

FACT SHEET FOR VR COUNSELORS

THE WHOLE STORY

The Business Enterprise Program (BEP), one of six major programs of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, was authorized by the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 and established in Georgia in 1944.

The federal government recognizes this program as the state-licensing agency (SLA), and gives priority to the SLA for operating businesses on federal property.

BEP provides business management opportunities for VR clients to become licensed blind vendors so they may operate various small businesses throughout Georgia.

Sites include snack bars, cafes, cafeterias, food courts, sundry shops, military food service, and vending.



Business Enterprise Program Snack Bar

STATISTICS WORTH REMEMBERING

BEP currently operates over one hundred thirty-four (134) sites throughout Georgia. Gross sales for FY 2012 neared \$ 8 million.

In Georgia, the average licensed blind vendor's income averages \$32,000.

Licensed blind vendors also employ other people, thereby impacting the state's economic growth. For the last 5 years approximately 1900 workers were employed by vendors in the BEP, including nearly 250 with disabilities.

Question #1: How do I make a referral?

CONTACT US

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
Business Enterprise Program
5238 Royal Woods Parkway, Suite 200
Tucker, GA 30084-3079
Phone: 770-724-6590
Fax: 770-724-6598

Field Offices are Located in Augusta,
Jesup, Macon, and Valdosta.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Answer #1: VR Counselors should refer individuals to the BEP training department. A selection committee will then evaluate the applicant and make a decision as to the readiness of the applicant.

Training resources are provided through RWSIR, which is currently the only facility in the state offering specialized retail services training for people with visual disabilities. The program covers all aspects of retail trade from stocking vending machines and handling cash registers to accounting and customer service.

Question #2: What is the eligibility criteria for entrance into the BEP training class?

Answer #2: To enter the BEP training class, individuals must be:

- Certified as legally blind by an ophthalmologist or optometrist:
 1. Not more than 20/200 central visual acuity in the better eye w/corrective lenses;
 2. An equally disabling loss of vision as evidenced by a limitation to the field of vision in the better eye to such a degree that its widest diameter subtends,
- Successful completion of psychological and vocational evaluations, as well as a criminal background check with no confirmed felonies, and
- TB testing with confirmed negative results,
- A United States citizen,
- 18 years old, or older, and
- Functioning on a minimum 10th grade Reading & Math level.

To exit the BEP training class, the client must:

- Have a high school diploma/GED,
- Demonstrate the ability to identify coins visually or using tactile sense, and make accurate change,
- Demonstrate independent mobility,
- Demonstrate excellent customer service skills,
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively,
- Demonstrate physical and mental stability (a necessity in independently interacting with retail customers, suppliers, and building managers), and
- Ability to stand or sit for extended periods of time and to lift a minimum of 20 lbs.

Question #3: Why is it necessary for my client to have 10th grade Reading and Math levels when exiting BEP's training at RWSIR?



GEORGIA
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Greg Schmiege, Executive Director

Answer #3: BEP locations operate on a cash and credit basis, thus good math skills are required to estimate percent of profit accurately, calculate a customer's multiple item sales, and count back change swiftly and correctly. VR clients are expected to be proficient with basic accounting skills necessary in the operation of any retail business.

Good reading skills are important to accurately interpret and complete paperwork such as sales reports, profit and loss statements, merchandise orders, supplier agreements, and preventive maintenance instructions for snack bar and vending equipment.

Question #4: What happens after my client successfully exits BEP's training at RWSIR?

Answer #4: After successfully completing training at RWSIR, the client will be referred by RWSIR to the BEP Training Coordinator who will develop an on-the-job training schedule at locations operated by licensed blind vendors who provide one-on-one training to the individual.



Business Enterprise Program Welcome Center Vending

A classroom component is also provided by the BEP Training Coordinator. Instruction will be provided in BEP program Rules and Regulations, Policy and Procedures, how to accurately complete required reports, and ServSafe training (a nationally recognized food safety course).

Question #5: When can I close my client's case as employed (26-closure)?

Answer #5: The client becomes a licensee candidate after successfully completing training. He/she is then eligible to interview for vacant BEP locations statewide.

If selected to fill a vacancy, the individual will operate the location for a minimum 6-month probationary period. The BEP Training Coordinator & BEP Counselor evaluate the individual's performance while in probationary status. All profits (retail sales less expenses & 12% set-aside rate) generated at that location are retained by the licensee candidate. However, a license is not awarded until it is determined that he/she can successfully manage the operation independently. At the point the individual receives his/her license, the case should be closed Status 26 by VR.