

STAFFING

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To issue a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the appointment of Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist (BROS), GS-601, in VA.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:

a. These changes are necessary for full conversion of the BROS occupation from the Title 5 competitive service employment system into VA's Title 38 Hybrid excepted service employment system in accordance with the "Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset and Business Improvement Act of 2003" (Public Law 108-170). Authority is given to the Secretary of the VA under 38 U.S.C. § 7402 to prescribe qualifications for occupations identified in 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3). The pages in this revision are to be inserted at the corresponding page numbers in part II of VA Handbook 5005. The Office of Personnel Management Group Coverage Standards for Professional Scientific Positions are no longer to be used to qualify BROS. 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](#).

b. In order to apply this new qualification standard, all employees currently in a BROS position must receive an initial special boarding by the applicable Blind Rehabilitation Specialist Professional Standards Board. Initial special boarding should be completed no later than September 1, 2010. Additional guidance regarding the initial special boarding process may be found in [Human Resources Management Letter 05-06-06](#), Attachment B, dated August 8, 2006.

(1) For employees on VA rolls as of April 2, 2006, a promotion resulting from the initial special boarding will be effected retroactive to the beginning of the first pay period after all qualification requirements at the higher grade (including level of assignment) were met, but no earlier than April 2, 2006.

(2) For employees appointed after April 2, 2006, a promotion resulting from the initial special boarding will be effected retroactive to the beginning of the first pay period after all qualification requirements at the higher grade (including level of assignment) were met, but no earlier than the effective date of their appointment.

c. Significant provisions of this qualification standard include:

(1) Coverage section provides a brief description of the occupation requirements.

(2) Standard language and sections provided are basic requirements, grandfathering clauses, licensure, deviations, etc.

(3) Description of creditable experience included in the grade requirements.

(4) Description of typical assignments and knowledge, skills, abilities, and other competencies included at each grade level.

(5) Clarifies that 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.

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:**

/s/
Roger W. Baker
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

/s/
John U. Sepúlveda
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration

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*Use in conjunction with the OPM Standard.

**[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 bachelor's degree in blind or vision rehabilitation, or related program in rehabilitation special education or health care, from an accredited college or university; or, have a bachelor's degree 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,**

(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.

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c. **Certification.** Required at all levels.

(1) Applicants must possess at least one active, current, full and unrestricted certification to be eligible for appointment. If the applicant has or has ever had a licensure or certification revoked for cause, or voluntarily relinquished such license or certification after being notified in writing by the State of potential revocation for cause, the applicant is ineligible for appointment. This applies even if the applicant possesses one or more valid, unrestricted license or registration (38 §U.S.C. 7402(f)). If all certifications are impaired, the individual is also ineligible for appointment in VA.

NOTE: *The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP) administers three certification programs: Low Vision Therapy, Orientation and Mobility, and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. Once certification candidates are approved, they receive an official letter of acceptance, a certificate, and a logo pin. They may then use the designation for the certification they hold (as listed in subparagraph (2) below).*

(2) BROSs who provide the following services must obtain and maintain one certification at the GS-11 level and two certifications at the GS-12 level granted by ACVREP as follows:

(a) Orientation and mobility training - Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS[®]).

(b) Communication and daily living therapy (formerly Rehabilitation Teaching) - Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (CVRT[®]).

(c) Low vision therapy - Certified Low Vision Therapists (CLVT[®]).

d. **Loss of Credential**

(1) Once certified, a BROS must maintain a full, valid and unrestricted independent certification to remain qualified for employment. Loss of certification(s) **will** result in removal from the BROS occupation and **may** result in termination of employment.

(2) A BROS who has, or ever had his/her certification, suspended, restricted, limited, or issued/placed in a probationary status may be appointed only in accordance with the provisions in Chapter 3, Section B, Paragraph 16 of this part. A BROS who **has or has ever had** a licensure or certification revoked for cause, or voluntarily relinquished such license or certification after being notified in writing by the State of potential revocation for cause, the applicant is ineligible for employment and must be removed from the GS-601 series. This applies even if the applicant possesses one or more valid, unrestricted license or registration (38 §U.S.C. 7402(f)).

e. **Grandfathering Provision.** All BROSs employed in VHA in this occupation on the effective date of this qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the title, series and grade held, including positive education and certification(s) that are part of the basic requirements of the occupation. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements required in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply.

(1) Such employees may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level, or changed to lower grade within the occupation.

(2) Employees who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their temporary appointment extended or be reappointed, on a temporary or permanent basis, until they fully meet the basic requirements of the standard.

(3) Employees initially grandfathered into this occupation, who subsequently obtain additional education and/or certification(s) that meet all the basic requirements of this qualification standard must maintain the required equivalent credentials as a condition of employment in the occupation.

