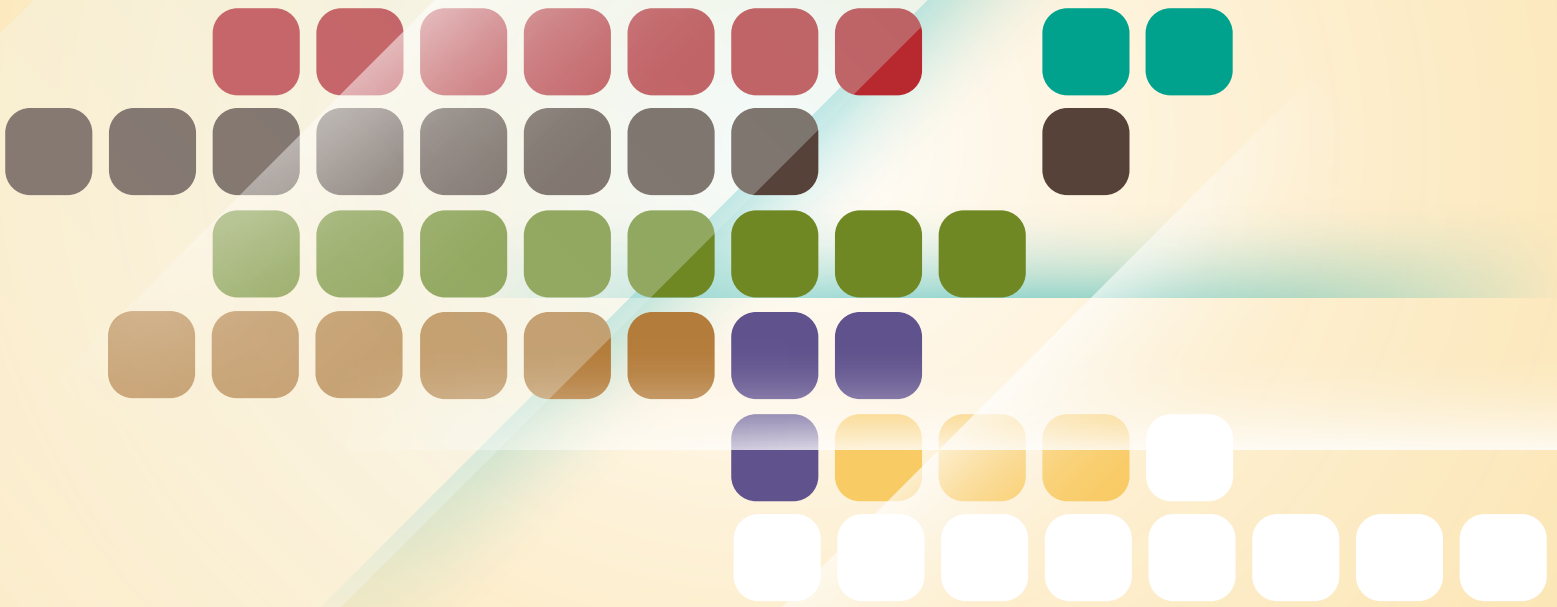




College Handbook for the Blind or Visually Impaired



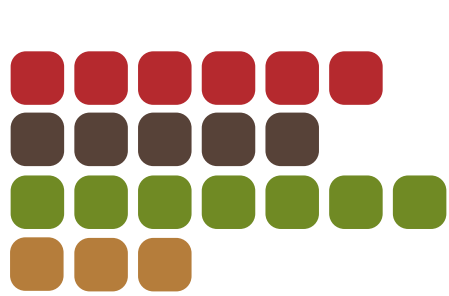


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WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS
— * * * * —

For more information:


800-628-5115

www.twc.texas.gov



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Texas Workforce Solutions is comprised of the Texas Workforce Commission, 28 local workforce development boards and our service-providing partners. Together we provide workforce, education, training and support services, including vocational rehabilitation assistance for the people of Texas.

Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS) has prepared this handbook to provide basic information about college services and resources to help people who are blind or visually impaired attend college and achieve their academic goals.

Earning a college degree is a rewarding task, but it requires focus, motivation and accountability. Students must commit to hard work and dedicate time to studying. Counselors are available to help students; however, it is the student's responsibility to seek, obtain and maintain any resources needed to face challenges during the academic journey.

A successful college experience can prepare blind and visually impaired people for the job market and for meeting future employers' expectations.

This handbook will provide prospective students with a greater understanding of:

- Their responsibilities as a student receiving college services from TWS-VRS
- Their responsibilities under Texas law.
- Services they may be eligible for through TWS-VRS.
- Comparable benefits and services available from colleges and other sources.

At any time, students may contact their VR counselor with questions.



Getting Started

Anyone eligible for educational services from TWS-VRS will be assigned a TWS-VRS counselor to start the process of attending college. The TWS-VRS counselor assists potential students by determining their educational needs based on the academic requirements associated with employment in their chosen career field.

The TWS-VRS counselor will also consider the student's record of academic achievement and independent living skills when deciding whether to grant assistance for educational training.

■ **BACHELOR'S DEGREE** - please see policy C-214 for additional guidance

Anyone seeking support for a bachelor's degree should provide:

- High school transcript, General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or other record of academic achievement
- College transcripts, if any
- Acceptance or admissions letter to college
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) award letter (see policy C-411)
- Copy of the degree plan
- Copy of grade reports & schedule if currently enrolled

The student submits the required documentation, it may be used as a part of the TWS-VRS comprehensive process. Assessments help provide a complete picture of the student's current capabilities and needs in all areas that may affect the college experience.

Possible assessments:

- Vocational
- Psychological / Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation System (CVES)
- Low vision
- Physical
- Skills assessment by a Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher
- Orientation and mobility
- Employment Assistance Services (EAS) consultation
- Assistive technology

Other assessments not included in this list may also be recommended. When TWS-VRS has reviewed all transcripts and confirmed that all necessary assessments are complete, the TWS-VRS counselor and the student will meet to discuss assessment-based recommendations, develop a vocational goal and create an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The IPE, which includes the student's educational plans, is based on skills, capabilities, interests and informed choices.

■ POSTGRADUATE DEGREE

For support beyond a bachelor's degree, the TWS-VRS supervisor may be consulted by the counselor who will approve or deny support based on previous academic success, acceptance to a graduate (or other) program and if the degree is required for employment in the chosen career field.

College preparation training

TWS-VRS may refer students to the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC) to participate in the College Preparation Training program. This program is offered once a year in the summer and prepares high school students who are blind or visually impaired for college through field trips to local campuses and training in core skills needed to succeed in college, such as self-advocacy, time management, study methods and note taking.

College preparation checklist

To receive services from TWS-VRS, students must:

- Complete all activities and assessments required by TWS-VRS before beginning college with TWS-VRS assistance.
- Be available and participate in required assessments.
- Apply for federal financial aid (FAFSA).
- Have a current IPE.



The items included in the checklist reflect TWS-VRS policy (C-411-1) on college services. For more information about this policy, ask your counselor for a copy of the policy or assistance.

Several spaces have been provided in the checklist for other assessments, as identified on the IPE, that the student may be required to complete. Student should defer to the list of requirements provided by their TWS-VRS counselor.



COLLEGE PREPARATION CHECK LIST

CUSTOMER NAME: _____

SCHEDULED

DATE COMPLETED

DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED (Policy C-411-1)

- Course registration for each semester or quarter _____ / /
- High school transcript or GED / record of academic achievement _____ / /
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) award letter _____ / /
- Copy of the degree plan _____ / /
- Books and supplies list before the start of the semester or quarter _____ / /

ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENTS

- Vocational _____ / /
- Psychological _____ / /
- Low vision _____ / /
- Vision VRT _____ / /
- VRT college checklist _____ / /
- Orientation and mobility _____ / /
- EAS consultation _____ / /
- Assistive technology _____ / /
- Other: _____ / /
- Other: _____ / /
- Other: _____ / /

OTHER

- Other examples of assessments may include: Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center tour Postsecondary/exit program TSBVI tour _____ / /



Ongoing Student Responsibilities

Students must maintain regular contact with their TWS-VRS counselors to assess progress and update the student's IPE to reflect any changes to educational or professional goals and services. In addition, counselors can provide guidance regarding services, accommodations and other issues related to academic success.

