

Vocational Rehabilitation Funding for Assistive Technology

If you are trying to keep your job after a vision diagnosis, or you are working to get back into the workforce, the equipment you need to do your job can feel impossibly out of reach. A good CCTV runs four thousand dollars. Smart glasses, screen readers, and the training that goes with them add up fast. The price tag alone can make you wonder if staying employed is even realistic.

Here is the funding source most people with low vision have never heard of: Vocational Rehabilitation. Every state has a VR agency, the application is free, and the program is built specifically to cover the assistive technology you need for work. There is no income test for eligibility, you do not have to be legally blind, and most workers with low vision qualify. This guide walks you through what VR covers, who qualifies, how to apply, and how to get the most out of the program. For a wider view of every funding option, see our [complete assistive technology funding guide](#).

What Vocational Rehabilitation Covers

Vocational Rehabilitation is a federally funded, state-administered program that helps people with disabilities prepare for, get, keep, or return to work. When low vision is part of your situation, VR can fund the assistive technology you need to do your job, plus the training and support that go with it.

Equipment for employment is the headline benefit. VR routinely funds screen magnification software, electronic magnifiers and CCTVs, screen readers like JAWS and NVDA, smart glasses, OCR readers that turn print into speech, accessible note-taking devices, and Braille displays when those fit your work. If a tool helps you perform your job, it is on the table.

Training on that equipment matters as much as the device itself. A screen reader is only useful if you can use it well, and VR knows this. Your plan can include hours of one-on-one instruction with a certified assistive technology specialist, follow-up sessions, and refresher training when you switch software or upgrade.

Workplace modifications are also covered. That includes task lighting, glare reduction, ergonomic and accessible workstations, large monitors, and adaptive keyboards. VR can also pay for job coaching, job placement services, transportation support during training, and, in some cases short-term tuition for credentials tied to your employment goal. To understand what counts as assistive technology in a work setting, see our overview of [assistive technology for low vision](#).

What VR does not typically cover: equipment for hobbies or personal use unrelated to work, ongoing maintenance after warranty, replacement devices outside the standard cycle, and assistive technology for people who are fully retired with no employment goal.

Who Qualifies for VR Services

The eligibility bar is lower than most people assume. To qualify, you need a documented disability that creates a substantial barrier to employment, and you need to want to work, keep working, or return to work. That is the core test.

A few things VR is not. It is not means-tested for eligibility. Your income does not determine whether you can apply, though some specific services like tuition support may be cost-shared based on income at the state level. You also do not need to be legally blind. Low vision that affects your ability to do your job is enough.

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Who counts as wanting to work is broader than it sounds. You qualify if you are currently employed and trying to keep your job, looking for new work, transitioning careers because of your vision, returning to the workforce after a break, or a student preparing to enter employment. Older workers planning to stay employed for a few more years before retirement also qualify.

To document your low vision, you will need a letter from your eye doctor that includes your visual acuity, visual field, and a description of how your vision affects daily and work tasks. A functional vision assessment from a low vision specialist strengthens your case considerably, because it translates clinical numbers into real-world job impact. NELVB regularly provides these assessments for people preparing VR applications.

The Application Process Step by Step

The full process from first call to equipment in hand typically takes three to six months. Here is what to expect.

Step 1: Contact your state VR agency. Every state has at least one, and the name varies. You may see Bureau of Services for the Blind, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, or Department of Rehabilitation. The [Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation](http://csavr.org) maintains a national directory at csavr.org. For low vision, start with the blind services agency rather than general VR if your state has both.

Step 2: Initial interview and intake. Once you reach out, you will be scheduled for an intake appointment, usually within one to two weeks. This is a conversation about your work history, your current vision, your employment goal, and what you think you need. Bring your eye doctor letter, recent pay stubs or job description if you are employed, and a list of the work tasks you find difficult.

Step 3: Eligibility determination. Federal law requires VR to make an eligibility decision within 60 days of your application. Most decisions come faster. You will receive a written notice confirming you are eligible and assigning you a counselor.

Step 4: Develop your Individualized Plan for Employment, or IPE. This is your roadmap. You and your counselor write it together, and it lists your employment goal, the services VR will provide, the equipment you need, the training hours, the timeline, and any responsibilities you have. The IPE is a legal document. Read it carefully before signing.

Step 5: Assistive technology assessment. A certified AT specialist evaluates which devices and software match your job tasks and your vision. Push for a real assessment with a qualified specialist, not just a vendor demo. The assessment shapes everything that follows.

Step 6: Procurement, training, and follow-up. VR orders the equipment, schedules your training, and checks in once you are using the tools at work. Most plans include a 90-day follow-up to make sure everything is working.

Maximizing Your VR Benefits

The difference between a basic VR outcome and a great one usually comes down to how you advocate for yourself during the IPE phase. A few things make a significant difference. Request a comprehensive AT assessment from a certified specialist. A standard eye exam tells VR your acuity. A functional AT assessment tells VR exactly which tools will let you do your job,

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with documentation that holds up. If your counselor offers a quick vendor demo instead, ask for a fuller evaluation.

