



**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 2019-20 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:** April 3, 2020

**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 guide for [Responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania](#) for updated information. Please visit the Department of Community & Economic Development's ([DCED](#)) 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 ([Project SEARCH](#)) for updated information on the impact of COVID-19: 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).

Because the 3<sup>rd</sup> Rotation/Phase 4 is an exploratory, community-based experience, providers should not attempt to develop new experiences.

1. Guidance from the national Project SEARCH office indicates that a student can complete the program after their 2<sup>nd</sup> Rotation/Phase 3, so it may be appropriate for interns to seek permanent employment and not participate in a 3<sup>rd</sup> Rotation/Phase 4. This should be decided on a case by case basis by each steering committee.
2. 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). [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, 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. DO should submit the request to Transition Specialist, Melissa Wert-Thrush.
    1. This documentation should include an outline of the work readiness curriculum provided by the Project SEARCH instructor.
    2. The District Office will add the specialized service code to the provider in CWDS and Melissa will approve the service code after review.
    3. Please contact Melissa if you need ideas or resources for curriculum.
  - ii. Documentation indicating the availability of an appropriate non-public facing remote communication product to instruct students (Zoom, Skype, a 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.
  - iii. 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.
  - iv. 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.
  - v. 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.
  - vi. 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.
  - vii. Billing must also include a report of students that includes attendance statistics like time(s) logged in and the amount of time active.
3. 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
4. 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:
  - 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 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 Phase 5&6 or they may transition to Supported Employment (SE) by completing a Supported Employment Support Plan (SESP) (SE000). However, if the intern and VRC decide to delay permanent employment, they may begin limited virtual job search activities (resume development, interview practice) using job development (SE001) or job mentoring (SE009) with an SE provider of their choice.

- c. 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.
  - d. 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. Phase 5 and 6 would continue as normal once the student completes Phase 4.
5. If the Job Skills Trainer or host site for an adult Project SEARCH is closed, intern may utilize either "a or b" as identified above in (3).
  6. 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.
  7. 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.