

Minimum Requirements and Preferred Qualifications for Blind Entrepreneurs Entering into the Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program

The National Research & Training Center on Blindness & Low Vision



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY™

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Introduction

The Randolph-Sheppard (R-S) Business Enterprise Program (BEP) has federally mandated entry level requirements that potential BEP candidates must meet in order to be considered for the program. These include:

- U.S. Citizen
- Legally blind

Many state R-S programs have added additional minimum requirements for BEP candidates in order to enter the program. These minimum requirements vary among state BEPs. Listed below, state by state, are some of these additional minimum requirements. Please note that this list is based on information provided by each state BEP director and only includes states that chose to provide such information. The minimum requirements listed below are in addition to the federally mandated requirements of being legally blind and a U.S. citizen. The purpose for providing this information is that it may be helpful when a state BEP is modifying its current entry-level requirements. By providing examples of what other state BEPs require, a state BEP can decide whether or not other state BEP requirements are something it would like to incorporate in its own entry-level requirements.

Entry-Level Requirements by State

Arizona

- At least 18 years old.
- Pass background check.
- No felony convictions or other convictions that would preclude an individual from getting a high security clearance.
- Health assessment.
- Must be ready for a referral to the BEP.
- Prior BEP involvement considered.
- Have basic skills assessed through orientation and mobility evaluation, rehabilitation teaching evaluation, aptitude screening on reading, writing, math, etc., and an assistive technology assessment.

California

- A consumer of the California Department of Rehabilitation.
- Pass a TB test with negative results.
- Pass the BEP qualifying math test.
- Have adequate skills in activities of daily living, communication, orientation & mobility, and the ability to use adaptive aids.
- Be accepted for the program by the Applicant Review Panel.

- Pass the pre-training courses.
- Complete a one-month pre-training evaluation with a local BEP facility.

Colorado

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Free of infectious diseases.
- Pass background check.
- No felony convictions or pattern or misdemeanor convictions.

Connecticut

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Pass background check.
- Psychological exam.
- Medical exam.
- Reliable transportation.

Delaware

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or GED.
- Pass background check.
- Pass credit check.
- Interviewed by committee members and BEP director and BEP staff to ensure commitment and interest.
- Computer Skills (word, excel, JAWS/ZoomText, and e-mail).
- Aptitude tests in math, English, writing, and computer skills.
- Skills in mobility, independence, and basic food service.

Florida

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Pass Level 2 background check.

Illinois

- At least 21 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- No felony convictions.
- Math skills at 8th grade level.
- High school reading level.
- Computer skills including spreadsheets and word documents.

Indiana

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- A client of vocational rehabilitation services and referred for the BEP by vocational rehabilitation services.
- Adequate orientation and mobility skills to travel independently.
- Skills sufficient to communicate with the public in a courteous manner.
- The ability to develop and maintain working relationships with others.
- Be able to maintain required records and reports.
- Mathematical skills sufficient to operate a small business.
- Independent daily living skills sufficient to allow the applicant to meet personal care and facility maintenance needs.

Iowa

- Must be found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.
- Must have a letter of referral submitted by vocational rehabilitation.
- Have discussion with BEP.
- Pass background check.
- Pass credit check.
- Must complete a full course in pre-vocational training at Iowa Department for the Blind's Adult Orientation Center.
- Must score a 70% on pre-test.
- Interview with Elected Committee of Blind Managers and receive a formal recommendation.

Kansas

- At least 18 years old.
- Must be an active consumer with a Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Must demonstrate abilities, skills, and desire to achieve success in area of interest.
- Must possess mobility skills.
- Must possess customer service skills.
- Must have appropriate personal hygiene and neat appearance.
- Must have the ability to obtain transportation to business location.

Kentucky

- 18 years or older.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Be certified that the consumer meets the general criteria of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services from the Office.
- Have financial skills for operating a vending business.

- Have verbal and communication skills.
- Have public relations skills.
- Have personal hygiene and appearance for meeting the public.
- Be independent in performing daily living activities.
- Have mobility skills.

