

## STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the appointment of Blind Rehabilitation Specialists (BRS) and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists (BROS) in VA.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES.** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5005. This revision clarifies the education requirements for BRS and BROS positions and eliminates the GS-5 grade level for BRS. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management](#) Web site. These revised qualification standards are effective on the date of issuance of this handbook.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY  
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

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**APPENDIX G41. BLIND REHABILITATION SPECIALIST  
QUALIFICATION STANDARD  
GS-601  
Veterans Health Administration**

**1. COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment as a blind rehabilitation specialist (BRS) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). This standard applies to all VHA BRSs, including Visual Impairment Services Team (VIST) Coordinator positions. The work requires the application of knowledge of the concepts, principles, and practices of blind and vision rehabilitation and the use of assessments and therapies to improve the independent function, quality of life and adjustment for patients who are blind or visually impaired. BRSs evaluate patients by interviews, tests, and measurements and use such findings solely and/or as a part of an interdisciplinary team to develop and implement blind and vision rehabilitation programs for individual patients. Instructional activities are directed toward achieving therapeutic objectives for patients who are blind and visually impaired in effective literacy and communication skills, orientation to and management of the environment, safe ambulation and travel, manual skills, proficiency and understanding in activities of daily living, pursuit of avocational and vocational skills, and adjustment to visual changes. **NOTE:** *Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS) Qualification Standard is contained in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G42.*

**2. BASIC REQUIREMENTS**

a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, Section A, Paragraph 3g, this part.)

b. **Education**

(1) The individual must have earned[:

(a) A] bachelor's degree [from an accredited college or university with a major field of study] in blind or vision rehabilitation, [ ] related program in rehabilitation, special education[, family and consumer science education, technology and industrial arts education,] or health care[; or,

(b) A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university (without a major field of study as outlined in (1)(a) above) that included or was supplemented by at least one of the following:

1. At least 30 semester hours of directly related, upper level undergraduate courses (e.g., at least 200-course level or higher, or as identified by the college or university).

2. One full year of directly related graduate level coursework (typically at least 15-18 semester hours).

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3. A certificate in the core curriculum in orientation and mobility, vision rehabilitation therapy or low vision therapy from an accredited college or university and a directly related practicum/internship in the occupation, either included in the degree or post-degree.]

(2) Foreign Graduates must have proof of a minimum of a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university (or foreign equivalent, as verified through an independent credential evaluation company), with a specialization in Blind Rehabilitation.

c. **Certification.** Required at GS-11 and above.

(1) Applicants must possess at least one active, current, full and unrestricted certification to be eligible for appointment. Certification must be granted by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP), or another equivalent, related professional credential in special education, rehabilitation or health care. If all certifications are impaired, the individual is ineligible for appointment in VA. **NOTE:** *The ACVREP administers three certification*



**PART II  
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(a) **Knowledge of Professional Blind Rehabilitation Practice.** To be creditable, the experience must demonstrate possession of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics associated with current blind and vision rehabilitation practice as outlined in the current scope and standards of practice for blind and vision rehabilitation. One or more of the following may have evidenced this:

1. The equivalent of 1 year of active practice. Active practice means paid/non-paid employment (VA or Non-VA) as a BRS or BROS.

2. Academic course work leading to an advanced degree in blind or vision rehabilitation or related therapeutic intervention program.

**(b) Quality of Experience**

1. Work as a graduate BRS directly related to the position to be filled; and

2. The work to be credited is at a level comparable to BRS experience at the same or next lower grade level than the grade level being considered for placement.

3. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.

(3) **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience as a professional BRS is credited according to its relationship to the full-time workweek. For example, a BRS would receive 1 week of full-time credit for each 2 weeks of half-time work.

(4) **Graduate Education.** Graduate degrees may be substituted for experience through the GS-11 level. Graduate degrees must be from a college or university that was regionally or nationally accredited at the time the candidate completed the program. To substitute the graduate degree, it must have been completed after the individual met the basic requirements for appointment.

