Orientation Packet

for New Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals Working with Individuals who are Blind or Visually Impaired
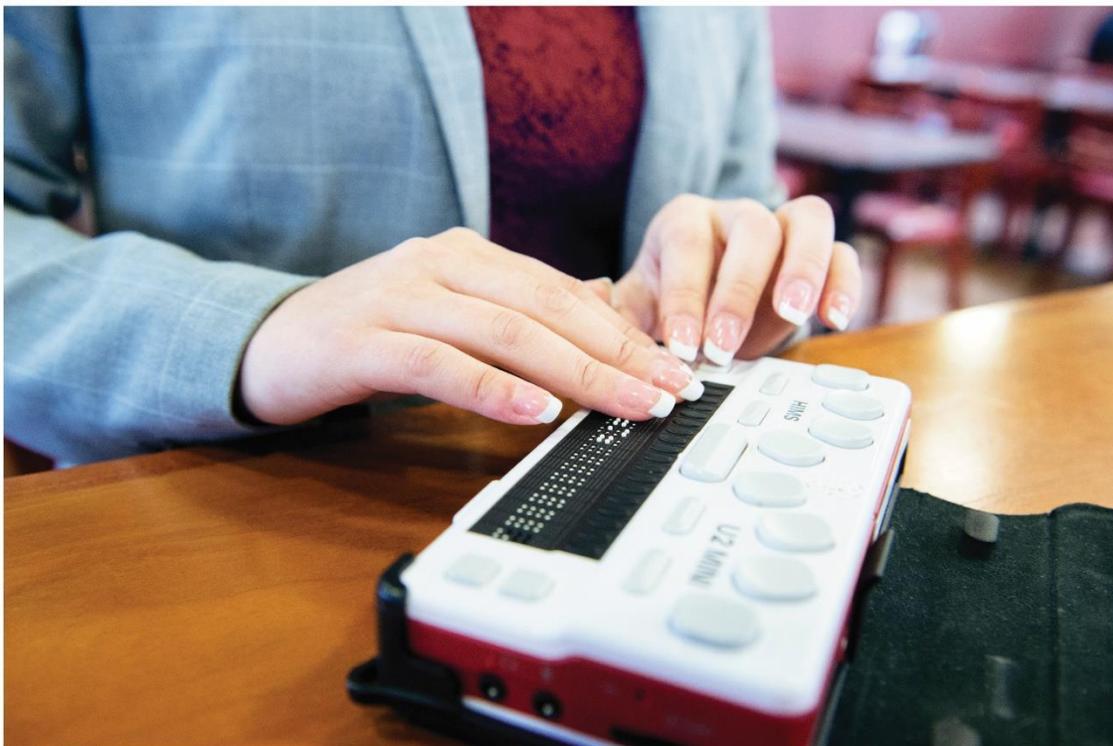

M STATE | **NRTC**
NATIONAL RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER
ON BLINDNESS & LOW VISION

Table of Contents

Letter of Introduction

Dear Vocational Rehabilitation Professional,

Congratulations! You are embarking upon a new and challenging professional role working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired. There is a great deal to learn about blindness, but the most important thing to remember is that there are resources to support you. The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (NRTC) provides resources, training, and technical assistance to ensure you are successful in effectively and efficiently serving your consumers.

The NRTC, located at Mississippi State University since 1981, is funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) and serves as a national center of excellence on employment for individuals with blindness or low vision. Our current NIDILRR funding is for a Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment for Individuals with Blindness or Other Visual Impairments (details about these projects are available on our website: www.blind.msstate.edu/research/index.php).

Outcomes from NRTC research projects provide information used by professionals ranging from direct service practitioners to administrators of state agencies and federal programs. Research findings have contributed significantly to the literature in the field and NRTC personnel regularly disseminate this information at national, regional, and state conferences.

In addition to conducting research, training and technical assistance are also key activities for the NRTC. The NRTC contracts with individual states to provide on-site training for VR personnel, state VR agency program evaluations, and needs assessments. We provide technical assistance through our website, the National Technical Assistance Center on Blindness and Visual Impairment (NTAC-BVI, www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu) and via phone (662-325-2001) and email (nrtc@colled.msstate.edu).

This orientation packet will familiarize you with the blindness field and our products. We want you to think of the NRTC as your blindness resource! We hope you find the information useful. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or comments. We would very much like to hear your feedback.