(4) If a BROS who was retained under this provision leaves the occupation, the employee loses protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of reentry to the occupation.

f. **Non-Certified BROS Hired Temporary.** Non-certified BROSs may be given a temporary appointment not to exceed two years under the authority of 38 U.S.C. 7405(c)(2). Temporary BROSs may be converted to a GS-12 appointment after one (1) year with at least one ACVREP certification and the second ACVREP certification must be obtained no later than two (2) years after the date of the initial appointment. Non-certified employees appointed temporarily as BROSs may not be converted to an appointment under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) as a GS-12 without obtaining two ACVREP certifications.

g. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

h. **English Language Proficiency.** BROSs must be proficient in spoken and written English as required by VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Chapter 3, Section A, Paragraph 3j.

3. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

a. Definitions

(1) **Affiliated.** Means affiliated for the purposes of health care training.

(2) Creditable Experience

(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.

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1. Work as a graduate BROS directly related to the position to be filled; and/or
 2. The work to be credited is at a level comparable to BROS experience at the same or next lower grade level than the grade level being considered for placement.
- (3) **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience as a professional BROS is credited according to its relationship to the full-time work week. For example, a BROS would receive 1 week of full-time credit for each 2 weeks of half-time work.
- (4) **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 resulting from blindness.

b. **Grade Determinations.** In addition to the basic requirements, the following criteria must be used when determining the appropriate grade assignment of candidates.

NOTE: *Appointments of BRSs at the GS-5 through GS-9 levels are made in accordance with Appendix G41 (Blind Rehabilitation Specialist Qualification Standard). The only grade levels for BROS positions are GS-11 and GS-12 as stated below.*

(1) GS-11 BROS (Entry level)

- (a) **Certification.** Candidates must meet the certification requirements in subparagraph 2c above (at least one certification from ACVREP).
- (b) **Education and Experience.** In addition to meeting the basic requirements, the candidate must fully demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) below:
 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.

(c) **Assignment of Staff BROS.** Individuals in this assignment serve in a developmental capacity as the BROS at a medical center or an outpatient clinic and in patients' homes and communities and are responsible for decision-making and for independent care under the direction of their supervisor and the Blind Rehabilitation National Consultant for their region. Individuals in this assignment serve as a member of a specialty care team. At the GS-11 level, BROS will receive training and oversight from the Blind Rehabilitation National Consultant for their region.

(2) **GS-12 BROS (Full Performance Level)**

(a) **Certification.** Candidates must meet the certification requirements in subparagraph 2c above. BROSs at the GS-12 level must achieve two ACVREP certifications to demonstrate full mastery in two areas of blind rehabilitation.

(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 KSAs at the GS-11 level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the following KSAs:

1. Ability to independently develop, plan, and administer complex treatment programs.
2. Ability to act as a subject matter expert in the blind/vision rehabilitation field and as consultant, supervisor and/or mentor in evaluating and treating patients in specialty or program areas.
3. Ability to coordinate, motivate, and effectively manage staff and/or committee members to include organizing work, setting priorities, and delegating tasks and responsibilities.
4. Ability to disseminate appropriate information through various media as a consultant or mentor.
5. Skill in interpersonal relationships in dealing with patients, employees, other team leaders, managers and other stakeholders.
6. Ability to identify team group dynamics, objectively observe, and modify behaviors.
7. Ability to apply decision-making principles to adjust programs on a day-to-day basis, to develop short term and long range goals, and to plan for future utilization of resources.

(c) **Assignments**

1. **Sole Practice BROS.** Individuals in this assignment may serve as the only BROS at a medical center or an outpatient clinic or in patients' homes and communities and, are responsible for independent decision-making and independent care. Individuals in this assignment may serve as a member of or as

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consultant to a specialty care team such as the Polytrauma System of Care. BROS will demonstrate mastery abilities in two of the blind/vision rehabilitation specialty areas: orientation and mobility, low vision therapy, and vision rehabilitation therapy. BROS will also demonstrate advanced skill in the practice of the other content specialties in blind rehabilitation, e.g., computer training and manual skills. At the GS-12 level, BROS practice independently, seeking support from the Blind Rehabilitation Service National Consultant for the region when necessary.

2. GS-13 and Above. Assignments as Supervisory BRS, National Program Consultant, Assistant Chief, and/or Service Chief are filled as BRS (VA Handbook 5005, Part II, Appendix G41).

4. DEVIATIONS

a. The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for BROSs in VHA whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignments, warrant such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

b. Under no circumstances will the educational or certification requirements be waived. Under no circumstances will the certification or certification requirements be waived, except as provided in paragraph 2f above.

c. The placement of individuals in grade levels not described in this standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, in VHA Central Office.

Authority: 38 U.S.C. §§ 7402, 7403.]