

The Role of Assistive Technology in Assessment

The Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Professionals (VECAP) recognizes assistive technology (AT) as an empowerment approach, one that, when appropriately applied, increases the life and work choices for a person with a disability. Assistive technology, as defined by the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1994 (PL 103-218) is:

- Assistive Technology Device: “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capacities of individuals with disabilities”
- Assistive Technology Service: “any service that directly assists an individual with a disability in the selection, acquisition, or use of an assistive technology device.”

An AT intervention can be as simple as placing blocks of wood under a desk or as involved as utilizing a voice activated computer system.

Federal laws mandate the provision of appropriate technology to assist individuals with disabilities. These include the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (last Amended 2004), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as Amended in 1990, and the Rehabilitation Act Amended in 1992. Each of these legislations clearly states that AT considerations occur throughout the education and rehabilitative process including services related to vocational evaluation, career assessment and employment support.

The use of assistive technology, in the assessment process is often required in order to reach effective outcomes. A fundamental goal of the field of assessment and vocational evaluation is to assist individuals with disabilities to reach their maximum potential. For many individuals this potential will be severely restricted without the benefit of assistive technology. The use of assistive technology within vocational evaluation, assessment, and work adjustment to enhance the performance of individuals is essential in determining their functional capabilities.

The use of AT during vocational evaluation, assessment, and work adjustment is often critical to a valid appraisal of the individual’s true capability. The application of assistive technology can take various forms, including (1) site assessment to provide better accessibility, (2) modification of assessment tools and instruments such as adaptation to work samples, (3) use of technologies such as visual aids and computer adaptations, and (4) assessment recommendations that specifically focus on AT issues. In all of these cases, assessment personnel can and should play a major role on the AT team,

coordinating access to technology-related services and contributing to team recommendations. Assistive technology resources and services should be integral components of all comprehensive vocational evaluation programs as well as assessment and work adjustment services.

As a professional organization, VECAP must continue to support an increasing and expanding role for assistive technology in our field. Individual potential is too easily underestimated or overlooked if technological aids and solutions are not considered. As such, VECAP will be actively involved in promoting technology training to its current and potential members. We will advocate for an increase in both pre-service (undergraduate and graduate level academic programs) and in-service (professional conferences, workshops, state vocational rehabilitation training, agency human resource development, etc.) assistive technology-related training opportunities.

VECAP will also advocate for educating consumers with disabilities and their families regarding the availability and legal foundations of AT. All vocational evaluation and assessment personnel should have a functional awareness of assistive technology and know when to refer a particular case to experts in rehabilitation engineering.

Assistive technology is not always the answer; however its use can create options which otherwise might not be available. The appropriate application of AT can be a powerful approach that leads toward increased independence and opportunities thereby enhancing consumer choice. All assessment and work adjustment professionals should strive toward further incorporation of AT into their work activities and advocate for appropriate assessment and accommodations prior to, during, and following vocational assessment, evaluation, and work adjustment.

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