Build training hours into your IPE from the start. Equipment without training is wasted money, and VR knows this. Ask for enough one-on-one instruction to be genuinely fluent, plus a follow-up session a few months in. Most counselors will agree if you ask.

Ask about ongoing support, maintenance, replacement schedules, and software updates. Find out what happens when your CCTV breaks in year four, or when JAWS releases a new version. Get the answers in writing as part of your plan.

Know your rights. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, including Section 504, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act both shape what VR has to do for you. The U.S. Department of Labor maintains a clear [overview of WIOA and broader disability employment resources](#).

Bring documentation to every meeting. A list of the specific tasks you do at work, the parts of those tasks your vision makes difficult, and the tools that would help. Specificity wins. “I need a screen magnifier” is weaker than “I review architectural drawings on a 27-inch monitor and cannot read dimensions below 12 point. I need ZoomText with a high-contrast mode and a connected CCTV for printed plans.”

How to Find Your State VR Agency

Most states have two parallel VR systems, and knowing which to call first saves weeks of redirection.

The first is the General Vocational Rehabilitation agency, often called the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or DVR. It serves people with all types of disabilities. The second is a separate Commission or Bureau for people who are blind or visually impaired, sometimes called BSVI, BSB, or Commission for the Blind. The blind agency exists because vision-related employment needs are specialized, and these agencies typically have larger AT budgets, staff trained in low vision tools, and faster timelines for blind and low vision clients.

For low vision, start with the blind agency. Even if you do not consider yourself blind, you almost certainly qualify for their services, and you will get a counselor who knows the equipment. If your state does not have a separate blind agency, the General VR office will route you to a counselor who specializes in vision.

To find both, use the [CSAVR directory](#) at csavr.org, or search “[your state] vocational rehabilitation blind” and “[your state] vocational rehabilitation general.” The [Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) at rsa.ed.gov is the federal office that funds and oversees state VR programs and is a good source for program rules.

Regional variation matters. Some state programs have larger AT budgets and shorter waitlists than others. When you call, ask directly: what is the typical AT spend for a low vision client, and what is the current timeline from IPE to equipment? You will get a straight answer most of the time.

[State assistive technology programs](#) often partner with VR to extend funding, run device demonstration centers, and operate equipment loan libraries. Ask your VR counselor whether your state’s AT program can supplement your plan.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Does vocational rehabilitation cover assistive technology?

Yes. Funding assistive technology for employment is one of the core services VR provides. That includes screen magnifiers, CCTVs, screen readers, smart glasses, OCR devices, and the training to use them. As long as the equipment supports your employment goal and is documented in your IPE, VR pays for it.

How long does vocational rehabilitation take?

From your first contact to equipment in hand, the typical timeline is three to six months. Federal law requires an eligibility decision within 60 days of application. After that, IPE development takes a few weeks, the AT assessment takes another few weeks, and ordering and training run another month or two.

Do I have to be legally blind to qualify for VR?

No. You need a documented disability that affects your ability to work. Low vision that creates a substantial barrier to employment qualifies, even if you do not meet the legal blindness threshold. An eye doctor letter and a functional vision assessment are usually enough.

Can VR pay for assistive technology I already bought?

Almost never. VR funds equipment that is part of your IPE and ordered through their procurement process. If you bought a device before applying, you are unlikely to be reimbursed. The exception is rare and case-by-case, usually tied to an emergency replacement. The fix is to apply before you buy. Other funding paths, including [Medicare](#) for medically necessary devices and [free assistive technology programs](#), may help if VR cannot.

What happens after I get my equipment from VR?

You enter the post-employment services phase. VR keeps your case open for at least 90 days after you start using the equipment at work, and they check in to make sure things are going well. After that, your case closes successfully. If your job changes, your vision changes, or your equipment breaks outside warranty, you can reopen your case and request additional services.

Take the Next Step

The strongest VR applications come in with clear documentation: a current eye doctor letter, a functional vision assessment, and a specific list of work tasks paired with the tools that solve them. NELVB provides exactly that. Working with a low vision specialist before your VR meeting helps you walk in knowing what you need and why, and it gives your counselor the documentation to fund it without back-and-forth.

If you are getting ready to apply for VR, in the middle of writing your IPE, or trying to get more out of services you are already receiving, we can help. [Schedule your no-obligation consultation](#), and we will help you build the case that gets you the assistive technology you need to keep working.

Also, be sure to visit our [Top Low Vision Aids for Vocational Rehabilitation](#).

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About This Document

This white paper was created by New England Low Vision and Blindness. Portions of the content were generated using AI technology and reviewed for accuracy. However, the information is provided “as is” and is not intended as a substitute for professional advice or a comprehensive assessment.

About New England Low Vision and Blindness

New England Low Vision and Blindness is a leading provider of assistive technology, training, and support for people who are blind or visually impaired. We serve individuals, schools, and organizations across the Northeast with personalized solutions that empower independence and improve quality of life. To learn more or schedule a no-obligation consultation, visit NELowVision.com or call 888-211-6933. You can also email us at info@NELowVision.com.