



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF REHABILITATION SERVICES
SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

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Business Enterprises Program Fact Sheet

The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) is a Federal/State program, which establishes entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals who are legally blind primarily through initiating food service business throughout Rhode Island. Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI), as the State Licensing Agency (SLA), finds appropriate potentially lucrative vending facility locations, builds the facility, installs the need equipment, purchases the initial stock and even provides the initial operating cash. The vendor is selected to manage a facility and is licensed by the State upon completion. All proceeds accrue to the vendor except for a small set aside fee, which the State collects mostly to maintain equipment and provide a safety net for program operation.

Currently, the trade name “**COFFEE PLUS**” is used to market the program and its products. There are 15 locations within the State of Rhode Island offering a range of dry goods and prepackaged foods to full service cafeteria or snack bar style operations.

In Rhode Island, BEP vendors earn individual gross incomes ranging from \$14,040 to almost \$80,000 annually. Combined gross sales of the businesses reach approximately \$1.7 million annually.

Who Is Eligible?

Legally blind individuals enrolled in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) are eligible for entry to the BEP training program. These individuals must be “work ready”. This means that they must be able to travel independently, have mathematical and business skills, be able to work with the public, and have pride in their personal appearance.

Once referred from the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit, a determination is made by the BEP unit to ensure their appropriateness for the program. A vendor must be willing to make a substantial personal commitment of time and energy toward the growth or maintenance of a vending stand.

What Training?

A potential vendor must demonstrate competence in RI Department of Health Food Protection rules and regulations; have business skills and customer relations abilities; know State and Federal labor and tax regulations; demonstrate good personal hygiene; be able to operate and maintain equipment; have cooking skills; be adept at cleaning, bookkeeping and accounting practices; as well as have a basic ability to demonstrate

effective product merchandising. General business management knowledge or courses and seminars for small business, supplemented by in house instruction on the Federal Randolph-Sheppard Act, and SBVI- BEP Policy is provided.

Where Will I Work?

Upon awarding of vendor status, the "vendor" is then eligible to bid on a vending facility as they become available or may be placed in a vacant facility when possible. Once in a facility, the graduate vendor takes over the operation of the facility. Facilities are awarded on the basis of seniority, performance and capability with a mindset toward upward mobility.

Why Be A Vendor?

It is a good opportunity for the right individual. Entering the Business Enterprise Program allows a legally blind individual the unique opportunity to operate a business without the massive start up expenses or the risk of starting a business on their own. Vendors have the potential to amass substantial personal incomes when compared to customary hourly wage based employment and the SLA takes on the capital risk and provides a supervisor to coach the vendor toward building or maximizing business potential. Additionally, much of the ongoing costs of business; such as equipment maintenance overhead are absorbed by the SLA through the benefit of specially appropriated State and Federal funding.

Vending Facility Locations

- ◆ Providence City Hall, 25 Dorrance Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ◆ Cannon Building, 3 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02903
- ◆ Kent County Courthouse, 222 Quaker Lane, West Warwick, RI 02893
- ◆ Garrahy Complex, One Dorrance Plaza, Providence, RI 02903
- ◆ Federal Center, Box 17, 380 Westminster Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ◆ Licht Building, 250 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ◆ Department of Children, Youth & Families, 101 Friendship Street, Providence, RI 02908
- ◆ Department of Administration, One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908
- ◆ Vocational Rehabilitation, 40 Fountain Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ◆ DMV Registry, 600 New London Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920
- ◆ Naval Undersea Warfare Center, 1176 Howell Street, 1320, Newport, RI 02841-1708
- ◆ Shepard Building, 80 Washington Street, Providence, RI 02903
- ◆ RI Army National Guard, 645 New London Avenue, 1st Floor, Cranston, RI 02920
- ◆ Naval Undersea Warfare Center, 1176 Howell Street, 1351, Newport, RI 02841-1708
- ◆ Center General Complex, Dept. of Labor and Training, 1511 Pontiac Avenue, Cranston, RI 02920