

Eight Essential Resources for VR Success With Deaf Youth During COVID-19



Now known as the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 started on a bright note for vocational rehabilitation (VR) in the United States.

2020 marks the **100th anniversary** of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program—the federally funded initiative founded in 1920 to assist people with disabilities that has empowered millions to become independent and employed.

Currently, though, VR counselors and agencies are coping with the coronavirus crisis, facing unprecedented uncertainties and challenges. Yet the centennial anniversary is a reminder that they can draw upon a century of innovative service and success.

And, for serving their **deaf and hard of hearing** clients, they can also draw upon the **National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes** (NDC), a technical assistance center committed to closing substantial gaps in **employment** and **education** for deaf people.

NDC has a wealth of online VR resources just a click away to boost deaf success during the pandemic (and beyond). Below are the “essential eight”—the most useful, evidence-based assets every VR counselor needs right now—in a checklist format for easy implementation with deaf clients.

1. The Must-Have: Take Advantage of the VR Professionals Toolkit

Deaf people have diverse identities, communication preferences, and access needs. VR professionals who effectively collaborate with deaf youth are better prepared to provide individualized services, effective career pathways, and improved outcomes.

NDC’s **VR Professionals Toolkit** is a one-stop shop of online information and tools that include the **Top 10 Tips for VR Professionals** and deep dives into transition, accommodations, deaf identity, and legal and policy topics.

2. Ensure Access to Pre-ETS

Thanks to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, VR agencies must allocate at least 15% of their federal budget to provide pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS). That funding gives agencies more opportunities to work closely with deaf high school students to ensure that they have access to job exploration counseling and other services. The funding also lets agencies take advantage of community rehabilitation providers equipped to offer pre-ETS online—opening the doors to deaf-accessible services that may not be available locally.

NDC’s online **Pre-Employment Transition Services Guide** provides resources, practices, and considerations to support the provision of the five required pre-ETS categories with deaf clients: job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on postsecondary opportunities, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

3. Work Online and Be Accessible

Face-to-face meetings may not be possible. Many people are working from home. Check out NDC's [COVID-19 Information Hub](#) for a complete list of tips and remote resources to help VR counselors and their agencies work from home, connect with deaf clients online, and use technology to be accessible.

The wide variety of topics include [hosting effective online meetings, using hearing assistive technology at home, deaf college students taking control of online learning](#), and much more.

4. Rely on Remote Role Models

Research shows that [role models positively influence](#) deaf youth's personal development, achievement in academics, and employment. But how can you connect deaf clients with role models during a pandemic?

NDC's [#DeafSuccess video stories](#) are an online solution. They showcase an empowering variety of careers and professions that deaf youth want to pursue, providing examples of accomplishment, resilience, and ingenuity. Share the videos as a standalone resource or integrate them into other programming options.

5. Get Help: A Team on Your Side

Have a fire to put out and don't know where to turn? Contact the [NDC | help team](#), the center's front line of support and assistance. They have VR counselors on staff who can answer questions about accessible technology options and strategies for deaf clients, schools, colleges, and business owners.

Want to stay in regular touch with their expertise? [Subscribe](#) to NDC's email newsletter or listserv.

6. Foster Self-Advocacy With ASL-Accessible Tools

Self-advocacy skill building is a [key element](#) of VR counselors' support for deaf youth in transition, and it can influence [lifetime outcomes](#).

To assess deaf VR clients, use the Self-Determination Inventory: Student Report, a 15-minute [online assessment](#) in English or American Sign Language (ASL) that asks clients how they feel about their ability to select choices, set and go after goals, and make decisions. Upon completion, use the report about their strengths and areas of need to [set goals and develop plans](#).

[Deafverse](#), the first-ever ASL-accessible online game for deaf teenagers, is a go-to resource to [practice and develop self-advocacy skills at home](#). Launched in 2019 by an NDC [team of deaf creators and educators](#), Deafverse is a free, choose-your-own-adventure game that includes a [Teacher Strategy Guide](#) and can be implemented in VR settings.

7. Plan Ahead: Accessible Work-Based Learning

One day the pandemic will be over. Plan ahead by learning how to create an accessible work-based learning program that can foster high expectations and prepare young adults for job success.

NDC's free online class [Developing Accessible Work-Based Learning Programs](#) features real-world examples from students, employers, and administrators. Typically completed in just 3 hours and eligible for CRC clock hours, it delves into the details of work-based learning program design, identifies field-based strategies that address common challenges in program development, and provides ways to achieve equitable access.

8. Grow Professionally: Improve Skills at Home

The pandemic has created countless new challenges to work, connect, and engage from home. Yet it may also offer time to focus on professional development and find opportunities for growth.

Use the [Professional Development Checklist: Six Ways to Improve Your Skills From Home](#) to improve VR capacity to serve deaf clients. NDC also offers an [online learning library](#) with free self-directed classes to earn CRC clock hours and support the postsecondary success of deaf clients.

Share these “essential eight” VR resources with colleagues working with deaf youth, and stay tuned for new online resources, classes, and research findings. Now is the time to come together as a VR community, support each other, and make sure that everyone is maximizing accessibility, inclusion, and independence—now and for the next 100 years.



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