(5) **Content Specialty.** Specialized content areas of blind and vision rehabilitation include, but are not limited to, orientation and mobility, low vision therapy, vision rehabilitation therapy, manual skills, technology and computer access for the people who are visually impaired, and case-management for disability due to blindness.

b. **Grade Determinations.** In addition to the basic requirements, the following criteria must be used when determining the appropriate grade assignment of candidates. This criteria is consistent with the 2 grade interval structure for professional/scientific professions found in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G17.

(1) **GS-[7] (Entry Level).** None beyond the basic requirements. No certification required at this level.

[]

[(2)] **GS-9**

(a) **Certification.** No certification is required at this level.

(b) **Education and Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, completion of one year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade level or completion of at least two full years of progressive graduate education or a master's degree in a field directly related to the position. In addition to the KSAs in subparagraph 2(c) above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(c) **Demonstrated KSAs**

1. Knowledge of policies and procedures of the blind/vision rehabilitation service.
2. Knowledge of administration and interpretation of assessments and evaluations in blind/vision rehabilitation.

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3. Ability to develop a basic written blind/vision rehabilitation plan from assessment results and develop more complex plans with consultation from supervisor.

4. Skill in instructing patients and families in a meaningful rehabilitation program and applying blind/vision rehabilitation therapeutic techniques.

5. Ability to recommend appropriate blind/vision prosthetic devices for patients within the scope of practice.

6. Ability to serve as team coordinator for assigned patients during their rehabilitation programs.

(d) **Assignment.** Individuals at this grade level serve as staff BRSs. They are responsible for intake, assessment, planning for rehabilitation, intervention and follow-up in the content specialties. They receive guidance from experienced staff members for the most complex patients.

**[(3)] GS-11 (Full performance level for BRSs who are not VIST Coordinators)**

(a) **Certification.** Required at this level and above.

1. **Staff BRS.** Candidates must meet the certification requirements in paragraph 2c(1) above. BRS (GS-11) must have one certification from ACVREP or a related, equivalent, professional certification.

2. **VIST Coordinators.** Candidates must meet the certification requirements in paragraph 2c(3) above. BRS who are VIST Coordinators may be drawn from traditional blind/vision rehabilitation backgrounds, and also from counseling backgrounds such as social work, vocational rehabilitation counseling, etc. VIST Coordinators may be credentialed/certified through:

a. Certification via the ACVREP, or

b. Licensure via the Social Worker Licensure Board, or

c. Certification via the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRC), or

d. Equivalent, related, relevant professional credential in counseling or rehabilitation.

(b) **Education and Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, completion of 1 year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the next lower grade; or 3 years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a Doctoral Degree; or Doctoral Degree in Blind Rehabilitation or a directly related field. In addition to meeting the KSAs described at the GS-9 level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the following professional KSAs:

(c) **Demonstrated KSAs**

1. Knowledge and understanding of highly specialized complex evaluations and diagnostic tests and procedures of blind/vision rehabilitation.

2. Ability to properly assess a wide variety of patients having diverse and multiple disabilities to make recommendations for blind/vision rehabilitation therapeutic interventions.

3. Ability to write a blind/vision rehabilitation plan that includes evaluation information from multiple disciplines with observable, measurable goals and that identifies specific outcomes.

4. Knowledge of teaching methods and learning principles.

5. Ability to employ interventions, unusual motivational techniques and coordinate treatment with other professionals to achieve outcomes of the rehabilitation plan.

6. Ability to recommend appropriate blind/vision rehabilitation prosthetic devices for patients within scope of practice, making adaptations and modifications as required.

7. Ability to plan, direct, and distribute work assignments to volunteers, assistants and, interns and/or BRSs at lower grade levels and perform assigned mentoring duties for staff, students, and interns.

