

**Nebraska VR Question and Answers**  
**Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)- COVID 19**  
**Updated April 1, 2021**

**Question** – Can we extend eligibilities if a TWE would be required to determine it?

**Answer** – During this time, all eligibility and eligibility extension requirements still apply. If a TWE is required and cannot be completed, an eligibility extension would be required.

**Question** - Do you know if state office is considering moving the 2nd deadline for IPEs, considering the outbreak? Is it still March 31, considering everything that has occurred?

**Answer** – During this time, all IPE and IPE extension requirements still apply. Policy states that in situations “ when planning exceeding the maximum 180 days without a IPE being developed, an automated e-mail will be generated to the Director of VR and the Office Director for review. The Office Director will be required to provide the Director of VR the justification of not meeting the IPE deadlines.” This would still be true for IPE’s not completed due to the current situation, and documentation of the reason would still be required in a task note.

**Question:** Can staff work 10 hour days in the office, and then telecommute for 8 hour days at home?

**Answer:** Telecommuting days cannot exceed 8 hours per day. In-office hours are at the discretion of the Office Director based on office needs.

**Question:** If staff are not interested in telecommuting, can they be required to?

**Answer:** Given the possibility an office could be closed at any time, Office Directors/Supervisors need to ensure all staff participate in some level of telecommuting to identify any technology needs or barriers to working remotely. This is necessary for planning purposes in the event they are required to telecommute full-time.

**Question:** Can the office identify a plan for telecommuting and then only use it if needed?

**Answer:** Since late March, all VR and ATP have been working remotely and only in unique situations have staff been reporting to the office to complete tasks which cannot be completed otherwise.

**Updated 6-23-2020**

**Question:** Is staggering hours or working outside core hours okay?

**Answer:** As stated in the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), adjusted work day/week scheduling is allowed. If a staff person will be working outside of core hours, approval from the VR Director is necessary.

**Question:** What end date should be used on the telecommuting agreement?

**Answer:** No longer than 30 days. The COOP requires it to be reviewed at that time.

**Question:** Is it acceptable to telecommute starting now?

**Answer:** Per the COOP, telecommuting in the field offices should start the week of 3/24/20.

**Question:** Can staff with underlying health conditions telecommute for 40 hours, starting immediately?

**Answer:** Yes. The CDC has defined those most at risk as –

- People 65 years and older
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- People of any age with the following underlying medical conditions, particularly those that are not well controlled
  - Chronic lung disease or asthma
  - Congestive heart failure or coronary artery disease
  - Diabetes
  - Neurologic conditions that weaken ability to cough
  - Weakened immune system
  - Chemotherapy or radiation for cancer (currently or in recent past)
  - Sickle cell anemia
  - Chronic kidney disease requiring dialysis
  - Cirrhosis of the liver
  - Lack of spleen or a spleen that doesn't function correctly
  - Extreme obesity (body mass index [BMI] >40)
- People who are pregnant

**Question:** What about staff that don't have a work cell phone?

**Answer:** OCIO has given us permission to purchase temporary cell phones to be used for remote work, if necessary. Based on the responses to the technology survey, State Office will be determining which staff need to receive a permanent state issued cell phone (requested through OCIO), and which need a temporary cell phones. Lindy will be sending an email to the Office Directors with a list of the staff who need temporary cell phones, and her approval to purchase them on the office p-card.

**Question:** How will mail be handled in the event an office is closed to the public and to staff (phase 3)?

**Answer:** Each office needs to identify a process for who will responsible for coming to the office periodically to open the mail. If staff are telecommuting, mail can be scanned to them. Each office should also plan for how the mail is handled if it is not possible to access the building/office.

**Question:** Should we send out a notification to SE/BH providers that it is okay to hold off on job searching with clients given we don't want them to have to go out into the public if it is not necessary?

**Answer:** A memo dated March 31, 2020 was sent to Providers of Supported Employment services under Service Agreements with Nebraska VR which outlines services under milestones which lend themselves to being appropriately provided in the person's home setting.

**Updated 6-23-2020**

**Question:** What would associates do from home?

**Answer:** Lisa M. has posted a document of Associate Job Duties From Home on the Office Director wiki. Other positions are posted in the wiki as well. If you haven't already, check it out!

