

Chapter 5

REFUGEE SOCIAL SERVICES EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (RSSEP)

Acronyms Used in this Chapter

CRP	Comprehensive Resettlement Plan
ELT	English language training
IEP	Individual Employment Plan
LDSS	Local department of social services
ONS	Office of Newcomer Services
RCA	Refugee Cash Assistance Program
RSSEP	Refugee Social Services Employment Program
SNAP	Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
VNIS	Virginia Newcomer Information System

This Chapter provides guidance to Refugee Social Service Employment Program (RSSEP) providers under contract with the Office of Newcomer Services (ONS) to provide services funded through two federal grants, Refugee Social Services and Targeted Assistance.

A. Program Objective

RSSEP objective is to assist clients in obtaining employment as soon as possible after RSSEP registration, remaining employed, and obtaining job upgrades.

B. Eligibility for Services

RSSEP services are provided to any person who requests these service and

1. Has documentation from an authorized federal agency verifying that the person is a refugee, asylee, Cuban/Haitian entrant, Afghan or Iraqi with a special immigrant visa, or victim of human trafficking. See Appendix A, *Documentation Requirements for Refugee Programs*.
2. Has had a refugee-eligible status for less than five years from the date of RSSEP registration, with the exception that there is no time limit on when an eligible person may apply for naturalization preparation services.
3. Is 16 years of age or older and not a full-time high school student, with the exception that assistance with part- time and summer employment may be provided to students.

C. Registration Process

The RSSEP Registration Form is the application for RSSEP assistance. The client completes the form either:

1. At an agency under contract with ONS to provide RSSEP services.
2. At a local department of social services (LDSS) when a person applies for Refugee Cash Assistance and does not have a copy of the RSSEP Registration Form or the LDSS cannot confirm RSSEP Registration through the Virginia Newcomer Information System (VNIS).

Note: When the client signs the RSSEP Registration Form at the LDSS, the original is given to the client and a copy is sent to the RSSEP service provider.

D. Service Delivery Requirements

1. RSSEP contract agencies that provide Department of State Reception and Placement Program (R&P) and Matching Grant Program (MGP) services must ensure that services are coordinated and that RSSEP services do not duplicate services provided through R&P and MGP.
2. RSSEP service delivery must be culturally and linguistically compatible with the client's language and cultural background.
3. RSSEP providers must provide employment and job placement services equally to both male and female clients.
4. RSSEP services may continue after a client enters employment to assist with job retention and job improvement.

E. Priority in Provision of Services

1. RSSEP service providers must plan service delivery so that services are provided in the following order of priority
 - a. Clients who arrived in the U.S. within the past year and clients who were granted asylee, victim of human trafficking or another refugee-eligible status within the past year
 - b. Recipients of cash assistance, either RCA or TANF

- c. Unemployed clients who are not receiving RCA or TANF cash assistance.
 - d. Employed clients in need of services to retain employment or increase their income to attain economic self-sufficiency.
2. Exceptions to this priority order are possible if made at the direction of or with the approval of the Virginia State Refugee Coordinator. For example, RSSEP eligible individuals who are homeless or are in situations which may lead to homelessness.

F. Program Services

1. Case Management
2. Employment Services
3. Skills Training for Enhanced Earnings Potential
4. English Language Training
5. Employment Support Services

G. Case Management Services

A Comprehensive Resettlement Plan (CRP) is developed with each RSSEP client. The CRP includes an Individual Employment Plan (IEP). The IEP is the basis of RSSEP case management activities.

1. RSSEP case management requires:
 - a. An assessment of the client's current and future employment needs and the services needed to assist the client in becoming self-sufficient.
 - b. Coordination and interaction with other community and agency resources.
 - c. Comprehensive service delivery done in collaboration with the client.
 - d. Job follow-up to verify job retention and to identify if there is a need for additional job retention services.
2. RSSEP Initial Interview

An initial intake interview is conducted with each client to explain the importance of immediate employment, services available to support employment activities, participation requirements, and the consequences of non-participation in the program

3. On-going RSSEP Case Management Requirements
 - a. Culturally and linguistically appropriate service delivery that ensures clients understand the program goals; their IEP; and how their IEP relates to the CRP; and their responsibility to participate in program activities.
 - b. On-going assessment to identify when a client is experiencing challenges and linking the person with the appropriate community resource is required.
 - c. Updating the IEP section of the CRP as explained in the ONS CRP Standard Operation Procedures.
 - d. Updating the client's VNIS record and case notes to record
 - i. All contacts with the client regarding all aspects of RSSEP service delivery;
 - ii. All employment activities including employer contacts, job referrals, entered employment;
 - iii. Issues, concerns, and RSSEP interventions; and
 - iv. Types of instruction, hours in instruction, name of the teacher, and cost.

