U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VR&E School Certifying Official Handbook

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VETERAN READINESS AND EMPLOYMENT (VR&E) FOR VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS WITH SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITIES (CHAPTER 31, TITLE 38 U.S. CODE)

Veteran Readiness and Employment Program

The Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program is authorized by Congress under Title 38 of the United States Code, Chapter 31. The purpose of this program is to provide services and assistance necessary to enable Veterans with service-connected disabilities to achieve maximum independence in daily living and, to the maximum extent feasible, to become employable and to obtain and maintain suitable employment.

VR&E Home Page
https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/

A Service member may be eligible for VR&E benefits if he or she:

• Is hospitalized or receiving outpatient medical care, services, or treatment for a service-connected disability that will likely be compensable at a rate of 20 percent or more
• Has a memorandum or Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) proposed rating of at least 20 percent

A Veteran may be eligible for VR&E benefits if he or she:

• Has received, or will receive, a discharge that is other than dishonorable
• Has a service-connected disability rating of at least 10%, or a memorandum rating of 20% or more from the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)
• Applies for VR&E Services

The basic period of eligibility in which VR&E Services may be used is 12 years from the latter of:

• The date of separation from active military service, or
• The date the Veteran was first notified by VA of a compensable service-connected disability rating

VR&E helps Service members and Veterans with service-connected disabilities and an employment handicap prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable careers. Potential services include comprehensive evaluation, vocational counseling, employment services, On-the-Job Training, post-secondary education, supportive rehabilitation services, self-employment, or independent living.

Rehabilitation services provided by VR&E must meet requirements and guidelines.
How to Apply

VBA Home Page on How to Apply:
https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/Applying.asp

eBenefits:
- Log in to your eBenefits account
- Select "Additional Benefits" from your Dashboard
- Select "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program" - be sure to read the program information and to update your contact information - and apply for the "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program"

Paper Application:
- Download and complete VA Form 28-1900 "Disabled Veterans Application for Vocational Rehabilitation"
- Mail or drop off the application to your local regional benefit office.

VetSuccess on Campus
The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to develop innovative ways to help Veterans make the transition to college life. The VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program aims to help Service members, Veterans, and their qualified dependents succeed and navigate through a coordinated delivery of on-campus benefits assistance and counseling, leading to completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers. Refer to the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) fact sheet.

VSOC Web Page
https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vetsuccess-on-campus/

VR&E IDES Counselors
The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to develop innovative ways to help Service members make the transition to civilian life. The VR&E Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) program aims to help Service members and Veterans and their eligible dependents succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery of benefits assistance and counseling during the transition from active duty, completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers. The VR&E IDES program provides a VA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) to each participating military installation. A VA Military Services Coordinator (MSC) is also available, co-located on many military installations to assist with application for benefits through the IDES, Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) or Quick Start pre-discharge programs.

IDES Web Page
https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/ides/

Subsistence Allowance Rates
Veterans participating in the VR&E program may receive a subsistence allowance while
they pursue an educational or training program in preparation for a future career. The subsistence allowance is paid each month and is based on the rate of attendance (full-time, three quarter time, or half time), the number of dependents and the type of training. If a Veteran qualifies for Post-9/11 GI Bill, he/she may be eligible to receive the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rate for subsistence.

Subsistence Allowance rates are updated each Fiscal Year. For current rates, refer to VR&E’s web site at: https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/subsistence_allowance_rates.asp

Certification Process

1. VA Authorization
When the VRC and the claimant have agreed on a facility that meets chapter 31 regulations and related instructions and can provide the services needed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the rehabilitation plan, the VRC may authorize the Veteran to begin his/her program of services. For this authorization, the VRC shall create an electronic authorization. The authorization is used to:
   - Notify the training facility that the Veteran is authorized to attend training at VA expense.
   - Indicate the Facility Code or Sub-Facility Code of the approved program.
   - Notify the School Certifying Official (SCO) that the training hours must be certified in VA-ONCE.
   - Identify the VR&E point of contact.