Please take a moment to register for our quarterly newsletter at www.blind.msstate.edu/news/newsletter. We wish you a long and successful career in the blindness field!

Sincerely,
The NRTC Team

There are many misperceptions about blindness and about what a person who is blind or has low vision can and cannot do. Many believe a person who is blind cannot cook a meal, clean their house, take care of their children, manage their finances, or work in a competitive job. This is simply not true. With proper adaptive skills training and the opportunity to implement those skills independently, the average person who is blind or has low vision can accomplish the same tasks as the average sighted person. When consumers put these blindness skills into practice, they gain confidence in their abilities and develop a more positive attitude about blindness. In turn, the person who is blind makes life choices and career goals no longer based on perceived limitations of blindness, but on his or her interests, skills, and abilities.

The following are some examples of common misperceptions about blindness:

- **Misperception: People who are blind see only darkness, nothing else.**

  Reality: Only approximately 18% of people who are visually impaired are classified as totally blind, and the majority of those who are can differentiate between light and dark.

- **Misperception: People who are blind develop a "sixth sense."**

  Reality: People who are blind or visually impaired are generally not endowed with a sharper sense of touch, hearing, taste, or smell. To compensate for their loss of vision, people may learn to listen more carefully, remember without taking notes, or increase directional acumen to compensate for their lack of functional vision.

- **Misperception: People who are blind or visually impaired cannot work or hold a job.**

  Reality: With the proper training and accommodations, people who are blind or visually impaired work competitively in a wide range of occupations. Some examples can be found on our website:
  www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/businesses/whatjobs/
  www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/businesses/blindworkers/

- **Misperception: Most people who are blind are proficient in braille and own a dog guide.**

  Reality: Braille is a beneficial skill, but only a small percentage of people who are blind or visually impaired are fluent in braille. Many people know enough braille for practical use, such as reading notes and labels. Most people who learn braille as adults do not develop the skill to read braille rapidly. Only a small percentage

of blind or visually impaired people use a dog guide. Dog guides are valuable tools and companions for those who use them. Dog guides lead the person safely through crowds, across streets, and around obstructions, but the person who is blind does control the dog. When the dog guide is harnessed, it is on duty, and one should not pet, talk to, or otherwise distract it.

- **Misperception: People who are blind or visually impaired cannot access print or handwritten materials.**

  Reality: The advent of computers and technology has made most print accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired, even some handwritten print. Computer software can translate print into speech, magnify screen images, and enlarge text to a readable size. Occasionally human readers may assist with text that is not recognizable by a computer.

- **Misperception: Feeling someone's face is a common technique that blind people use to "see" what someone looks like.**

  Reality: People who are blind follow the same social conventions as those with sight, which means that it is highly unlikely they will want to touch the face of someone they are not intimately acquainted with. In fact, according to many visually impaired people, feeling someone's face does not provide very much helpful information about a person's appearance.

- **Misperception: If you are speaking with someone who is blind or visually impaired you should avoid using words like "look" or "see," so that you do not offend them.**

  Reality: Words referencing sight are frequently used as figures of speech by people of all vision levels, including those who are blind. Telling your blind friend "I'll see you later" is acceptable, as are other phrases using such words.

People who are blind want to be treated like everyone else: with courtesy and respect. So, relax and act naturally. Be considerate of the fact that you can see and they cannot. Below are some suggestions from Perkins School for the Blind that will make your next interaction with someone who is blind easier and more comfortable for both you and the person with vision loss.

- **If you think someone who is blind may need help navigating, ask first.**

  It is jarring for anyone to be unexpectedly grabbed or pulled, but especially so for someone who cannot see who is doing the grabbing. By asking, you give the person a chance to say, "Yes, please" or, "No, thank you."

- **If your help is accepted, allow him or her to grasp your arm just above the elbow.**

  That makes it easier for the person to feel your movements and follow on their own terms.

- **If you see someone who is blind or visually impaired about to encounter danger, be calm and clear when you warn the person.**

  Use specific language, such as, "There's a curb right in front of you," or, "The door in front of you is closed," instead of, "Watch out!" Also, use directional language, such as "to your left" or "directly behind you," rather than "over here." Think about what information you would want to know if you could not see.