H. Employment Services

1. The development of an IEP for each client that
 - a. specifies employment goals;
 - b. details the tasks and time frames to be taken both by the client and RSSEP staff to meet those goals; and
 - c. identifies known obstacles to immediate employment and outlines the strategies to remove these obstacles.
2. Pre-employment and post-employment counseling, coaching, and mentoring to assist the client in obtaining and maintaining employment and obtaining salary increases and job upgrades.
3. A formalized written American workplace orientation, which includes expectations that may differ from a client's work experiences in other countries.
4. Job referral, job search, job placement, and follow-up assistance.
5. Job development, which is direct employer contacts by RSSEP staff for the purpose of finding jobs for clients who need direct assistance in obtaining and maintaining employment consistent with their abilities, skills, and experience in the U.S. labor market.
6. Apprenticeship and skills recertification. [Note RSSEP funding for this is limited to one year.]
7. Aptitude assessment and employment skills testing, when necessary.

I. English Language Training

1. English language training (ELT) both increases employability skills and prepares clients for applying for citizenship.
2. When ELT is part of the IEP, the RSSEP service provider must provide the ELT training concurrently with employment or employment activities. RSSEP delivery of ELT and vocational training is not to interfere with employment. To the fullest extent feasible, ELT and other training services are to be provided
 - a. outside the client's normal working hours, and
 - b. concurrently with employment services.
3. ELT is generally curriculum-based instruction taught by certified trainers and is provided individually, in groups, or on-line.
4. ELT may be provided directly by the RSSEP provider staff or purchased.

J. Employment Support Services

Each RSSEP client's IEP must describe the need for these services.

1. Vocational or career training which does not interfere with employment and does not exceed one year
2. Childcare related to employment activities, if specified in the contract between ONS and the RSSEP service provider
3. Transportation related to an employment activity, if specified in the contract between ONS and the RSSEP service provider
4. Translation and interpreter services related to employment and case management services, if specified in the contract between ONS and the RSSEP service provider

K. Skills Training for Enhanced Earnings Potential (STEP)

1. STEP provides RSSEP clients, whose professional skills are specialized and not immediately transferable to U.S. jobs, with opportunities for obtaining comparable employment in the U.S. Clients receive specialized services including professional assessments and testing and assistance in accessing training, certifications, and courses related to their prior careers.

2. Participation in STEP is assessed during the development of the CRP/IEP.
3. The CRP/IEP must include short term and long-term employment and training objectives developed in consultation with the client. The consultation is to include an explanation of types of technical training and other options available.
4. Whenever possible, arrange for one-stop workforce centers, community colleges, and professional associations and organizations to conduct assessments, training, and skills development services.
5. As part of the short term objectives, each client will
 - a. Be provided job referral services with the expectation that the client will be employed while receiving training leading to long-term employment goals.
 - b. Be informed of and referred to the appropriate level English Language Training.
6. Each STEP client will receive training in financial literacy, basic computer skills, and interview skills unless determined proficient in these areas during the CRP/IEP assessment.
7. Each STEP client must complete the Workforce Development Pre-Employment Training or an equivalent program.
8. Consistent with available and practicable services, STEP clients are provided assistance in
 - a. Procuring and initiating forms required by licensing agencies,
 - b. Applying for validation of credentials,
 - c. Researching educational options for recertification in a primary field or affiliated field,
 - d. Applying for programs at local community colleges and accessing financial aid, if eligible,
 - e. Identifying work and volunteer opportunities in the professional sector while researching certification and educational options,
 - f. Re-assessing educational and career goals.

L. Participation Requirements

1. RSSEP clients must apply for employment and accept a job if offered unless the job does not meet the definition of suitable employment.