The SCO will receive an electronically generated email which will provide notification that an authorization for a Chapter 31 claimant has been submitted. The SCO can access the electronic authorization by clicking a link in the email which will take them directly to the electronic authorization in the Tungsten Network.

Sample Electronic Authorization Notification Email

<This is an auto generated email. Please do not respond>

An Authorization for payment of training, services, books, and/or supplies at your facility for a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) participant is available in the Tungsten Network Support. If this is the first Authorization you are receiving, you will need to register using this link. The Tungsten Network is an electronic invoicing service that the VA uses to authorize and pay all invoices.

Chapter 31

The authorization approves required costs for Chapter 31 training including tuition, fees, books, and supplies for the program identified in the “Name of Service” section of the authorization. Please note that VA will pay all invoices for the required tuition, fees, books, and supplies directly to the institution in arrears. The authorization also serves as notification to the School Certifying Official that training time should be certified for Chapter 31 claimants. In addition, this notification, if applicable, must be forwarded to the responsible party at your facility to alert them of the available authorization in the system to initiate the certification.
process using VA-ONCE.

**Chapter 35**

This authorization approves training, education, and services for Chapter 35 claimants under Specialized Vocational Training or Special Restorative Training. VA will pay only for the Special Restorative Training services listed in the “Name of Service” section of the authorization for Chapter 35 claimant. If applicable, detailed information for specific training courses and services during the authorized period may be listed under the specific “Notes” section of the authorization.

**Chapter 18**

The authorization approves required costs for Vocational Training for Certain Children with Spina Bifida or Other Covered Birth Defects under Chapter 18, which include tuition, fees, books, and supplies for the program identified in the “Name of Service” section of the authorization.

If you have any questions regarding the authorization, you may contact the case manager listed in the “VR&E Case Manager Email” section of the authorization. For procedures on electronic invoice processing, you may contact Tungsten directly at 1-877-752-0900 and notify the VR&E Case manager about your concerns.

Thank you.

2. **SCO Certification**

After retrieving the electronic authorization, the SCO uses VA-ONCE to certify the Ch31 Veteran’s enrollment. VA-ONCE allows training facilities to electronically certify attendance and includes number and type of hours, beginning and ending dates, and changes in enrollment. The SCO must use the facility code or sub-facility code, if applicable, indicated in the authorization when certifying training time.

The SCO should certify enrollment in VA-ONCE prior to the drop-add period. Once the SCO certifies enrollment, the VRC can process the Veteran’s subsistence allowance. The SCO should identify whether the training is semester, quarter hours, or clock hours, and if it is in residence or distance learning hours.

The use of VA-ONCE is mandatory. Training facilities electing not to use VA-ONCE must provide documentation to the local VR&E Officer.

**Note:** If an authorization is issued for a Chapter 31 Veteran who is currently enrolled under Chapter 33, Post 9/11 GI Bill, the certification for Chapter 31 cannot begin until the start of a new semester or term. A change in the election of VA benefits is not allowed in the middle of a semester or term.

**Financial Aid, In-State Tuition, and Billing**

VR&E staff has primary responsibility for ensuring that tuition and fees are authorized so that the Ch31 Veteran may begin training or continue his or her training program without delay or distraction.
VR&E’s policy regarding tuition and fees is controlled by VA Acquisition Regulation (VAAR) 48 CFR 831.7001-1. The following guidelines are derived from VA policy and regulations:

1. VR&E pays all invoices in arrears, directly to the institution for the Veteran’s tuition, required fees, books, and supplies. Therefore, VR&E must not be billed for a term or semester until after any Drop/Add period for that term closes.

2. Any Veteran under Chapter 31, or child under Chapter 18, should not have his or her registration cancelled for non-payment of these expenses, since VR&E has obligated payment for that term.

3. VR&E should be billed only for the actual cost for tuition and fees assessed by the institution for the program of education after the application of:
   - Any waiver of, or reduction in, tuition and fees; and
   - Any scholarship, or other Federal, State, institutional, or employer-based aid or assistance that is provided directly to the institution and specifically designated for the sole purpose of defraying tuition and fees, with the following exception: Loans and any funds provided under section 401(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1070a), such as Pell grants, should not be used to reduce the amount billed to VR&E.

