

TO: Project SEARCH Job Skills Trainers
OVR Staff
School Districts
Project SEARCH Host Businesses
County MH/ID Offices

FROM: Shannon Austin, Executive Director
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

RE: Guidance for the 2019-2020 school year to OVR staff, providers and schools on Project SEARCH services during a period of state mandated mitigation strategies for slowing the spread of Coronavirus Disease - 2019 (COVID-19).

ISSUED: 6/3/20

EFFECTIVE: Immediately

DISCUSSION: The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is committed to providing quality services to Pennsylvanians with disabilities. During this unprecedented time, the health and safety of our customers, staff and community partners remain our top priority. All Commonwealth businesses should follow the most recent guidance issued by the Governor's Office. Please reference the [Responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania Guide](#) for updated information. Please visit [the Department of Community & Economic Development's \(DCED's\) website](#) for resources for businesses affected by COVID-19, along with a current list of businesses allowed to operate and the waiver/exemption form (if applicable).

Partners are encouraged to stay connected by frequently checking out the [National Project SEARCH member portal](#) for updated information on the impact of COVID-19 and FAQs regarding COVID-19 and Project SEARCH Program Sites. During this time, Project SEARCH will be handled as follows in accordance with the Governor's current directives (as of this document's publication date).

1. Because the 3rd Rotation/Phase 4 is an exploratory, community-based experience, providers should not attempt to develop new experiences.
2. Guidance from the National Project SEARCH office indicates that a student can complete the program after their 2nd Rotation/Phase 3, so it may be appropriate for interns to seek permanent employment and not participate in a 3rd Rotation/Phase 4. This should be decided on a case by case basis by each steering committee.
3. If schools do not return to in-person classes, but virtual lessons and discussions occur in place of Rotation 3, the Job Skills Trainer may provide virtual job exploration at the same rate as Phase 4 using this COVID-19 specific service code: PSPPC4. Job Exploration should be provided a minimum of 5 hours

per week to each student (services may be provided in groups or individually). The Job Exploration services provided by the Job Skills Trainer must be a separate and distinct service from the instruction provided by the school; OVR will not pay PSPPC4 for a job skills trainer to participate in the regular virtual classroom instruction. [VocFit](#) may be incorporated into the job exploration curriculum.

- a. To do so, the following is required and must be uploaded in the provider's CWDS business folder:
 - i. If the Job Skills Trainer is not a current provider for Job Exploration, or if they choose to revise their current job exploration curriculum, then the Job Skills Trainer must submit an outline that details the job exploration curriculum and includes daily lesson plans to be provided virtually by the Job Skills Trainer (of no more than 5 pages) to the District Office (DO) that oversees the Project SEARCH site. Please contact Melissa Wert-Thrush if you need ideas or resources for curriculum.
 - ii. Prior to changing to or beginning virtual services, provider must have written documentation from the DO agreeing to virtual services. This may be documented in a purchase order or email that is uploaded in the provider's business folder in CWDS.
 - iii. Documentation indicating the availability of an appropriate non-public facing remote communication product to instruct students (Zoom, Skype, an LEA specific online learning platform, etc.). This documentation can be in the form of a copy of the purchase receipt of a software license from the provider or an email from the school district and should be uploaded in the provider's business folder in CWDS.
 - iv. The District Office will add the specialized service code to the provider in CWDS, and Melissa will approve the service code after review. The service code request does not go through the resource account; the DO should send an email directly to Melissa once all the required documentation is uploaded into CWDS.
 - b. The Job Skills Trainer must be present during virtual sessions. Pre-recorded sessions, concurrent sessions and/or stand-alone online curriculum are not allowable provider services.
 - c. Once instruction is scheduled, provider must forward an invitation or login instructions to the OVR District Office Project SEARCH point of contact so that OVR staff may monitor services remotely on an as needed basis. Providers are also encouraged to take attendance and record sessions for later viewing to verify the receipt of services.
 - d. All materials must be accessible and accommodations must be provided to students who need them. No person with a disability shall, on the basis of the disability, be excluded from participation in virtual service(s) if available.
 - e. Billing must also include a report of students that includes attendance statistics like time(s) logged in and the amount of time active.
4. Job Skills Trainers should submit invoices up to the date of school closure. Payments must be prorated for incomplete phases. If an invoice was paid but the service was not completed, the provider must submit a refund to OVR
 5. If school does not return to in-person instruction for the 2019-20 school year, a virtual Employment Planning meeting should be scheduled with the IEP team for each intern, and the team should review the intern's situation and choose 1 of the following options:

OVR's Mission: To assist Pennsylvanians with disabilities to secure and maintain employment and independence.
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Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program

- a. Intern will transition to OVR Business Services and begin virtual job search activities with DO Business Services staff. Project SEARCH Phases 5 & 6 are not authorized or paid.
 - b. Intern has a job offer, but it is placed on hold because of COVID-19. Up to 3 months of offsite mentoring may be authorized using PSPPC5 at a rate of \$350 per month to follow up with student, assist with job orientation and/or paperwork, and support student while awaiting a start date. Project SEARCH Phases 5 and 6 would be paid at employment outcomes outlined in the administrative memos.
 - c. Intern will skip the in-person Rotation 3/Phase 4. If the intern and VRC are in agreement, the intern may make the informed choice to search for permanent employment as normal. They may either work with the Job Skills Trainer to obtain permanent employment utilizing Project SEARCH Phases 5 & 6 or they may transition to Supported Employment (SE) by completing a Supported Employment Support Plan (SE000).
 - d. Intern and VRC decide to delay permanent employment; they may begin limited virtual job search activities (resume development, interview practice) using PSPPC5 at \$350/month for 3 months.
 - e. Intern will delay job development activities and plan to return to Project SEARCH and complete Rotation 3/Phase 4 when the host business returns to normal operations in the summer or fall 2020 (with permission from the host business and approval from the education partner). This should be recorded in the student's IEP. Project SEARCH Phases 5 and 6 would continue as normal once the student completes Phase 4.
 - f. Intern will delay job development activities and plan to participate in a Paid Work Experience (PWE) when businesses return to normal operations. Services would be authorized as instructed in the provider's PETS Provider Agreement. Once the PWE is completed, then Phases 5 & 6 would be authorized.
6. If the Job Skills Trainer or host site for an adult Project SEARCH is closed, intern may utilize options identified above in 5 a-e.
 7. OVR may discontinue the allowance of virtual services at any time at the discretion of our executive director. A 30-days' notice will be issued to all providers if these services are discontinued.
 8. OVR supports the continuation of selecting interns for 2020-2021 utilizing virtual methods of interviewing and/or meeting. OVR staff should follow previous guidance on the referral of interns in status 02 or 11.