

WorkFirst

Individual Responsibility Plans (IRPs)

Should I read this?

Yes, if you are participating in WorkFirst. This explains how an IRP is created. It can help you can get the best possible plan for yourself.

You do **not** have to participate in WorkFirst if:

- You are working for pay 32 hours or more a week.
- You are under 18. You have not finished high school or your GED.
- You are under 20. You are going to high school, or its equivalent, full-time.
- You are any age, attending a Washington state community or technical college at least half-time, and working at least 16 hours a week in a work-study program. Read [TANF and WorkFirst for College Students](#).
- Your “situation” keeps you from looking for a job. **Examples:** you have physical or mental health problems, are homeless, and/or are dealing with family violence.

Your caseworker should ask questions to figure out if you have problems you need help with before you can participate. If you have physical or mental problems making participation hard for you, your caseworker should make sure you get a “full assessment” to determine what help you need. **You must tell DSHS about any disability issues.** You

must also ask for a deferral from job search if needed and help addressing the issues.

Who else is exempt from participating in WorkFirst?

You do not have to take part in WorkFirst activities **if:**

- You have a child under age one. This exemption is available only to one parent in a two-parent household. There is a twelve-month lifetime limit on this exemption.
- You are 55 or older. You are caring for a child who is not your own.
- You are unable to work due to physical and/or mental disabilities.
- You must be in the home to care for a child with special needs.
- You must be in the home to care for an adult who has a disability.

What is an Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP)?

It is an agreement between you and DSHS. It makes a plan for moving you into paid work as soon as possible. An IRP says:

- what you must do to work, look for work, or get ready for work through required participation in the WorkFirst program
- how DSHS will help you meet these goals

You and your WorkFirst case manager at DSHS must sign the IRP

- when it is first written AND
- any time you change it

The IRP should be in your primary language. You should get a signed copy of it and keep it with your other DSHS papers.

What goes into making my IRP?

The process should include:

- screening you for skills and problems
- referring you to appropriate programs
- making adjustments over time to reflect changes in your participation in the WorkFirst program

What does an IRP say?

It must state:

- Info about your WorkFirst activities. Most people must participate “full-time.” DSHS says 32-40 hours per week is full-time. If your IRP does not say how many hours a week you are supposed to do an activity, ask your case manager to add it.
- Any specific requirements related to the WorkFirst activity. **Examples:** learning English, getting counseling or other treatment.
- Support services you need to participate. **Examples:** helping you pay for childcare, transportation, and other supportive services.
- Who to contact if you cannot get to a required activity.

- What will happen if you do not do your required activities or you have unexcused absences. Read [WorkFirst Sanctions](#).
- Your agreement to get and keep a job as soon as possible.

What kinds of activities will be in my IRP?

You must participate in **Job Search** as your first WorkFirst activity unless you are temporarily “deferred” (excused). Job Search should help you find and keep a job.

You start by going to orientation. They will assess your skills and needs there. The Job Search process is next. It:

- Takes from two to twelve weeks.
 - May include pre-employment training to help you learn needed skills for an entry-level job paying more than average entry-level wages.
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- ❖ During these weeks, you will be actively looking for work. You must keep a written record of all job contacts.
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By the end of the first four weeks, a caseworker, probably at the Department of Employment Security, will decide if you should stay in Job Search. Job Search ends when one of these happens:

- You find a job.
- You become exempt from WorkFirst.
- You are “deferred.”
- Your situation changes. Your case manager changes the activities on your IRP.

- The caseworker decides you need more skills or experience to find a job.
- You have not found a job after twelve weeks.

It has been twelve weeks. What if I have still not found a job?

Your WorkFirst case manager will do an “employability evaluation.” The manager will ask you questions to find out why you have not gotten a job. You and your case manager will use this info to change your IRP to include other activities to help you become employable. See below.