4. If the Chapter 31 Veteran receives assistance that is not specifically designated for tuition and fees (funds that may be disbursed directly to the Veteran) from a Federal, State or private contribution, the tuition and fees must not be reduced unless the Veteran requests to apply the funds to the tuition and fee charges. If the Veteran chooses to apply such assistance to tuition and fees, the school should then reduce its bill to VR&E by an equal amount.

5. Reimbursement of duplicate funding or errors in accounting: All errors in accounting or disbursing of funds should be corrected by the school and any funds that are unused by, or recouped from, the Chapter 31 Veteran or another source should be returned to the appropriate funding source, including VR&E. It is the responsibility of the school to contact the agency that created the duplication and arrange the return of any unused funds. All refunds to VR&E should be initiated in Tungsten as a Credit Memo.

In accordance with Public Law (Pub. L.) 115-251, Section 301, public institutions of higher learning (IHL) must comply with the requirement that Veterans who reside in the state and are using educational assistance under title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) Chapter 31, will be charged the resident rate regardless of whether the Veteran meets the state’s residency requirements. This includes Chapter 31 Veteran previously covered in 38 U.S.C. 3679(c). The expectation is that as soon as the Veteran can establish residency, he or she will do so. If the IHL has other requirements to meet the standard for in-state tuition and fee rates, Chapter 31 Veterans must adhere to those requirements to qualify for in-state tuition and fee rates.

**Requesting Supplies**
Whenever possible, VR&E will use IPPS to authorize the purchase of required books and supplies from the Service member’s or Veteran’s training facility bookstore. This
method ensures that supplies are available and can be secured in a timely manner. Any restrictions and/or dollar limitations on bookstore purchases will be noted in the Line Item Detail section of the electronic authorization form. The VRC must only authorize books and supplies for approved periods and can only authorize the purchase of required books and supplies. If the training facility does not have a bookstore or if an individual is requesting additional books or supplies, please refer them to their VRC.

**Invoicing**

All invoices must be completed by the appropriate SCO electronically within the Tungsten Network. Separate invoice must be provided for each Service member or Veteran and must be directly related to an existing VA Authorization.

If a school/training facility invoices VA in any other manner other than through the Tungsten Network, the receiving VR&E office will return it for re-submission through the Tungsten Network.

**Grades, Transcripts, Progress Reports**

Service member’s and Veteran’s participation are evaluated regularly to determine if the he or she is satisfactorily completing his/her program. Grades, transcripts, or other progress reports from the training facility are part of this evaluation. SCOs must provide grades, transcripts, or progress reports to VR&E staff by the end of each term or by request. The SCO should also notify VR&E staff of any problems the Service member or Veteran is having at school that may be disrupting his/her training. If the program the Service member or Veteran is enrolled in has changes to its requirements, the SCO should inform VR&E staff so appropriate adjusting and planning can take place.

**Rounding Out for Last Term Enrollment**

A Service member or Veteran, who is attending degree courses taken on a quarter, semester, or term basis, may add non-required classes to increase his/her course load up to a full-time rate during his/her last term only. However, the non-required courses must contribute to the Veteran’s employment goal outlined in the Veteran’s Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP).

**Note:** The rounding out procedure will be phased out for terms beginning on or after August 1, 2021.

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) by VR&E participants**

Q. I can’t get in contact with my VRC and need books, supplies etc. What should I do?
A. If you are unable to reach your VRC, call or visit your VA Regional Office and ask to speak to the VR&E Office Supervisor. Someone will be able to assist you in your VRC’s absence

Q. I need books and supplies for my classes. What will VR&E pay for?
A. VR&E will pay for all supplies that VA determines are necessary for the Service member’s or Veteran’s rehabilitation program. Supplies necessary to accomplish the purposes of a Service member’s or Veteran’s rehabilitation program may include, but
are not limited to, the following: books, office supplies, tools, consumable goods, computer packages and other material.

- Pre-approval is required prior to obtaining needed supplies. Your VRC is solely responsible for determining the need for supplies.
- VR&E will only provide supplies for Service members or Veterans who are participating in an active plan of service.