Maine

- At least 18 years old.
- Must be free from infectious disease and in good health to meet the demands of the job. Evidence of the applicant's general physical condition will be based on a general physical examination by a physician.
- Must have good stamina and capable of positively interacting with the public.
- Must have basic math skills.
- Must successfully complete Business Enterprise Program evaluation and training requirements including the prescribed sanitation certification and on the job training.

Maryland

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Pass background check.
- Psychological evaluation.
- Math skills at 8th grade level.
- Reading skills at 8th grade level.
- Effective communication skills including written and verbal and exhibit interpersonal skills.
- Assessment in mobility.
- Ability to learn and use assistive technology.
- Job shadowing prior to training.
- Certified by the SLA as qualified to operate a food service facility after completion of training.

Minnesota

- Interview with BEP supervisor.
- Interview with three current blind entrepreneurs and job shadow one blind entrepreneur.
- Complete a situational assessment experience.

Missouri

- Same as federal requirements.

Nebraska

- At least 19 years old.

- Have the ability to be a business person.
- Pass background check.
- Pass drug test.
- No substance abuse issues within the previous 12 months.

New Jersey

- At least 18 years old.
- Hold a high school diploma.
- Pass background check.
- Be evaluated at Commission for Blind Training Center.
- Undergo training recommended in evaluation report.
- Be interviewed by Committee of Business Enterprise Managers.

New Mexico

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Pass background check.
- Pass credit check.
- A completed BEP application.
- Math and English aptitude assessment.
- Documentation such as vocational reports or letters of recommendation.
- Documentation of ability to perform essential job functions such as a medical report verifying no contagious disease and physical ability to perform duties.
- Possess basic computer skills in MS Windows, Word, Internet Explorer, or similar programs.
- Possess requisite skills in communications, mathematics, mobility, independent living, and personal grooming.
- Possess the ability for self-employment.

North Carolina

- At least 18 years old.
- Must have no felony convictions.
- Physically able to perform all duties.
- Demonstrate proficiency in mobility, activities of daily living, mathematics, and basic food service practices.
- Must successfully complete BEP training program.

Oklahoma

- Same as federal requirements.

Oregon

- Pass drug test.

- No felony convictions.
- Psychological evaluation.
- Open and eligible VR client.
- Assessment and screening by VR counselor and deemed appropriate for referral.
- Assessment by the Orientation & Career Center for the Blind on skills such as communication, interpersonal, daily living, mobility, math, and computers.
- Assessment by BEP staff.

Pennsylvania

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Pass background check.
- Math skills of at least 8th grade.
- Have capabilities to perform job task with or without accommodation.

South Dakota

- Provide employment background and references.
- Possess basic academic skills including math and reading at an 8th grade level.
- Ability to perform all physical job tasks.
- Social interaction skills.
- Communication and interpersonal skills.
- Mobility skills.
- Psychological evaluation.
- Ability to use required equipment.

Tennessee

- Vocational rehabilitation evaluation.
- Rehabilitation assessment including communication skills, mobility skills, basic math potential, computer skills, social skills, and management potential.
- Pass background check.
- BEP management staff evaluation.

Texas

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- No history of substance abuse for the previous 12 months.
- Physical examination.
- Demonstrated proficiency in math, writing/typing, and reading comprehension.
- The person has adequate general health and stamina required to perform the basic functions of a manager.
- The person has adequate mobility skills to safely operate a BET facility.

- The person must successfully complete all CCRC and BET assessment and training requirements to become a licensed BET manager.

Utah

- At least 18 years old.
- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Academic achievements, work history, and resume.
- Diagnostic and evaluation reports.
- Physical examination.
- Orientation and adjustment training.
- Psychological examination.
- Rehabilitation and training services received.
- Pass credit check.
- Pass background check.
- No record of substance abuse within the previous 12 months.
- Ability to relate well to and cooperatively with others.
- Ability to complete physical job tasks.
- Score 80% or better on entrance exam.
- Two-week evaluation period working with a current blind entrepreneur.