- **Identify yourself when approaching someone who is blind or when entering a room that the person is in.**

  Even if the person has met you before, he or she may not recognize you by your voice. In a group setting, address the person who is blind by name, so they know you are talking to them. Inform the person when you depart so they do not continue the conversation.

- **Do not pet or distract a working dog guide.**

  These dogs are busy directing their owners and keeping them safe. Distracting them makes them less effective and can put their owners in danger.

- **Use "people first" language.**

  No one wants to be labeled by how they are different. It's kinder, and more accurate, to say "a person who is blind" rather than "a blind person." We are all people first.

- **Converse appropriately.**

  Speak in a normal voice and speak directly to someone who is blind, not over or around the person to someone else.

NRTC Short Course Recommendations

The NRTC has developed a series of short courses for professionals who work with people who are blind or visually impaired. The courses are available online, completely free of charge, and they offer continuing education credits (CRC, ACVREP, and NBPCB). These courses will help you learn about vision loss and its impact on the human experience. Our recommended course sequence is provided below. We believe these courses can provide a foundation for you as you begin your new profession of assisting individuals with vision loss to achieve positive employment and independent living outcomes.

All the following courses, as well as additional courses, are available at the NTAC-BVI website: www.ntac.blind.msstate.edu/courses/

1. Basics of Blindness and Low Vision

2. Introduction to Blindness and Low Vision

3. The Low-Down on Low Vision

4. Adjustment and Acceptance of Blindness

5. Anatomy and Physiology of the Eye

6. Common Adult Eye Conditions

7. Interpreting Regular and Low Vision Eye Reports

8. An Introduction to Assistive Technology for Individuals with Vision Loss

9. Working with Employers: Why it is Important and What Successful VR Agencies Do

10. Working with Businesses to Improve Employment Outcomes

11. Employer Attitudes toward Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired

12. Understanding and Overcoming Transportation Barriers

13. Understanding Social Security Work Incentives: It's Easier than you Think

NRTC Resources

The NRTC has developed numerous products for professionals who work with individuals who are blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind, as well as products for individuals who are blind or visually impaired themselves. These products are available on our website, and a brief description of these resources is provided below.
www.blind.msstate.edu/our-products/

Employment Resources

- A Human Resources Guide for Working with Employees Experience Vision Loss – a guide for Human Resources staff who are helping employees who experience vision loss maintain employment filled with guidance and information
- Blind People Can't Perform This Job...Or Can They? – a brief article with findings about attitudes of hiring managers, written for employers
- Resource Sheet for Job Seekers – a list of online resources for job seekers
- SSDI Beneficiaries who are Blind or Visually Impaired – an evidence-based practice guide presenting recommendations for agencies and counselors
- Working with Businesses to Improve Employment Outcomes – an evidence-based practice guide that presents findings from four studies and recommendations for agencies and counselors about working with businesses
- Employment Mentoring Manual – a resource for individuals who are interested in having a mentor and service providers who are interested in starting a mentoring program

Transportation Resources

- Transportation Guide for Persons who are Blind or Have Low Vision –information about finding and using transportation options
- Customized Transportation Plan – questions to generate conversation between a counselor and consumer regarding the consumer's transportation situation to craft a customized, workable plan
- Transportation Briefs – short fact sheets about transportation topics

Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Resources

- BEP Brochure – overview of program history, program information, and testimonials that can be used to promote the BE program
- BEP Service Video – video of process for BEP
- Minimum Requirements and Preferred Qualifications for Blind Entrepreneurs Entering into the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program – explanation of entry-level requirements to assist state BEPs to create qualifications lists
- Practices for Recruiting Transition-Age Youth into the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program –suggestions for recruitment strategies

- Working with Blind Entrepreneurs who have Hearing Loss in the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program Resource Guide –strategies for accommodating these entrepreneurs in training activities, on the job, and at meetings

Deaf-Blindness Resources

- Youth with Deaf-Blindness –report that describes the characteristics, school experiences, academic achievements, and after-school experiences of deaf-blind youth, based on the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2
- Employment Statistics for People with Dual Sensory Impairments – employment statistics compiled by NRTC researchers for 2011-2015
- Predictors of Employment for Youth Who are Deaf-Blind –article about factors that predict post-high school employment for youth who are deaf-blind
- Predictors of Employment and Job Quality of VR Consumers with Deaf-Blindness – article describing a study that investigated employment outcomes for VR consumers who are deaf-blind
- Experiences of Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness after High School –short article about post-high school experiences of young adults who are deaf-blind
- Characteristics, Services, and Outcomes of Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers who are Deaf-Blind – article that provides descriptive information about the characteristics, services, and outcomes of deaf-blind consumers served by VR agencies
- Services for Consumers who are Deaf-Blind: Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Service Models Utilized and Their Effectiveness – four VR agency service models are identified and described, and differences in competitive employment closure rates based on service-model type are discussed

