increase Tribal community awareness of the available services for American Indians with disabilities. It may be possible to host an event (e.g., co-host annual Disability Awareness Days) or set up a table or booth at community and Tribal events such as Pow Wows and job fairs. Other potential places where outreach can occur include churches, prisons, local employers, educational institutions, job placement agencies, and social service agencies. Word of mouth and announcements on Tribal radio stations are also good ways to get the word out. What is important is that people in the community, as well as American Indians with disabilities, know that Tribal VR services are available and how to make referrals to the AIVRS program. Another type of outreach can occur through regular orientation events. Some AIVRS offices conduct monthly orientation meetings that are open to anyone. The purpose of these orientation meetings is to provide clear and concise information about the available services and the referral, application, and eligibility process. Invitations to orientation meetings can be made through many of the outreach efforts described above.

◀ *“What is important is that people in the community, as well as American Indians with disabilities, know that VR services are available and how to make referrals to the AIVRS program.”*

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Disclaimer

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