Q. I am experiencing medical/emotional/dental issues that are impacting my schoolwork. What should I do?
A. Contact your VRC to ask about a referral for FREE care at the nearest VA Medical Center to address the issue that is impacting your training. VR&E participants may be eligible for services for a wide range of medical, counseling, or dental services if enrolled in a plan of service, and the medical service is needed for you to continue your training.

Q. How can I get paid the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate for my Vocational Rehabilitation program?
A. A Veteran participating in the VR&E Program who qualifies for Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits can elect to receive the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate of pay instead of the regular chapter 31 subsistence allowance. In most cases, the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate is higher than the regular chapter 31 rate of pay. To elect the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate, the Veteran must have remaining eligibility for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and must formally choose (or “elect”) the Post-9/11 GI Bill rate. Your VRC can help you with the election. Veterans participating in the VR&E Program who elect the Post-9/11 rate are paid at the 100% rate level for their school and training time, even if their Post-9/11 GI Bill eligibility is less than 100%. Note, if you are not attending school at the full-time rate, the actual subsistence allowance paid will be based on the 100% rate but reduced based on the percentage of training time you are attending. Additional benefits are also available through the VR&E Program, such as payment of all required books, fees and supplies as well as other supportive services.

VR&E Officer Contact List
Below is a list of current VR&E Officers in each of the Regional Offices. At least annually, the SCO should contact the VR&E Officer to obtain a list of each VRC and their contact information.

Albuquerque, NM (340)
Corliss De La Garza, VR&E Officer
Mailing Address
Department of Veterans Affairs
VR&E Division (28)
P.O. Box 900
Albuquerque, NM 87103

Office Location
500 Gold Ave SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
office tel. 505-346-3780
office tel. 505-346-4860 (VR&E Officer direct)
office fax. 505-346-4861
VRC.VBAALB@va.gov

Anchorage, AK (463)
Aaron N. Pugh, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
1201 North Muldoon Road,
Anchorage, AK 99504
office tel. 907-433-1060 (VR&E Program Support)
office fax. 907-257-6780
VRE.VBAANC@va.gov

Atlanta, GA (316)
Vacant, VR&E Officer
Mailing Address
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
VA Regional Office
P.O. Box 100024
Decatur, GA 30031-7024
Office Location
1700 Clairmont Rd.
Decatur, GA 30030-7024)
office tel. 404-929-3152
office fax. 404-929-3168
VRC.VBAATG@va.gov

Baltimore, MD (313)
Gerald Bacon, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Federal Building
31 Hopkins Plaza, Suite 1231
Baltimore, MD 21201
office tel. 410-230-4550
office fax. 410-230-4558
VRE.VBABAL@va.gov

Boise, ID (347)
Michael Duke, VR&E Officer
office tel. 208-429-2209
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
444 West Fort Street
Boise, ID 83702
office tel. 208-429-2228
office fax. 208-429-2278
VRE.VBABOI@va.gov

Boston, MA (301)
Jenny Willett, VR&E Officer
VARO/VR&E Division (28)
JFK Federal Building
15 New Sudbury St
Boston, MA 02203
office tel. 617-303-5533
office fax. 617-303-4988
VRC.VBABOS@va.gov

Buffalo, NY (307)
Susan Fitzgibbons, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
130 S Elmwood Ave
Buffalo, NY 14202-2478
office tel. 716-857-3370
office fax. 716-857-3373
VRC.VBABUF@va.gov

Chicago, IL (328)
Herbert Morris, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
2122 W. Taylor Street
Chicago, IL 60612
office tel. 312-980-4458
office fax. 312-706-6682
VAVBACHI.VRE@va.gov

Cleveland, OH (325)
Ashley Adomaites, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Anthony J. Celebrezze
Federal Building
1240 East 9th Street
Cleveland, OH 44199
office tel. 216-522-3535
office fax. 216-522-2692
VRE.VBACLE@va.gov

Columbia, SC (319)
Dr. James M. Lester, VR&E Officer
VA Regional Office (319)
VR&E Division (28)
6437 Garners Ferry Road
Columbia, SC 29209
office tel. 803-647-2400
office fax. 803-647-2300
VRC.VBACMS@va.gov