Washington

- Pass tests on math, reading comprehension, and oral comprehension at 8th grade level.
- Eligible to receive vocational rehabilitation services.
- Referred to the program through vocational rehabilitation.
- BEP application.
- Meet with BEP and VR to discuss program.
- Observed BEP entrepreneur for three days.
- Developed and approved an Individual Plan for Employment.
- Pass background check.
- Medical release.
- Possess adequate reading, writing, and independent travel skills.
- Assistive technology skills.

West Virginia

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Pass credit check.
- Pass background check.
- Pass drug screening.
- Have no criminal convictions involving moral turpitude.
- Functional capacity evaluation.

- Vocational evaluation.
- Ability to perform all physical tasks required.
- Possess good personal social interaction skills.
- Possess basic math skills at the high school graduate level.
- Possess basic academic skills including reading, writing, and the ability to delegate accounting practices.
- Interview with BEP staff.

Preferred Qualifications and Characteristics of BEP Candidates

In many states, the minimum requirements needed to qualify to become a BEP entrepreneur do not adequately reflect the qualifications and characteristics that are needed in order to be successful in the program. Therefore, many states have developed preferred qualifications criteria which they provide to vocational rehabilitation counselors to use when accessing potential candidates, and which is also used by BEP staff when assessing a potential candidate. These preferred qualifications are not required but are highly desired in potential BEP candidates.

Below is a list derived from 25 state BEPs' preferred qualifications lists for potential BEP candidates. The list is a summary of information provided by the 25 state BEPs. The purpose of providing this information is to assist state BEPs that have not developed a list of preferred qualifications to use this as a guide in developing their own preferred qualifications list.

Basic Preferred Qualifications (some are these are mandated in certain states)

- Orientation and mobility skills including being able to travel independently within and around a facility location.
- Communication skills including having effective written and oral communication.
- Computer skills including the use of spreadsheets and word files.
- Assistive technology skills including being able to learn assistive technology used in the BEP such as talking calculators and cash registers.
- Daily living skills including being well groomed.
- Interpersonal skills that allow for working well and cooperatively with others and being able to effectively and positively interact with customers.
- Good health including having the physical stamina to perform all job tasks and the ability to manage any health problems.

Additional Preferred Qualifications

- Aptitude for business management.
- Prior work experience preferably in a retail or food service setting.

- Experience with delegating responsibilities.
- Strong math skills including an understanding of bookkeeping.
- Strong work ethic.
- Demonstrated success in other areas such as academics, employment, organizations, etc.
- Professional and organized.
- Demonstrated success in managing personal finances.

Preferred Personality Characteristics

- **Possess an Entrepreneurial Spirit:** Having an entrepreneurial spirit means that, in regards to being a BEP entrepreneur, managing a food service facility is not just a job but it's a passion. In order to truly embrace the entrepreneurial spirit one must be passionate about his/her work. Embracing an entrepreneurial spirit means that you are always contemplating how things can be done better. You are continually developing ways and adapting methods to improve. Individuals with entrepreneurial spirits are not afraid to make changes, take chances, and embrace calculated risks in order to enhance and grow business opportunities. People with entrepreneurial spirits are naturally optimistic about challenges. They don't view challenges as a burden, instead they embrace them and use them as motivation to improve. Lastly, people with entrepreneurial spirits are not afraid to execute ideas. Unlike others who have ideas but never act on them, true entrepreneurs realize that the execution of ideas is the difference between success and failure and they are not afraid to take a risk on their ideas in order to achieve success.
- **Focused on Customer Service:** The key to any successful business is providing exceptional customer service. A BEP entrepreneur must have a strong customer service orientation in order to be successful. The customer is the heart of any business so if customers are not happy then the business is guaranteed to fail. Therefore, it is imperative for blind entrepreneurs to view their businesses through the mindset of their customers in order to anticipate customers' needs and wants. A blind entrepreneur in the BEP must know who his/her customers are and focus on providing service and products customers want. Doing this will result in a more successful businesses for blind entrepreneurs and increased sales/profits.
- **Positive personality:** A BEP entrepreneur must have the ability to work well with others. The blind entrepreneur's success depends on the ability of him/her being able to satisfy the needs of customers and business associates and therefore must be able to develop positive working relationships. He/she must be friendly and approachable and be a problem solver. Also, it is important for BEP entrepreneurs to be optimistic in adverse and challenging times. Running a

business is hard and stressful, at times, and being able to approach these situations with a positive attitude is imperative for success.

