



The International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP) represents the largest group of Vocational Experts in the United States, including those specializing in Social Security disability cases. To ensure the highest quality of services provided to the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review (ODAR) we offer the following definition of a Vocational Expert contracted with the Social Security Administration.

Per the 2011 AG 11-12 Disability Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) SSA-RFQ-11-1206, the definition of a Social Security Vocational Expert (SSVE) is “an individual who is trained and skilled to render impartial opinions relevant to evidence at the hearing level of the Social Security disability claims process. Areas of expertise should include current knowledge of: working conditions and physical demands of various occupations; transferability of skills; knowledge of the existence and numbers of jobs *at all exertional levels* in the national economy; and involvement in or knowledge of placing adult, handicapped workers into jobs.”

In line with the Rehabilitation Counseling Coalition’s (RCC) Statement of Professional Qualifications and Credentials, IARP embraces the following statement: Vocational Experts (VEs) are rehabilitation professionals who possess specialized expertise in business, employment, the workforce, and working with people with disabilities from diverse backgrounds. VEs are professionals committed to performance accountability and continuous improvement through emerging and best practices. Competencies include, but are not limited to: (a) counseling and guidance, (b) knowledge and application of the medical and psychological aspects of disability, (c) knowledge and implementation of vocational testing, assessment strategies and application of transferable skills, (d) working knowledge and integration of labor market data and disability employment policy, (e) working knowledge and application of data from government publications such as the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), Standard Occupational Classification System (SOC) and Selected Characteristics of Occupations (SCO) (f) skills and ability to match business workforce needs with the evaluatee’s skills and talents, (g) current working knowledge of exertional and non-exertional demands of occupations in the labor market, (h) providing services required to develop and implement individualized career plans that assists persons with disabilities in successful employment in a competitive, integrated work environment.

The above knowledge and experiential domains are achieved through education and ongoing professional experience. IARP supports the knowledge and experiential domains identified above as well as the following minimum standards and qualifications for work as a Vocational Expert contracted with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to provide testimony at administrative law hearings.

1. A Master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or other related Master’s degrees such as Counseling, Psychology, Education, Human Services or another behavioral science. National certification as identified in #4 below will demonstrate that one has met educational standards.



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2. At least five years of direct experience providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. IARP recognizes that no one can be an expert without direct experience in the field.
3. Employment as a principal, employee or private consultant in vocational counseling, vocational assessment, or job placement of people with disabilities including labor market research and communicating with employers regarding the physical and mental demands of occupations.
4. National certification including the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC), the American Board of Vocational Experts (ABVE) Fellow or Diplomate status, or the Certified Vocational Evaluator (CVE). National certification assures that one has met educational standards, passed an examination, and is bound to a scope of practice and ethical code. Individuals with related degrees may require additional coursework to obtain national certification. All four certifications require passage of a national certification examination, adherence to an ethical code, and continuing education requirements.
5. An SSVE who is teaching in the vocational rehabilitation field at the university or college level or administrators in the field of rehabilitation should also possess the required credentials or qualifications.
6. IARP recommends ongoing membership in a professional organization that provides regular updates in the body of knowledge required of the Vocational Expert.

IARP is aware that the Social Security Administration has extended contracts to some rehabilitation professionals that do not possess or meet all of the above standards but who have provided expert testimony for many years. We acknowledge experience providing vocational rehabilitation services, including job placement and vocational assessment qualifies these individuals to provide vocational expert services to the Social Security Administration. It is IARP's position that from this point forward, it is imperative that new Social Security VEs meet the minimum standards indicated by points 1-6 above.

In closing, to assure competent and appropriate testimony in Social Security administrative law hearings, IARP supports these minimum standards. These standards protect the public by ensuring the provision of ethical and culturally competent professional services. With the implementation of these standards and qualifications, there are mechanisms in place to sanction and/or remove those who fail to meet the required standards of the national certifications, through ethics violation of any certifying body or professional organization to which the party holds a current membership.

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