Denver, CO (339)
James Ziruolo, VR&E Officer
Mailing Address
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
155 Van Gordon St
Box 25126
Denver, CO 80225
office tel. 303-914-5550
office fax. 303-914-5555
VRE.VBADEN@va.gov

Des Moines, IA (333)
Randal R. Beyer, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
210 Walnut Street
Des Moines, IA 50309
office tel. 515-323-7550
office tel. 515-323-7557 (VR&E Officer direct #)
office fax. 515-323-7431
VRE.VBADES@va.gov

Detroit, MI (329)
John McCarthy, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Patrick V. McNamara Federal Building
477 Michigan Ave
Detroit, MI 48226
office tel. 313-471-3800
office fax. 313-471-3814
VRE.VBADET@va.gov

Fargo, ND (437)
Margie Polak, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
2101 Elm Street
Fargo, ND 58102
office tel. 605-333-6845
office fax. 701-451-4691
VRC.VBAFAR@va.gov

Fort Harrison, MT (436)
David Wirtz, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
3633 Veterans Drive
PO Box 188
Ft. Harrison, MT 59636
office tel. 406-495-2010
office tel. 406-495-2012 (VR&E Program Support Clerk)
office fax. 406-495-2019
VRC.VBAFHM@va.gov
Hartford, CT (308)
Charleen Fischer, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs
Hartford Regional Office (28)
PO Box 310909
555 Willard Avenue
Newington, CT 06111
office tel. 860-666-7379
office fax. 860-667-1068
VRE.VBAHAR@va.gov

Honolulu, HI (459)
Debra Lowery, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
459 Patterson Road
Honolulu, HI 96819
office tel. 808-433-0560 or 808-433-0561
office fax. 808-433-0382
VRC.VBAHON@va.gov

Houston, TX (362)
Kelly Shupak, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
6900 Almeda Road
Houston, TX 77030
office tel. 713-383-1985
office fax. 713-383-1984
VRE.VBAHOU@va.gov

Huntington, WV (315)
Megan Raphael, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
640 Fourth Avenue
Huntington, WV 25701
office tel. 304-399-9300
office fax. 304-399-9362
VRE.VBAHUN@va.gov

Indianapolis, IN (326)
Cheyenne Irwin, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
575 North Pennsylvania Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204
office tel. 317-916-3740
office fax. 317-916-3432
VRE.VBAIND@va.gov

Jackson, MS (323)
Chloe Freeman, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
1600 Woodrow Wilson Drive
Jackson, MS  39216
office tel. 601-364-7164 or 7165
office fax. 601-364-7166
VRE.VBAJAC@va.gov

Lincoln, NE (334)
Jessica Brazau
VR&E Officer VA Regional Office
P.O. Box 85816, 3800 Village Drive
Lincoln, NE  68516
office tel. 402-420-4012
office fax. 215-842-6504
VRE.VBALIN@va.gov

Little Rock, AR (350)
Trena Hyde, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
2200 Fort Roots Drive, Building 65
North Little Rock, AR 72114-1756
office tel. 501-370-3780
office fax. 501-370-3785
VRE.VBALIT@va.gov

Los Angeles, CA (344)
W. Anthony Roeback III, VR&E Officer
Los Angeles Regional Office
Department of Veterans Affairs
Federal Building
11000 Wilshire Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90024
office tel. 310-235-7722
office fax. 310-235-6247
ROVRC.VBALAN@va.gov

Louisville, KY (327)
Tameel Benders, VR&E Officer
US Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
321 West Main Street, Suite 390
Louisville, KY  40202
office tel. 502-566-4453
office fax. 502-217-9963
VRE.VBALOU@va.gov

Manchester, NH (373)
Jenny Willett, VR&E Officer
office tel. 603-222-5752
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
275 Chestnut Street
Manchester, NH 03103
office tel. 603-222-5751
office fax. 603-222-5757
VRE.VBAMAN@va.gov

**Milwaukee, WI (330)**
David Crosby, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
5400 West National Ave
Milwaukee, WI 53214
office tel. 414-902-5725
office fax. 414-902-9413
VRC.VBAMIW@va.gov

