Who Pays for Assistive Technology?

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Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is an excellent place to go for Assistive Technology (AT). They can pay for all kinds of things, regardless of cost, and they can even help with AT services, such as training and device maintenance. But there is one caveat: The need for AT has to be connected to an employment goal.

It’s up to you to show your counselor why you need the device to succeed at work. Not at daily living, not at recreation. At work.

Sometimes VR will cover a device in one case and not in another. This may seem inconsistent and unfair, but what they’re really doing is looking at whether the device is necessary in that individual situation, to assist that individual with “preparing, securing, retaining, or regaining an employment outcome.”

Everyone’s going to need something different to reach their employment goal. Here are some examples.

Covered (most likely)

• An IntelliPen to help someone with a learning disability to keep track of what was said in meetings or trainings at work.
• Adaptive software for someone to access specific digital material at work.
• A netbook and screen reader for someone who is blind to be able to do work related tasks such as taking notes and accessing emails and calendars.
• An iPad for someone with an intellectual or developmental disability to be able to communicate work preferences and develop work-related skills.

Not covered (most likely)

• An IntelliPen for convenience, because you’re tired of carrying your laptop around.
• Adaptive software for someone who does not yet have a job and does not need it for education or job searching.
• A netbook and screen reader for someone who is blind to access books or newspapers for leisurely reading on the go.
• An iPad for someone with an intellectual or developmental disability to be able to communicate with caretakers at home.

It gets tricky when VR thinks another agency, such as Independent Living, the Utah Assistive Technology Program, Medicaid or the employer should pay for the AT. If it’s something that could be paid for by a “similar or comparable” benefits program, VR is not obligated to pay. However, if the other agency takes a long time, interrupting or delaying your progress toward your employment goal, VR is required to pay. They can later be reimbursed by the other agency if it’s determined that they are in fact the responsible party. Here are some examples where VR might or might not see a clear connection to an employment goal. They may argue that someone else should pay.

May or may not be covered

• Van modifications to be able to get to work… and everywhere else.
• A shower seat so you can have good hygiene at work… and everywhere else.
• Hearing aids so you can hear what’s going on at work… and everywhere else.
• A ramp installed at home so you can get to work… and everywhere else.
Questions? Call the Disability Law Center at 1-800-662-9080.