(d) **Assignments.** This is the full performance level for BRSs who are not VIST Coordinators. Typical assignments at this grade level include but are not limited to the following:

1. **Staff BRS.** In addition to providing services to Veterans described at the GS-9 level, individuals at this level have duties that typically include the following: serving as a consultant to blind/low vision rehabilitation and other medical center staff in evaluating and treating patients in the specialty area; serving as a mentor to other therapists who are evaluating and treating patients in the content specialty or program area; serving as internship supervisor to students who are completing their supervised practice, providing in-service and clinical training programs in the content specialty or program area.

2. **Sole Practice BRS.** Individuals in this assignment may serve as the only BRS at a medical center or an outpatient clinic and are responsible for independent decision-making and independent care. Individuals in this assignment serve as a member of or as consultant to a specialty care team.

3. **VIST Coordinators.** Individuals in this assignment serve in a developmental capacity as case management professionals whose knowledge must be broad ranging and include not only the medical conditions and rehabilitation of Veterans who are blind and visually impaired, but also knowledge of their compensations and benefits, as well as VA and non-VA rehabilitation programs. In addition, VIST Coordinators work with Veterans and their families in readjustment counseling.

[(4)] **GS-12 (Full performance level for VIST Coordinators)**

(a) **Certification.** BRS must meet the certification requirements in paragraph 2c(1) and (2) above. VIST Coordinators must meet the certification requirements in paragraph 2c(3) above.

(b) **Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, completion of a minimum of 1 year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the next lower grade level. In addition to meeting the



population at active, affiliated blind rehabilitation inpatient centers or outpatient clinics. Has full supervisory responsibility for staff that includes lower level BRS positions. At this level, the blind or vision rehabilitation program typically includes a variety of specialties, an extensive educational program, and involvement in research activities. Additional activities include the evaluation of new products and equipment, and making recommendations concerning upgrades/new purchases that would improve operations. Other supervisory responsibilities include informing higher level management of anticipated staffing variances and recommending promotions, reassignments, or other personnel actions such as retention or release of probationary employees as well as recommending recognition of superior performance when applicable.

[(5)] **GS-13**

(a) **Certification.** Candidates must meet the credentialing/certification requirements in paragraph 2c(1) and 2c(2) above.

(b) **Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, completion of 1 year of experience as a BRS equivalent to the next lower grade level. In addition to meeting the KSAs described at the GS-12 level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the KSAs required for the specific assignment and demonstrate the potential to acquire the assignment-specific KSAs as indicated by an asterisk (\*).

(c) **Assignments.** BRSs at this grade level may be appointed to one of the following assignments:

**1. National Program Consultant.** BRS National Program Consultants (NPCs) are responsible for support, oversight and communication among the various local, regional, and national levels of VHA Blind Rehabilitation Service. They create and implement the didactic models for training, perform ongoing review and evaluation of services, and report findings. NPCs articulate findings from data and research for programmatic quality assurance. The following KSAs are required:

a. Ability to balance responsibilities and to work with great autonomy.

\*b. Ability to set priorities, delegate tasks, meet multiple deadlines, analyze organizational problems, and develop and implement effective solutions.

\*c. Ability to monitor and report on the status and progress of work, evaluate program quality to ensure that methods, deadlines, and quality have been met; and make adjustments to accomplish the workload in accordance with established priorities.

d. Ability to analyze and use data effectively to manage workload, quality, performance, and productivity within the section.

e. Ability to utilize evidence-based practices and clinical practice guidelines in a professional area, and to guide BRS professionals in applying these tools.

f. Ability to apply and to instruct professionals in current practice, literature and research to enhance the continuum of care in blind/vision rehabilitation services.



staff, and other resources associated with the department, with great autonomy. Service chiefs exercise supervision, administrative management, and direction of all professional areas in a unified blind/vision rehabilitation service. The following KSAs are required:

a. Ability to supervise, motivate, and manage effectively a diverse clinical staff applicable to a small blind/vision rehabilitation center; skill in assessing qualifications and abilities of current and prospective employees.

