

RSA's response to frequently asked questions about extended (sheltered) employment

Is Extended Employment Still a Legitimate Employment Option?

Yes. Employment in a sheltered setting is a legitimate and valuable employment option for individuals with disabilities. Implementation of these regulations will not change that fact. Individuals still may choose to pursue long-term extended employment outside of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program, and these regulations ensure that those individuals' needs are met by requiring the VR agency to make the necessary referral to local extended employment providers.

Do the Regulations Restrict Individual Choice?

No. We interpret the concept of individual choice in the Act as a choice among the employment outcomes under the VR program specified in the statute or by the Secretary in regulations. Extended employment (i.e., sheltered or non-integrated employment) remains both an initial step toward achieving integrated employment under the VR program and a long-term employment option through sources of support other than the VR program. In recognizing that some individuals with disabilities may wish to work in an extended employment setting, these regulations require the VR agency to ensure that these individuals are afforded the opportunity to do so by referring them to local extended employment providers. Those providers currently support the vast majority of sheltered workers through non-VR program resources. Moreover, persons wishing to prepare for integrated employment by initially working in an extended employment setting also may do so. In these cases, the VR agency cannot discontinue VR services until the individual transitions to integrated work in the community.

Can State Agencies Refuse To Serve Those With the Most Significant Disabilities?

No. Both the Act and regulations guard against that result. Persons with disabilities may not be excluded from the VR program based on an assumption or belief that the individual is incapable of working in an integrated setting. Rather, State units are required to establish clear and convincing evidence that an individual is incapable of achieving an employment outcome, for purposes of the VR program, and must conduct a trial work assessment of the individual's abilities before it can refuse services to any individual who it initially believes is incapable of working in an integrated job setting.

Are Homemaker and Unpaid Family Worker Considered Employment Outcomes for Purposes of the VR Program?

Yes. The chief purpose of the regulations is to ensure that individuals with disabilities participating in the VR program are able to pursue the same type of employment opportunities that are available to the general public. Extended employment jobs, unlike homemakers and unpaid family workers, are primarily reserved for those with disabilities.

Will the Regulations Serve To Close Down Sheltered Workshops?

No. Sheltered workshops are primarily supported by other State, local, and private resources and rely very little on VR program funds. Persons who prefer to work in extended employment on a long- term basis are assured access to local extended employment programs through the referral requirements in the regulations. Also, those participants in the VR program who can best prepare for integrated employment by working in an extended employment setting as part of a training and assessment program are able to follow that path as well. Thus, extended employment programs and sheltered workshops continue to serve essentially the same role that they currently serve.