Students should meet with their VR counselors, as outlined in the IPE, to review GPA and progress each semester. They will also review the IPE at least annually to review overall progress of the IPE. In addition, students must inform their TWS-VRS counselor regarding any changes to address, telephone number, income, vocational goal or degree plan, including dropped classes or changes to academic schedule.

Ongoing student responsibilities (Policy C-411-2):

- Enroll in courses related to their declared major
- Maintain a full-time course load each semester
- Maintain satisfactory training progress
- Maintain any equipment provided by TWS-VRS
- Maintain regular communication with their TWS-VRS counselor and college staff members involved with the IPE



ON-GOING DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED

SEMESTER _____

SCHEDULED

COMPLETED

- Registration with disabilities services _____
(as needed by school)
- Course registration for each semester _____
or quarter
- Grades within 14 days of the school posting _____
after the semester or quarter ends
- Written documentation of added and _____
dropped courses each semester
- Request for reader services for the _____
semester or quarter
- Request for tutoring services (*must* _____
document tutor's relevant experience or skills)
- Books and supplies list before the start _____
of the semester or quarter
- Certificate of Blindness _____
- TWS-VRS IPE updated with vocational goal _____
and services (*clearly delineate and identify
customer and counselor responsibilities as needed*)
- FAFSA award or denial letters annually _____
- Updates to financial documents when required

Eight copies of this checklist have been provided in this handbook for students to track their requirements each semester.

To continue receiving services from TWS-VRS, students must submit the following to the TWS-VRS counselor:

- FAFSA award or denial letters (annually)
- Copy of financial assistance award letter from college (annually)
- Documentation when dropping or withdrawing from a course
- Copy of the degree plan if it has changed

Students should submit the following documentation at least two weeks before the beginning of each semester or quarter (Policy C-411):

- Grades from the previous semester or quarter within 14 days of the college posting grades
- A list of books and supplies
- Course registration and schedule for the upcoming semester
- Request for reader services

(Failure to provide documentation in a timely fashion may result in a delay of authorizations for services by TWS-VRS.)

Free Application for Federal Student Aid and grants

Students must complete a FAFSA every year at the college's financial aid office or online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. Submit the FAFSA award or denial letter to the TWS-VRS counselor before the beginning of the first semester and each consecutive fall

semester. FAFSA awards or denials will be taken into consideration when determining the level of TWS-VRS assistance. Pell grant must be applied to tuition fees and other educational expenses. (Policy C-415-6)

Keep in mind:

- The FAFSA approval process can take up to four months.
- Students may accept or reject any approved grants or loans.
- If more information is needed for the application, immediate follow up will help avoid delays.
- Male U.S. residents between the ages of 18 and 25 must register with the Selective Service System to complete the FAFSA successfully.



In addition to completing the FAFSA, students must submit information about any other grants (not loans or scholarships) received. Grants will be taken into consideration when determining the level of TWS-VRS assistance.



Melissa Padron Trains for Success in College

I've always had aspirations to attend college, even though I am legally blind due to a condition called albinism. I attended the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center's College Prep Training where I visited a local university and learned about applying for college, applying for financial aid, working with the university's disability services office and receiving accommodations.

Thanks to my training, I not only got to attend Texas A&M University — the college of my choice — but applied for and received numerous scholarships. College has allowed me to take advantage of many opportunities. I was president of a student organization, Insightful Connections, which educates people about blindness and visual impairments. I also helped start a puppy-raising group for Guide Dogs for the Blind in Bryan-College Station and worked as an independent living facilitator at the Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living.