Transition Resources

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Work Fact Sheets – fact sheets with general information, examples of calculations and links to more detailed information for youth with visual impairments who receive SSI benefits and their parents
- Transition Calendar - Checklist of tasks that students who are blind or visually impaired need to complete as early as middle school in order to be ready to attend college

Career Advantage for V.I.P.s

An employment-preparation curriculum that includes eight instructional models for individuals who are blind or visually impaired to prepare for the job search

NRTC Publications

Lists NRTC publications, with copies of most publications available for free downloads

Separate vs Combined Agencies

Provides a review of the research on outcomes for blind and visually impaired consumers served in separate vs. combined agencies

Accessibility Resources

- <u>Creating an Accessible PDF</u> – offers tips and guidance for designing, formatting, and saving an accessible PDF
- <u>Creating an Accessible Document</u> – provides information for beginners on how to make documents more accessible
- <u>External Accessibility Resources</u> – describes and links to other organizations' resources for document accessibility

Information and Resource Referral

Links to programs, services, and other resources related to blindness and visual impairment that may be of benefit to consumers

Acronyms and Jargon

Abbreviation	Definition
ACB	American Council of the Blind (www.acb.org) – Consumer group
ACVREP	Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (www.acvrep.org) – Provides certification program information and resources for Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (CVRTs), Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMSs), Certified Low Vision Therapists (CLVTs), and Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialists for People with Visual Impairments (CATISs)
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
ADL	Activities of Daily Living – Functional areas that are considered essential for daily functions, such as dressing, eating, or bathing; an instructional area for VRTs or rehabilitation teachers
AER	Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (www.aerbvi.org) – Professional association for service providers of individuals who are blind or visually impaired
AFB	American Foundation for the Blind (www.afb.org) – National nonprofit organization committed to creating a more equitable world for individuals who are blind or visually impaired
AHEAD	Association for Higher Education and the Disabled – Professional organization for college support services personnel
AMD	Age-Related Macular Degeneration (aka ARMD)
AOTA	American Occupational Therapy Association (www.aota.org) – Professional organization that provides state policy and licensure information for occupational therapists
APH	American Printing House for the Blind – Provides educational aids and materials to blind children
AT	Assistive Technology
AVRT	Association of Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (formerly MACRT) (www.avrt.org) – Professional organization for vision rehabilitation therapists from public and private sectors across the US
BANA	Braille Authority of North America – Sets U.S. braille code standards
BEP	Business Enterprise Program – Program to assist persons who are blind to have their own food-service business, funded by the Randolph-Sheppard Act and administered through VR
Bioptic Driving	A technique to allow people who are visually impaired or legally blind to drive a car using special assistive telescopic devices
Bookshare	Organization that provides textbooks and bestsellers in a variety of

accessible formats to students and adults (www.bookshare.org)

BVA	Blinded Veterans Association (www.bva.org) – Consumer group
B/VI	Blind and Visually Impaired OR Blindness and Visual Impairment
CAP	Client Assistance Program – Provides advocacy and mediation for VR clients
CAT	Computer Access Technology – Primarily references adaptations for those who are blind or visually impaired
CATIS	Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for People with Visual Impairments (from ACVREP)
CDMS	Certified Disability Management Specialist (www.cdms.org)
CEC	Council for Exceptional Children (www.cec.sped.org) – Professional association for special education teachers
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations of the United States of America
CLVT	Certified Low Vision Therapist (from ACVREP)
COMS	Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (from ACVREP)
CRC	Certified Rehabilitation Counselor
CSAVR	Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (www.csavr.org)
CVI	Cortical Visual Impairment
CVRT	Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (aka Rehabilitation Teacher; from ACVREP)
DB	Deaf-blind (or deafblind) – Individuals with severe visual impairment who also have severe hearing loss
DSA	Designated State Agency (Vocational Rehabilitation Agency)
DVM	Delayed Visual Maturation
EI	Early Intervention
FVA	Functional Vision Assessment – Done by a vision professional in a natural setting, such as at home or work
HKNC	Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (www.helenkeller.org/hknc) – Provides training and resources to individuals age 16 and over who have combined vision and hearing loss
IADLs	Instrumental Activities of Daily Living – Important activities that are not critical for daily functioning, such as cleaning and maintaining a house or managing money
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (education legislation)
IEP	Individualized Education Program for K-12 special education students