2. Suitable employment means:
 - a. The work site is not in violation of federal and state safety standards.
 - b. It is full time or part time, permanent or temporary, year-round or seasonal.
 - c. The wage is at or above minimum wage for jobs that are subject to minimum wage standards. For jobs not subject to minimum wage standards, the wage is comparable to labor market wages paid for such employment.
 - d. The hours of work do not exceed the customary hours of work for the occupation.
 - e. The position is not vacant due to a labor dispute.
3. An RSSEP client may not voluntarily quit a job that meets the definition of suitable employment.
4. In rare instances when the client's IEP includes on-the-job training, vocational training program, or recertification program approved by the RSSEP provider and part of the client's individual employment plan, the employment search may be delayed.
5. RSSEP clients must
 - a. Keep all scheduled meetings, appointments, and assignments;
 - b. Participate in the development of an IEP;
 - c. Participate in job search, where applicable;
 - d. Go to job interviews arranged by the RSSEP staff;
 - e. Accept an offer of employment;
 - f. Not voluntarily quit a job; and
 - g. Participate in any available employability service program the RSSEP service provider determines is appropriate

M. Good Cause Reasons for Non-Participation

1. The RSSEP provider will determine good cause for non-participation with RSSEP requirements.
2. When the provider determines good cause for non-participation, the client's RSSEP case is closed.

3. Good cause for non-participation is based on the following factors.
 - a. The job the client refused does not meet the RSSEP's definition of suitable employment.
 - b. A client is age 16 or 17, is not in school, and is in vocational or technical school as a full-time student.
 - c. A client is age 18 and is a full-time high school student or in the equivalent level of vocational or technical training and is expected to complete this program before reaching age 19.
 - d. A client has an injury or medical condition that temporarily prevent entry into employment or training.
 - e. A client has a physical or mental impairment a doctor or psychologist has determined prevents the individual from engaging or participating in employment or training on an on-going basis.
 - f. A client is caring for a household member who has been determined by a physician or psychologist to have a physical or mental impairment requiring care in the home on a substantially continuous basis and neither the client nor the RSSEP provider has been able to arrange for care for the family member.
 - g. A client has a child under the age of 12 months.
 - h. There is a break in full time employment expected to last a minimum of 30 days.
 - i. A client is working in unsubsidized employment at least 30 hours a week.
 - j. Transportation is unavailable as determined by the RSSEP staff.
 - k. The RSSEP provider verifies a client is in an emergency situation.
 - l. The schedule of the RSSEP activity conflicts with mandatory judicial proceedings.
 - m. The RSSEP provider accepts a client's documentation of an impediment beyond the client's control.
4. Inability to communicate in English is not a good-cause reason for nonparticipation and is not a reason for not accepting an offer of employment.

N. Consequences of Non-Participation

A client, who is not meeting work participation requirements and does not have good cause, is not eligible for any of the services offered through RSSEP and may not be eligible for RCA and TANF.

1. The RSSEP case is closed. The RSSEP provider is to send the client a notification of the case closure.
2. The LDSS follows RCA and TANF rules in closing the RCA or TANF cases. One of the reasons for RCA or TANF closure is a client's non-compliance with a work requirement. The case closure rules applies to all RCA and TANF case members.
3. The RSSEP staff is to notify the LDSS within 24 hours of the date the RSSEP case is closed.
 - a. Send the LDSS VIEW staff notice of a TANF recipient's RSSEP case closure due to non-participation.
 - b. Send LDSS TANF staff notice of a RCA recipient's RSSEP case closure due to non-participation.

O. Reasons for Case Closure

1. Client is employed 90 days after date of employment and requests no additional RSSEP services
2. Client has reached five-year RSSEP eligibility period
3. Client has failed to participate without good cause
4. Client requests case closure
5. Client has moved from agency service area
6. Unable to contact client for 30 days after five or more attempts

P. Re-opening a Case

When the RSSEP case is closed for any reason, including non-participation without good cause, the person may request RSSEP services again at any time. A new RSSEP Registration Form is signed and a new CRP/IEP is completed.

Q. Cash Assistance Work Requirement and Coordination with Local Departments of Social Services

Unless determined exempt, a person receiving TANF or RCA cash assistance must meet either the TANF or RCA work requirement. The work requirement for each program is different and the RSSEP provider's responsibility in coordinating and communicating with the local DSS is different.