David Ondich Achieves Professional Success with Master's Degree

My name is David Ondich and I am a blind individual, and a former Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) customer. I received my bachelor's degree with support from VR 20 years ago. After earning my bachelor's degree, I was approved to receive support for my master's degree. Today, my education has paid off. As a successful human resources professional and, as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) program manager for the City of Austin, I get to make a positive difference in the lives of people with disabilities in Austin.

In the 20 years since I earned my bachelor and master's degrees with help from VR, a lot of things, including assistive technologies, have changed to make it easier for students with disabilities to succeed in college. But some things have remained the same—VR is still there to help students who are blind or visually impaired achieve their educational and career goals by offering guidance, assisting with tuition and book payments, motivating them to be self-advocates, and helping them to pursue advanced degrees.

Course registration

Students must enroll in courses that support the academic training specified on their submitted degree plan and IPE.

Students must also maintain a full-time course load (e.g. 12 hours for undergraduates and nine for graduate students at most colleges and universities) during each standard long semester:

- Incoming freshmen, graduating seniors and summer school attendees should discuss possible exceptions with the TWS-VRS counselor.
- Any circumstances preventing a student from taking a full-time course load should be discussed with the TWS-VRS counselor. Not being able to handle a full-time course load or wanting to improve the grade point average (GPA) by taking fewer hours are not acceptable justifications.

Students must maintain satisfactory academic progress and assume responsibility for items listed on the IPE. If grades fall below the school's acceptable GPA, the student should address this with the TWS-VRS counselor. TWS-VRS will use the university regulations regarding academic probation to address any issue with GPA. TWS-VRS support depends on progress toward the educational goals outlined in the student's individualized plan for employment. If the GPA falls below the school's satisfactory academic progress

requirement for more than two consecutive semesters, TWS-VRS support may be discontinued.

Course drops and withdrawals

Students must inform their TWS-VRS counselor if they withdraw from or drop a class and submit documentation with the date on which the class was dropped. **The counselor will use this information to:**

- Adjust payments for reader services, tutoring, books and supplies
- Discuss TWS-VRS policy regarding required satisfactory progress and training timelines

Students who officially exit a course during the schedule change period or before the official college reporting date are considered to have dropped the course. Dropped courses are not considered withdrawals and are not posted on the student's transcript.

Withdrawals from a course occur after the official reporting date and result in a "W" on the student's transcript. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a withdrawal request before the deadline. Discontinuing class attendance or notice to the instructor does not constitute authorized withdrawal.

Texas state law on course drop and withdrawal limit

Under Texas state law, first-time college students who enroll in a Texas public college are not allowed to withdraw from or drop more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career. All college-level courses withdrawn from or dropped after the 12th class day are included in the six-course limit, including courses dropped at another Texas public college.



Instructors may initiate withdrawals if a student fails to attend class or turn in work; these withdrawals also count toward the six course limit established by Texas state law.

Excessively dropping or withdrawing from courses may result in consequences to:

- Financial aid
- Veterans' benefits
- International student status
- Academic standing
- College services from TWS-VRS
- Use of Certification of Blindness letter

Students who reach the six-course drop and withdrawal limit must remain on the class roll unless they request and receive approval for a drop or withdrawal exception. Students seeking an exception should contact the college registrar for more information.

Possible exceptions include:

- The student withdraws from the college or all registered courses that semester or quarter.
- The student or course is exempt from the rule.
- The student receives an exception authorized by college officials.

Please check with the college or university for details about exemptions for extreme circumstances.



Services

TWS-VRS has many services to help students succeed in college. All services provided or purchased by TWS-VRS must be on the student's IPE.

Tuition

Certificate of blindness tuition waiver

Texas residents who are legally blind are eligible for a certificate of blindness tuition waiver. The waiver is valid for any public college in Texas and waives all tuition and fees, except refundable deposits, when presented to the college's registrar. Private and out-of-state colleges will not honor the waiver.