**Montgomery, AL (322)**
Jamie B. Wilder, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
345 Perry Hill Road
Montgomery, AL 36109-3798
office tel. 334-213-3333
VR&E Officer 334-213-3523
Assistant VR&E Officer 334-213-3512
office fax. 334-213-3305
VRE.VBAMGY@va.gov

**Muskogee, OK (351)**
Kathryn Harmon, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Federal Building
125 South Main Street
Muskogee, OK 74401
office tel. 918-781-7540
office fax. 918-781-7539
VRE.VBAMUS@va.gov

**Nashville, TN (320)**
Shari (Tonna) Mustian, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
110 9th (Ninth) Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37203
office tel. 615-695-6372
office fax. 615-695-6164
VRE.VBANAS@va.gov

**New Orleans, LA (321)**
Jesse Julius, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
1250 Poydras Street, Suite 200
New Orleans, LA 70113
office tel. 504-619-4346
office fax. 504-523-6470
VRC.VBANOL@va.gov

New York, NY (306)
D'Laija Francis-Abdullah, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
245 West Houston Street, Room 301
New York, NY 10014
office tel. 212-807-3008
office tel. 212-807-3135 (VR&E Officer direct)
office tel. 212-807-3409 (Assistant VR&E Officer direct)
office fax. 212-807-4036
VRE.VBANYN@va.gov

Newark, NJ (309)
Daniel Umlauf, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
20 Washington Place
Newark, NJ 07102
office tel. 973-297-3221
office fax. 973-297-3210
VRE.VBANEW@va.gov

Oakland, CA (343)
Rodney Hackney, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Oakland Federal Building
1301 Clay Street
Oakland, CA 94612-5209
office tel. 510-637-6128
office fax. 510-637-6119
VRC.VBAOAK@va.gov

Philadelphia, PA (310)
William Bethea, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Philadelphia Regional Office
5000 Wissahickon Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19144
office tel. 215-381-3028
office fax. 215-381-3457
VRC.VBAPHI@va.gov

Phoenix, AZ (345)
Walter N. Strong Jr, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
3333 North Central Ave
Phoenix, AZ 85012
office tel. 602-627-2800
office tel. 602-627-2778 (VR&EO)
office tel. 602-627-2890 (AVR&EO)
office fax. 602-627-2804 or 2805
VRE.VBAPHO@va.gov

Pittsburgh, PA (311)
Elizabeth Lucas, VR&E Officer
office tel. 412-395-6067
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
1000 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
office tel. 412-395-6070
direct number. 412-395-6067
office fax. 412-395-6071
VRE.VBAPIT@va.gov

Portland, OR (348)
Melissa Bay, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
100 S. W. Main Street Fl2
Portland, OR 97204
office tel. 503-412-4577
office fax. 503-412-4740
VRE.VBAPOR@va.gov

Providence, RI (304)
Nicole Robert, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
380 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903
office tel. 401-223-3605
office fax. 401-223-3612
VRE.VBAPRO@va.gov

Reno, NV (354)
Bonnie Thomas VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28) Reno Regional Office
5460 Reno Corporate Dr.
Reno, NV 89511
office tel. 775-321-4821
VRE.VBAREN@va.gov

Roanoke, VA (314)
Jeff Jones, VR&E Officer
office tel. 540-597-1670
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
210 Franklin Road, SW
Roanoke, VA  24011
office tel. 540-597-1672
office fax. 540-597-1791
VRE.VBAROA@va.gov

St. Louis, MO (331)
Heather Shade, VR&E Officer
office tel. 314-253-4400
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
St Louis VA Regional Office
9700 Page Ave
VR&E Suite 101
St. Louis, MO  63132-1502
office tel. 314-253-4390
office fax. 314-253-4161
VRC.VBASTL@va.gov

St. Paul, MN (335)
Linda Steffensmeier, VR&E Officer
office tel. 612-970-5446
Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office
VR&E Division (28)
Federal Building
1 Federal Drive
Fort Snelling
St. Paul, MN  55111
office tel. 612-970-5463
office fax. 612-970-5455
VRC.VBASPL@va.gov