**Question:** If staff are sent home because they are sick, can they use administrative leave?

**Answer:** See NDE FAQ, Question C1.

**Updated 3-24-2020**

**Question:** What if staff do not have internet at home?

**Answer:** VR will provide a phone with a hot spot for staff to access the internet if they do not currently have it at home. Staff who currently have internet at home cannot be reimbursed for it.

**Question:** Can IT send out instructions for WebEx and Zoom?

**Answer:** ZOOM - staff may sign up for free accounts (you do not need to set up through NDE). Go to <https://insidende.education.ne.gov/offices/communications/zoom-help-and-tutorials> to request a Zoom account and access a series of videos and tutorials.

WEBEX: You must have an account to “host” a meeting. Currently only Tibor, Laura, and Chad have accounts. Tibor is requesting a Webex account for every Office Director so they can host staff meetings.

**Question:** Can staff take their monitors and other technology devices (e.g. keyboard, docking station, etc.) home with them?

**Answer:** In May, the IT team developed processes for VR and ATP staff to pick up from the office and take home their display (including **power and video** cable attached, as well as the **video adapter** attached to the cable.), a keyboard and a mouse.

**Updated 6-23-2020**

**Question:** Can IT staff assist us in connecting laptops and/or iPADS to monitors, printers, etc. at home?

**Answer:** No. IT staff are working to ensure all employees have the capacity to connect from home and access what they need to perform their work. The additional time that would be needed to assist staff with connecting to devices at home is not available.

**Question:** Can printers be provided for staff while working remotely?

**Answer:** In January 2021, the Director of Nebraska VR worked with all supervisors to determine which staff needed access to a printer/scanner. A solution was then deployed through Capital Modern. Staff who were signed up for this option have now received the printer/scanner.

**Updated 4-1-2021**

**Question:** What is a VPN needed for?

**Answer:** A VPN (Virtual Private Network) allows you to create a secure connection to the state network over the Internet from home or outside the agency. It is needed to access files that are on a server or on your desktop. It is not needed to access QE2, KRONOS, VRIS, Program Manual, LINK, and InsideNDE.

**Question:** Can a VPN be set up on iPads for staff that are using them at home?

**Answer:** VPN's on iPads require additional software and support, so will not be installed on the iPads. Staff with iPads are able to use them for Kronos, QE2, VRIS, KRONOS, Program Manual, Link, and InsideNDE etc. without a VPN. If staff begin working at home full-time and require access to shared Office Files or files on their computer, the Office Director would need to make a request through Lindy for a laptop.

**Question:** Who do we contact if there are questions about AlertSense?

**Answer:** Staff can email questions about AlertSense to [nde.hr@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.hr@nebraska.gov). Prior to emailing, staff should first check to see if they have password reset emails in both their Junk email box in Outlook, or more likely in their Quarantine: <https://protection.office.com> (then use their full email and email password to log in.)

**Question:** While I telecommute, what pointers are available to ensure I'm organizing my workspace while being mindful of ergonomics.

**Answer:** Find suggestions here: [https://insidende.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/HealthFitness\\_DeskSetUpOverview.pdf](https://insidende.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/HealthFitness_DeskSetUpOverview.pdf)

**Updated 8-14-2020**

**Question:** Can Nebraska VR begin offering work-based learning and other in-person experiences for students with disabilities?

Yes, beginning June 1, 2021. As shared previously, the Director of Nebraska VR has continued to consult with NDE leadership to determine appropriate timing for again organizing work based learning experiences (WBLEs) for students with disabilities. Considering trending improvements in public health data and the statewide plan/timeline for disseminating the vaccine, Nebraska VR may organize WBLEs and other in-person activities for students with disabilities (e.g., volunteer experiences, job shadows, informational interviews, business tours) to begin no sooner than **June 1, 2021**. This guidance is shared in advance so staff may begin organizing these activities, as appropriate. When planning for these experiences it is critical Nebraska VR staff have thorough understanding of the host businesses' compliance with any applicable direct health measures and the 3Cs: avoiding crowded places, close contact, and confined spaces.