TWS-VRS will issue the waiver upon the student presenting a current eye exam report that shows legal blindness. Students are responsible for submitting the waiver to the college and ensuring that the student is not charged for the items covered.

Some colleges have specific requirements that students must meet for the college to honor the waiver, including:



- Residency requirements for how long a recipient must have lived in Texas
- Minimum grade point average requirements
- Course hour limitation requirement, for how many course hours a student can take until the amount covered by the waiver is exceeded

Other tuition services

For certain students who do not qualify for a certificate of blindness tuition waiver, TWS-VRS may agree to pay tuition directly to the college. Tuition assistance is based on each student's IPE and the TWS-VRS counselor's assessment of need in accordance with policy.

Once a student has an IPE, and the TWS-VRS counselor has authorized tuition payment, the student must:

- Promptly submit an itemized fee statement for the upcoming semester.
- Apply any remaining grants or economic resources that exceed guidelines toward tuition before TWS-VRS assists with the difference.



Books and supplies

TWS-VRS may pay for books and supplies if the student can demonstrate denial of grants and does not exceed income criteria.

If TWS-VRS is paying for books and supplies, the student must submit his or her course schedule for the semester, which will be used to generate a service authorization form for the college bookstore. When the student picks up the order, the bookstore will send a receipt to TWS-VRS. This process needs to be completed each semester, and the TWS-VRS counselor will determine the allowable amount for each semester hour students in accordance with policy.

Students should purchase used textbooks (*current edition*) when available, and may not purchase items unrelated to coursework, such as food, T-shirts and decals.

Services for academic training

Reader services (Policy C-309)

TWS-VRS may be able to help students who are legally blind receive reader services, which include oral reading and research assistance. The student must explore the availability



of non-visual formats before consideration of purchasing reader services.

If the student and TWS-VRS counselor agree on the service, it can be placed on the IPE, and the procedure outline in the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual (VRSM) should be followed.



When choosing a reader, it is wise to consider the person's dependability, honesty, clarity of speech and reading ability.

Students may contact the college's disabilities office to find a reader. If TWS-VRS has a contract with the college, the office may be able to directly bill TWS-VRS and provide reader services. Students may find

a reader independently by asking a friend, classmate or neighbor, or by advertising in the college newspaper or on a bulletin board. However, the reader may not be a family member or a TWS-VRS customer.

Low-vision services

TWS-VRS may help students get a low-vision evaluation to determine if low-vision devices will help with academic needs. Some examples of low-vision devices are magnifiers, special glasses, special sunshades and telescopes. Depending on income criteria, students may have to contribute to the cost of these aids.



Assistive technology and training

Students who need assistive technology to access college training and related materials and the Internet can consult with TWS-VRS to receive an evaluation for assistive technology.

Based on a review of the student's economic resources, TWS-VRS may purchase necessary assistive technology and provide training on its use.

Student responsibilities and additional information about assistive technology:

- Any assistive technology purchased is TWS-VRS property. Students may not pawn or sell the assistive technology and should check with the TWS-VRS counselor before disposing of any technology.
- In general, TWS-VRS purchases assistive technology devices only one time during a student's college attendance.
- Assistive technology purchased by TWS-VRS provided must be solely used for the purpose intended.
- The student must maintain the assistive technology provided by TWS-VRS in good working order and submit all warranty information forms to the manufacturer.

Services for independent living and transportation

Vocational rehabilitation

TWS-VRS vocational rehabilitation teachers (VRTs) can meet students at home or at the college to provide evaluation and training. Depending on the student's needs, VRTs provide training that focuses on increasing confidence and skills for independence.

Training may include:

- Learning to read and write Braille
- Nonvisual techniques for everyday tasks such as cooking, household chores, matching clothes, accessing appliances,
- sewing, organizing paperwork and note taking
- Help with direct employability skills and activities, including résumé writing, interviewing and job searching skills

When appropriate, VRTs can provide or order helpful tools such as a large-print planner, talking watch, writing guides and a white cane.