IL(S)	Independent Living (Services) – Rehabilitation services for persons without vocational objectives
IOL	Intraocular Lens - Surgically implanted lens for the eye (used after cataract surgery)
IPE	Individualized Plan for Employment for VR consumers
JAN	Job Accommodation Network (www.askjan.org) – An organization that provides free guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues
JAWS	Job Access with Speech – Speech software program to allow persons who are blind to access text on a computer
JVIB	Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness (https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jvb)
LB	Legally Blind – Central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye, with the best possible correction, and/or a visual field of 20 degrees or less
Learning Ally	Organization that provides accessible audio textbooks for high school, college, and university students (www.learningally.org)
LMA	Learning Media Assessment
LPO	Light Perception Only – Not able to see details but can perceive the difference between light and dark
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
LVA	Low Vision Aid – An aid or device, such as a talking watch or magnifier, to assist an individual with daily activities
LVE	Low Vision Exam - Done by an eye care professional in a clinical setting, such as a doctor's office or rehabilitation facility
LVT	Low Vision Therapist or, when certified by ACVREP, CLVT
NBPCB	National Blindness Professional Certification Board (www.nbpcb.org) – Provides certification program information and resources for National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC), National Certification in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind (NCRTB), National Certification in Literary Braille Certification (NCLB), and National Certification in Unified English Braille (NCUEB)
NCDB	National Center on Deaf-Blindness (nationaldb.org)
NCLB	National Certification in Literary Braille (from NBPCB)
NCRTB	National Certification in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind (from NBPCB)
NCSAB	National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (www.ncsab.org)
NEI	National Eye Institute (www.nei.nih.gov)

NET	National Employment Team – Program of CSAVR focused on business engagement
NFB	National Federation of the Blind (www.nfb.org) – Consumer group
NIDILRR	National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research – Federal government's primary disability research agency (formerly NIDRR)
NIMAC	National Instructional Materials Accessibility Center (www.nimac.us)
NLP	No Light Perception
NLS	National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (www.loc.gov/nls)
NOMC	National Orientation & Mobility Certification (from NBPCB)
NRA	National Rehabilitation Association
NRTC	The National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision (www.blind.msstate.edu)
NSF	National Science Foundation (www.nsf.gov)– Funding source for research grants
O&M	Orientation and Mobility – Service provided to those who are blind or visually impaired to help them travel safely and efficiently using a white cane, human guide, and/or dog guide
OIB	Title VII, Chapter 2 – Older Individuals who are Blind Program, also known as Independent Living for Older Individuals who are Blind (ILOIB) – Administered by state VR agencies and funded by RSA
OIB-TAC	Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (www.oib-tac.org)
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs – Federal office with oversight for educational programs for children with disabilities
OSERS	Office on Special Education and Rehabilitative Services – Federal agency comprised of RSA, NIDILRR, and OSEP
OT	Occupational Therapist
Pre-ETS	Pre-Employment Transition Services – Mandated by WIOA, requires 15% of state VR funds be spent on Pre-ETS programming
PWD	Person with a Disability
RCB	Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind
RESNA	Rehabilitation Engineering Society of North America (www.resna.org) – Certifies assistive technology specialists
ROP	Retinopathy of Prematurity
RP	Retinitis Pigmentosa

RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) – Federal agency charged with oversight of VR programs for people with disabilities, including older blind adults
RT	Rehabilitation Teacher – Also known as VRT or, if certified, CVRT or NCRTB
SSP	Support Service Provider, typically used by people who are deaf-blind
US	Usher Syndrome - A condition that causes vision and hearing loss
VA	Veterans Affairs (aka U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)
VRT	Vision Rehabilitation Therapist - Also known as Rehabilitation Teacher (RT) or, if certified through ACVREP, CVRT
WBU	World Blind Union (www.worldblindunion.org) – global association consisting of organizations of and for the blind in 190 countries
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014