1. RCA Work Requirements

RCA clients, who are not exempt from the RCA work requirement, are required to register for RSSEP and meet the RSSEP participation requirements as a condition of continued eligibility for RCA.

- a. An RCA applicant is exempt from the RCA work requirement if the applicant
 - i. Does not live in an RSSEP Service Area
 - ii. Is 65 years of age or over
 - iii. Will not reach his 16th birthday within the eight-month RCA eligibility period.
 - iv. Is between the age 16 and 18 and is a full time student at an elementary or secondary school or is a full time student at a vocational or technical school. For persons attending a vocational or technical school, full time means the person is taking the number of courses the institution considers full time. The applicant's statement regarding full time school attendance is recorded in case notes.

- b. RCA clients, who do not meet a *LDSS RCA work requirement* exemption, may meet an RSSEP good cause reason for non-participation. The service provider makes the determination that an RSSEP client has good cause for not meeting RSSEP participation requirements. Section M defines good-cause for non-participation, for example pregnancy or disability.

- c. RCA applications are made at the LDSS. At the time of application, the client, must
 - i. Present a signed RSSEP Work Registration Form at the time of RCA application, or
 - ii. Be identifiable in VNIS as an RSSEP client.
 - iii. Sign an RSSEP Work Registration Form at the time of RCA application.
 - When the RCA applicant signs the RSSEP Work Registration form at

- the time of application, the local DSS gives the original to the applicant and sends a copy to the RSSEP provider.
- The RSSEP staff is responsible for contacting the individual and conducting the initial intake interview and completion of the RSSEP CRP and IEP.
- d. The local DSS terminates RCA payments when the RSSEP contract agency notifies the agency of RSSEP non-compliance without good cause.

2. TANF Work Requirement and Coordination with Local DSSs

- a. A TANF recipient who does not meet one of the TANF work exemption must participate in the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) Program.
- b. Under federal and state TANF regulations, VIEW participation requirements apply to all work mandatory TANF recipients. A client who is both an RSSEP client and a VIEW client must meet the participation requirements of both programs.
- c. The RSSEP caseworker must communicate with the VIEW caseworker to ensure coordination regarding the client's work activities and document those activities.
- d. The TANF application intake process and the VIEW assessment interview occur at different times. The VIEW assessment interview must occur within 10 to 30 days after the TANF application is approved
- e. Work requirements of the two programs must be coordinated by the VIEW and RSSEP case workers to ensure each agency's case record contains required participation documentation
- f. RSSEP staffs are required to coordinate with the VIEW staff in each local DSS where RSSEP staffs reside. A face-to-face meeting is recommended to discuss the following:
 - i. The local DSS VIEW assessment process. While the basic assessment requirements are the same for each local DSS, the implementation and processes vary.
 - ii. What role the RSSEP staff will have in the initial VIEW interview.
 - iii. How the RSSEP provider will provide the local DSS with required RSSEP documentation.

- g. The RSSEP staff must provide the VIEW worker with
 - i. A copy of the RSSEP client's Comprehensive Resettlement Plan and Individual Employment Plan.
 - ii. A monthly verification of continued participation,
 - iii. Immediate notice of entered employment or non-participation.

R. Sanctions for Non-Participation

1. When the RSSEP provider notifies the local DSS that the RSSEP case closure due to non-participation, the local DSS will take the action to sanction a TANF or RCA recipient following that agency's case closure procedures.
2. If the TANF or RCA recipient appeals the action taken by the local DSS, the RSSEP staff is required to assist the local DSS staff with any appeals conferences, hearings, and written arguments. This includes a summary of
 - a. The reason, if any, given by the client for non-participation.
 - b. The RSSEP factual basis for the determination that there was not good cause for the non-participation.
 - c. The dates of contact with the client regarding non-participation.
3. If the client signs a new RSSEP Registration Form and participates as required, the individual will be eligible for TANF or RCA at the end of the sanctioning period.

S. Required Forms

1. Comprehensive Resettlement Plan
2. RSSEP Registration Form
3. Mutual Responsibility Agreement
4. RSSEP Communication Participation Form
5. Release of Information Form