Orientation and mobility training

Orientation and mobility (O&M) training provided by TWS-VRS can help students build skills to effectively navigate, orient themselves to new environments and use public transportation.

This training may be provided while students are blindfolded and using a white cane to help them increase their confidence and become independent travelers.





Diabetes education

TWS-VRS can help students with diabetes with education, a manageable nutrition plan and health monitoring. Students can also purchase tools for managing diabetes, such as a talking or large-display glucose monitor or scale.

Transportation

Students must secure and manage their own transportation. Transportation options may include using public transportation, carpooling with other students, or getting rides from family or friends. If there is no transportation available, the TWS-VRS counselor can help students develop long-term transportation strategies and may provide short-term assistance.



Comparable Services and Benefits

Federal law and TWS-VRS require that students use a comparable service or benefit if it is available. Comparable services and benefits are similar to services provided by TWS-VRS, but are provided or paid for by another entity and can assist students throughout undergraduate or graduate training. Students can discuss their eligibility for comparable benefits and services with their TWS-VRS counselor.

Comparable benefits include, but are not limited to, any benefits or services from:

- The college or college's disability services office
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Medicare or Medicaid
- Pell Grants and other educational grants
- Other state and federal entitlement program services and benefits

Comparable benefits from college

Colleges should be able to provide students with valuable comparable benefits and services, which may include:

- Career counseling
- Financial aid services
- Tutoring services
- Counseling and health services
- Disability services

Disability Services Office

Every college has a disability services office dedicated to helping students with disabilities. The office ensures that students with disabilities have equal access to university programs and activities in an accessible and inclusive environment. The decision to use disability services is a matter of individual choice, but students who use this service may experience more success while attending college.

Accommodations and services available may include:

- Extended time on tests
- Materials converted to an alternative format
- Assistive technology or communications access
- Counseling
- Other reasonable accommodations
- Notetaker and readers

Students who have trouble getting reasonable accommodations can ask their TWS-VRS counselor to work with the college on their behalf.

When determining accommodations, students should seek solutions that allow them to be independent. For example, relying on someone to take notes for them is being dependent on others. Instead, students can stay independent and in control of their own notes by:

- Audio recording the class
- Asking for the professor's notes in large print
- Typing notes on an electronic note taker

Students should be confident in their ability and take initiative to devise solutions to any challenges they encounter. Knowing how to solve problems independently is an essential skill to being an efficient and productive employee in the workforce.

NOTE: The guidance in this handbook does not replace or supersede any policy or procedure found in the VRSM.



Resources

Academic training and independent living

The Benetech Initiative / Bookshare.org

650-352-0198 |

www.bookshare.org

Access more than 34,400 books and 150 periodicals converted to Braille, large print or text-to-speech audio files. Newspapers and magazines in BRF and DAISY formats are provided through a partnership with the National Federation of the Blind's Newsline[®] System. Free membership available for students of U.S. colleges with free text-to-speech app for PCs and Android devices.

The College Board

www.collegeboard.com

The College Board is a nonprofit association founded to help students achieve educational success by providing programs and services for college admissions, assessments, financial aid, enrollment, teaching and learning. Its programs include the SAT[®], PSAT/NMSQT[®] and Advanced placement Program[®].

Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**800-323-4238 |
www.hadley.edu**

The website has free correspondence courses for people who are blind or visually impaired and their families. Courses are available in academic subjects, independent living, recreation topics, and Braille reading and writing.

HEATH Resource Center, George Washington University

www.heath.gwu.edu

View resources on educational disability support services, transitioning to college, scholarships and financial assistance, accessing college campuses, and technical or other non-traditional postsecondary training opportunities.

Learning Ally

**800-221-4792 |
www.learningally.org**

Access more than 75,000 easy-to-navigate audio textbooks narrated by real people. Audiobooks are available through a free app for PCs and portable Apple or Android devices. Paid yearly subscription available with proof of disability.