**Updated 4-1-2021**

**Question:** Are clients able to participate in OJEs at this time?

**Answer:** Yes. The VR Specialist should have a conversation with the client to ensure they are aware of risks due to COVID-19 and are able to make an informed choice on whether or not they would like to proceed with these services. If the client states they are unaware of risks due to COVID-19, the Specialist can provide them with resources to review (such as CDC guidelines), so that the client will then be able to make an informed decision on whether they would like to move forward with an OJE. If the client chooses not to move forward at this time, their case should be kept open (unless they request closure), until such time as they are able to complete the required assessment. If they choose to move forward with the OJE, the VR Specialist can proceed with securing an appropriate site. Businesses should be contacted (and the OJE set up) by the VR Specialist using remote options. If an appropriate site cannot be secured due to COVID-19, or if there are no job coaches available and one is required, the case should be held until it's possible to provide this service. While a case is "on hold", regular check ins with the client are still required, and if possible, alternative activities should be explored.

**Updated 6-23-2020**

**Question:** Are applicants able to participate in trial work experiences (TWE) to assist in determining eligibility at this time?

**Answer:** Yes. The VR Specialist should have a conversation with the applicant/authorized representative to ensure they are aware of risks due to COVID-19 and are able to make an informed choice on whether or not they would like to proceed with these services. If the applicant/authorized representative states they are unaware of risks due to COVID-19, the Specialist can provide them with resources to review (such as CDC guidelines), so the applicant/authorized representative will then be able to make an informed decision on whether they would like to move forward with an TWE. If the applicant chooses not to move forward at this time, their case should be kept open (unless they request closure), until such time as they are able to complete the required TWE. If they choose to move forward with the TWE, the VR Specialist can proceed with securing an appropriate site. Businesses should be contacted (and the TWE set up) by the VR Specialist.

If an appropriate site cannot be secured due to COVID-19, or if there are no job coaches available and one is required, the case should be held until it's possible to provide this service. While a case is "on hold", regular check ins with the applicant/authorized representative are still required, and if possible, alternative activities should be explored. During this time, all eligibility and eligibility extension requirements still apply. If a TWE is required and cannot be completed within the 60-day timeframe, an eligibility extension would be required.

#### **Updated 7-10-2020**

**Question:** If an individual who has been removed from the wait list is apprehensive to move his/her case forward due to COVID-19 concerns, is it okay to place the case "on hold"?

**Answer:** No. The timeline for IPE development (with or without extension) is a federal requirement and still applies. If a client is apprehensive about working in the community at this time, career planning, discovery activities and IPE development can still occur virtually using a variety of tools (see [Resources for Working Remotely](#) and [Career Planning](#) on VRIS). Rapid Engagement activities may also be considered. During this time, monthly contact with the client is still required, as stated in policy.

After IPE development if there is hesitation to start VR services because of COVID-19 and community exposure, monthly contact with the client would continue so services can begin immediately when the client is ready.

Maintaining engagement in the employment process is vital, even for a person who needs or chooses to move slowly in pursuit of their employment goals. Such activities should continue as COVID-19 concerns are lessened or the person makes an informed choice to stop pursuing an employment goal.

If a client is no longer interested in receiving services, or is not actively participating, case closure may be considered.

**Question:** What activities could be considered for individuals who may need a Supported Employment Plan or have an approved Supported Employment Plan and are apprehensive about community services?

**Answer:** The following activities may be considered for individuals who have an approved Supported Employment IPE, and due to COVID-19 are apprehensive about implementing community-based services. These activities may be facilitated by either service providers or VR Specialists in an effort to help the client remain engaged while physically distancing from others.

- Assist people with gaining skills using remote technology. Teach and practice use of technology for remote communication –including Facetime, texting or voice texting, Zoom and other platforms, etc.
- Practice work communication skills that may generalize to the work environment
- Assist with personal appearance/hygiene (identifying appropriate interview clothes and personal appearance standards, or choosing interview attire from clothing the person has, and getting it ready)
- Research employers in the local area using internet resources
- Develop and improve interview skills; complete practice interviews
- Help the person to develop a list of references
- Develop a cover letter and resume
- Help to create video clips for a visual resume
- Assist with completion of employment application template for use with on-line or paper applications
- Identify accommodations that might be needed for specific types of jobs
- Contact and develop prospective employers based on the person's and/or their family's social networks
- Conduct virtual informational interviews or virtual job shadows
- Identify transportation resources and apply for transportation supports, when applicable

**Updated 8-14-2020**