\*b. Comprehensive knowledge of, and ability to, apply administrative and human resources policies effectively.

c. Demonstrated ability to organize work, set priorities, delegate tasks and responsibilities, and manage and direct the work of others to accomplish program goals and missions.

d. Ability to adapt to new and changing work conditions, contingencies, and staffing.

e. Ability to translate management goals and objectives into well-coordinated and controlled service operations through technical direction, review, analyses and evaluation of program components including productivity, and ability to manage budgets for a blind/vision rehabilitation center.

f. Ability to provide consultation and promote best practice procedures in blind/vision rehabilitation nationally; and serve as a national leader in the field of blind/vision rehabilitation.

[(6)] **GS-14**

(a) **Certification.** Candidates must meet the credentialing/certification requirements in paragraph 2c(1) and 2c(2) above.

(b) **Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, completion of 1 year of experience as a BRS equivalent to the next lower grade level. In addition, the candidate must demonstrate the KSAs required for the assignment and demonstrate the potential to acquire the assignment-specific KSAs as indicated by an asterisk (\*).

1. Ability to supervise, motivate, and manage effectively a diverse clinical staff applicable to a large blind rehabilitation center or equivalent program.

2. Ability to assess qualifications and abilities of current and prospective employees and manage large budgets.

3. Ability to establish and monitor productivity standards and production and performance priorities and to apply administration and human resource policies effectively.

4. Ability to organize work, set priorities, delegate tasks and responsibilities and to manage and direct the work of others to accomplish program goals and missions.

5. Ability to accommodate to new and changing work conditions and contingencies and staffing.



**APPENDIX G42. BLIND REHABILITATION OUTPATIENT SPECIALIST  
QUALIFICATION STANDARD  
GS-601  
Veterans Health Administration**

**1. COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment as a Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). This standard applies to all VHA BROS positions. BROS are professionals who have been cross-trained to provide outpatient services in blind/low vision rehabilitation including orientation and mobility, communication and daily living, low vision therapy, technology and computer access and manual skills. The work requires the application of knowledge of the concepts, principles, and practices of blind and vision rehabilitation and the use of assessments and therapies to improve the independent function, quality of life and adjustment for patients who are blind or visually impaired. BROSs evaluate patients by interviews, tests, and measurements and use such findings solely and/or as a part of an interdisciplinary team to develop and implement blind and vision rehabilitation programs for individual patients. Instructional activities are directed toward achieving therapeutic objectives for patients who are blind and visually impaired in effective literacy and communication skills, orientation to and management of the environment, safe ambulation and travel, manual skills, proficiency and understanding in activities of daily living, pursuit of avocational and vocational skills, and adjustment to visual changes. **NOTE:** *Blind Rehabilitation Specialist (BRS) Qualification Standard, including Visual Impairment Service Team (VIST) Coordinator, is contained in VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G41.*

**2. BASIC REQUIREMENTS**

a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, Section A, Paragraph 3g, this part.)

b. **Education and Experience**

(1) The individual must have earned[:

(a) A] bachelor's degree [from an accredited college or university with a major field of study] in blind or vision rehabilitation, [ ] related program in rehabilitation special education[, family and consumer science education, technology and industrial arts education] or health care[; **or**

(b) A master's degree from an accredited college or university with a major field of study in blind or vision rehabilitation, related program in rehabilitation, special education, family and consumer science education, technology and industrial arts education or health care; **or**

(c) A bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university (without a major field of study as outlined in (1)(a) and (b) above) **AND**] obtained a certificate in the core curriculum in orientation and mobility, vision rehabilitation therapy or low vision therapy from an accredited college or university. For individuals this education must have included supervised practice; **and**,

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(2) Completion of 1 year of progressively complex experience equivalent to the BRS, GS-9; **or**

(3) Three (3) years of progressively higher level graduate education leading to a doctoral degree in blind rehabilitation **or** a directly related field.

(4) Foreign Graduates must have proof of a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university (or foreign equivalent, as verified through an independent credential evaluation company), with a specialization in blind rehabilitation.