Career exploration and internships

Students with diverse experiences are more competitive in the job market. Be proactive during college by becoming involved in as many career-related experiences as possible. Pursue internships, join student organizations and seek volunteer opportunities.

AHEAD

704-947-7779 |

**[www.ahead.org/
students-parents](http://www.ahead.org/students-parents)**

AHEAD is a professional membership organization for people who help develop policy and provide quality services to meet the needs of people in higher education with disabilities. The website has resources for students and parents.

American Association of People with Disabilities Internship Programs

www.aapd.com/internships

Apply for paid summer internships in congressional offices, federal agencies, nonprofits and corporations

in Washington, D.C., for college students with disabilities.

American Foundation for the Blind Career Connect

888-824-2184 |

**[www.afb.org/
CareerConnect](http://www.afb.org/CareerConnect)**

Connect online with more than 1,000 mentors who are blind or visually impaired who work in interesting career areas. Create a résumé, build an accessible online calendar, and get helpful tips about career exploration, conducting a job search, getting hired and succeeding in the workplace.

Federal Government Student Internship Programs

USA Jobs/Pathways
**[www.usajobs.gov/
StudentsAndGrads](http://www.usajobs.gov/StudentsAndGrads)**

Apply for paid federal government internships across the country in a variety of career fields.

O*Net Online

www.onetonline.org

Search different occupations based on skills or education, and learn the requirements for employment in different fields.

Volunteer Match

www.volunteermatch.org

Find volunteer opportunities at non-profits and local organizations to practice skills needed to succeed.

Work in Texas

www.workintexas.com

WorkInTexas.com is a comprehensive online job search resource and matching system developed and maintained by the Texas Workforce Commission. It provides recruiting assistance to Texas employers of all types and sizes, and job search assistance to any individual seeking work in Texas.

Adaptive aids and providers

American Printing House

800-223-1839 |
www.aph.org

Independent Living Aids

800-537-2118 |
www.independentliving.com

Learning Sight and Sound Group

800-468-4789 |
www.lssproducts.com

Lighthouse International

800-829-0500 |
www.lighthouse.org

Maxi Aids

800-522-6294 |
www.maxiaids.com

See-More Vision Aiding Products

800-428-6693 |
www.seemorevision.com

Speak to Me Catalog

800-248-9965 |
www.speaktomecatalog.com

Scholarships

It is important to apply for scholarships to help with college-related expenses. Periodically, the TWS-VRS counselor will send out scholarship applications; however, it is the student's responsibility to also seek out these scholarships, if needed.

Students might be interested in joining the following organizations that sometimes offer scholarships:

**American Council of the
Blind of Texas**

www.acbtexas.org

**National Federation
of the Blind of Texas**

www.nfbtx.org

**American Foundation
for the Blind**

800-232-5463 | www.afb.org

Support organizations and groups

**Deafblind
Multi-Handicapped
Association of Texas**

www.dbmat-tx.org

**Texas Association
for Education
and Rehabilitation
for the Blind and
Visually Impaired**

www.txaer.org

Your Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services Office

To locate your Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS) office, visit: <https://twc.texas.gov/find-locations>

Notes:

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes, spanning the width of the page.



Texas Workforce Solutions - Vocational Rehabilitation Services
101 East 15th Street
Austin, Texas 78778-0001
800-628-5115

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program

Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Relay Texas: 800-735-2989 (TTY) and 711 (Voice).

The Texas Workforce Commission accepts calls made through any relay service provider.

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WWW.TWC.TEXAS.GOV

For purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation program, the Federal Vocational Rehabilitation grant pays 78.7 percent of the total costs of the program. In Federal fiscal year 2020, the Vocational Rehabilitation agency anticipates receiving \$287,666,847 in Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds. Funds appropriated by the State pay 21.3 percent of the total costs (\$77,856,466) under the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