- **Charismatic:** Charisma in an entrepreneurial setting can help ensure success. If a BEP entrepreneur can win over customers and other business contacts through being charismatic then the chances of success are substantially increased. Making connections through being charismatic helps build a network of business colleagues that can provide support and direction when needed and a base of loyal customers that will ensure success for the blind entrepreneur.
- **Motivated and Opportunity Focused:** BEP entrepreneurs must have a desire to be business owners. They must be willing to accept responsibility for all aspects of their business and be willing to hold themselves accountable. There is a high probability that a BEP graduate's first opportunity will not be the business or the location that they desire the most. BEP graduates must be motivated to take any opportunity that provides them future opportunities. Blind entrepreneurs must also be willing to be dedicated to their business. Running a business is not a Monday through Friday, 8 to 5 type of job. The blind entrepreneur must be committed to being there for the business whenever necessary, whether that means working weekends and/or working 60 hours a week to ensure success.
- **Self-Starter/Self Reliant:** BEP entrepreneurs are responsible for running all aspects of their business. There is no one to tell them when they have to be at work and what they have to do. Therefore, it is imperative that blind entrepreneurs have intrinsic motivation to manage all the different aspects of a business. Blind entrepreneurs will need to be able to prioritize work duties in order to meet their responsibilities in the BEP. They must also be able to take action on their own and have a plan for the direction they want their business to go and be focused with goals and standards for their business. Nobody is going to force a blind entrepreneur to continually improve their business, this motivation must be intrinsic in order to succeed.
- **Leadership:** It is essential for BEP entrepreneurs to have ability to lead. Being a leader means that you do not wait for someone to tell you what to do, you know what to do and you do it and you are confident in your ability to make decisions. You are able to think creatively to find solutions to overcome challenges. Leaders motivate their team through actions and attitudes. Leaders possess a sense of responsibility to others and demand excellence in themselves and others. Leaders have the ability to view issues from multiple perspectives and understand other people's viewpoint. Leaders also have a strong desire for doing what is right for themselves, and for their team, customers, and business.

- **Adaptability:** Business success requires the ability to adapt to changing situations. As an entrepreneur, one is constantly facing unforeseen events. BEP entrepreneurs must possess the ability to adapt to accommodate changes, and ideally, embrace such changes as opportunities to grow and improve. Being able to quickly react and adapt to changes may be the difference between success and failure. Being flexible gives blind entrepreneurs the ability to respond to changes without being paralyzed with fear and uncertainty. A blind entrepreneur should be resilient and be able to recover from set-backs and changes and embrace such instances as an opportunity to improve.
- **Manage Stress Well:** Being an entrepreneur and running your own business can be one of the most stressful careers, especially in a high customer contact setting such as food service. Therefore, it is imperative that BEP entrepreneurs know how to manage stress well and flourish, rather than retreat, when facing stressful situations. BEP entrepreneurs must be able to control their emotions and treat everyone with respect during times of high stress and/or conflict.
- **Belief in the mission of the Randolph-Sheppard Program:** Every blind entrepreneur in the BEP should take pride in and be an advocate for the program both professionally and personally. They should be actively considering how they act, conduct business, and maintain their facility is a direct reflection upon the program, and therefore, be striving for excellence in all aspects. The Randolph-Sheppard Program was created to showcase the abilities of people who are blind and any BEP entrepreneur who does not take their part in advocating for the program seriously or with pride should not be a part of it. Lastly, a blind entrepreneur should have a desire to give back to the BEP and ensure its success in the future for others. Some BEP entrepreneurs claim that not being able to pass their business down to their children is a drawback of the program, however, a BEP entrepreneur should look at their colleagues like family and want to make their business as successful as possible so they can be proud to pass it on to another deserving entrepreneur. Blind entrepreneurs have the ability to make the BEP as successful as their entrepreneurial spirit, ambition, and motivation will allow, and therefore, finding the right people for the program is key.