St. Petersburg, FL (317)
Kim Lloyd, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
9500 Bay Pines Blvd
Bay Pines, FL 33744
office tel. 727-319-7902
office fax. 215-991-1527
VRC.VBASPT@va.gov

Salt Lake City, UT (341)
Vacant, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
PO Box 581900
Salt Lake City, UT 84158-1900
Office Location
550 Foothill Drive (courier deliveries)
Salt Lake City, UT 84158-1900
office tel. 801-326-2431
office fax. 801-326-2434
VRE.VBASLC@va.gov

San Diego, CA (377)
Ashley Johnson, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
8810 Rio San Diego Drive
San Diego, CA 92108
office tel. 619-400-5381 / 619-400-5580
office fax. 619-400-5490
VRE.VBASDC@va.gov

San Juan, PR (355)
Vacant, VR&E Officer
office tel. 787-772-7344
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
50 Carretera 165
Guaynabo, PR 00968
office tel. 787-772-7341
office fax. 787-772-7458
MBVRE.VBASAJ@va.gov

Seattle, WA (346)
David Boyd, VR&E Officer
office tel. 206-341-8530
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Federal Building
915 Second Avenue, Suite 1356
Seattle, WA 98174
office tel. 206-341-8228
office fax. 206-341-8687
VRE.VBASEA@va.gov

Sioux Falls, SD (438)
Margie Polak, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
2501 West 22nd Street
Sioux Falls, SD 57105
office tel. 605-333-6845
office fax. 605-977-4407
VRC.VBAFAR@va.gov

Togus, ME (402)
Allison Bubier, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs (28)
One VA Center
Augusta, ME 04330
office tel. 207-623-8411 ext. 4871
office fax 207-621-4867
VRE.VBATOG@va.gov

**Waco, TX (349)**
Carolyn Williams, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
One Veterans Plaza
701 Clay Avenue
Waco, TX 76799
office tel. 254-299-9816
office fax. 254-299-9824
VRC.VBAWAC@va.gov

**Washington, DC (372)**
Chantile Stovall, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
National Capitol Regional Benefits Office
1722 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20421
office tel. 202-530-9162
office fax. 202-530-9171 and 202-530-9179
VRE.VBAWAS@va.gov

**White River Junction, VT (405)**
Jenny Willett, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
VA Medical and Regional Office Center
215 North Main Street
White River Jct., VT 05009-0001
office tel. 802-295-9363 x 5296
office fax. 802-291-6202
VRC.VBABOS@va.gov

**Wichita, KS (452)**
Maricela Martinez-Torres, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
Wichita Regional Office
5500 East Kellogg Drive, Bldg 61
Wichita, KS 67218
office tel. 316-688-6842
office fax. 316-688-6893
VRE.VBAWIC@va.gov

**Wilmington, DE (460)**
William Bethea, VR&E Officer
Department of Veterans Affairs VR&E (28)
1601 Kirkwood Highway
Wilmington, DE 19805
office tel. 302-993-7231 or 7232
VA offers free Educational-Vocational Counseling services (also called Chapter 36 counseling) that are available to:

- Service Members within six months prior to discharge from active duty.
- Veterans within one year following discharge from active duty.
- Individuals receiving or eligible for educational assistance under Chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 1606, 1607.
- Veterans and qualified dependents who are eligible for and have entitlement to education assistance under Chapters 30, 31, 32, 33, 35, 1606, 1607.

Services include:

- Counseling to facilitate career decision making for civilian or military occupations.
- Educational and vocational counseling to choose an appropriate civilian occupation and develop a training program.
- Academic and adjustment counseling to resolve barriers that impede success in training or employment.

How to Apply:

**eBenefits:**

- Log in to your eBenefits account
- Select “Additional Benefits“ from your Dashboard
- Select “Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program” - be sure to read the program information and to update your contact information - and apply for the "Educational and Career Counseling"

**Paper Application:**

- Download and complete VA Form 28-8832 “Educational/Vocational Counseling Application”
- Mail or drop off the application to your local regional benefit office.