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- ❖ If DSHS refuses to make adjustments or “accommodate” a physical or mental disability and insists you go to Job Search, it may be violating your rights under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#). Contact a legal services office right away! (Read [DSHS Help for People with Disabilities: Necessary Supplemental Accommodations](#) and [WorkFirst and the Family Violence Amendment](#).)
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What are other activities?

DSHS may decide the fastest way to get you working is to have a training activity in your IRP. **Examples** of these:

- ESL, GED, or literacy classes. You must combine these with Job Search or paid or unpaid work.
- Vocational education at an accredited school for up to twelve months that leads to a degree or certificate for a

specific occupation. WorkFirst can pay for your tuition, books, and other education costs if this education is in your IRP and there is no other way to pay for them.

- Customized job skills training, under rules like those for vocational education.
- Work experience for up to six months. This means unpaid work for a non-profit or government association.
- Temporary “Community Jobs.” The State pays for you to work at a job for up to nine months.
- Community service. This can be unpaid work for a charitable non-profit or government organization, or work benefiting your family or community, such as caring for a family member with a disability.
- On-the-job training if you lack skills the local labor market demands. You are paid for working and attending job-related training.
- Full-time participation with DVR (Department of Vocational Rehabilitation) if you are not exempt from WorkFirst participation.
- Full-time seasonal worker training.
- Parenting and life skills education.
- Volunteer work at a licensed day care, preschool, or elementary school.
- In-patient drug and alcohol treatment.

- Activities to relieve crises like homelessness, mental health issues, or domestic violence.
- Paid work leading to more employability. DSHS does not count 50% of your gross wages in determining the amount of your TANF grant.

What are support services?

DSHS will provide extra services if your situation makes it hard or impossible to meet your IRP requirements. If you need help with childcare or transportation, including car repairs, you must tell your case manager so you can add these services to your IRP. Other services may include

- Substance abuse treatment
- Domestic violence counseling
- Medical care and evaluations
- Special work accommodations for those with special needs
- Tools and uniforms
- Diapers for your child in day care while you work or look for work

❖ DSHS might set a limit on the amount of support services you can get.

Do I have to take any job offer?

As a WorkFirst participant, you normally must take the first job offered you. There are exceptions to this. You do **not** have to accept a job that:

- Provides no workers comp.
- Is available due to a strike.

- Interferes with your religion.
- Violates any health or safety standards.
- Does not pay minimum wage or more.
- Does not provide the same benefits for WorkFirst employees as for its other workers.

For unpaid work, you will not have to participate for more hours than would equal the amount of your TANF grant plus your Basic Food benefit divided by the state or local minimum wage, whichever is higher.

How can I get the best IRP for me?

DSHS must involve you in creating it. You have the right to help develop your IRP. You and your case manager should work together in selecting activities and services. Tell your case manager about:

- Any specific plans you have.
- What you think you need to get a job, such as help with childcare and transportation.
- Any physical, mental health, or domestic violence issues you or family member faces, making it hard for you to participate. DSHS must adjust your IRP to accommodate these issues. If they will not, call a legal services office.

❖ Make sure the IRP takes your circumstances into account in setting your hours of participation.

When do we review my IRP?

You can review it any time either you or your case manager feels it necessary. It should change as needed to make sure it continues to meet your needs in finding and keeping a job.

What if I do not agree with my IRP?

Suggest some changes. If your case manager will not make them, do not sign the IRP. Ask to speak with a supervisor. If you cannot resolve the problem with a supervisor, you have the right to an administrative hearing.

When and how do I ask for an administrative hearing?

You should request a hearing within 90 days of the date the IRP was finalized. Call your local DSHS office, fill out a Hearing Request at your local DSHS office or write

the Office of Administrative Hearings, P.O. Box 42488, Olympia, WA 98504. If it is an emergency, you can ask them to hold your hearing as soon as possible. Call the Office of Administrative Hearings at (360) 664-8717 to ask for an “expedited” hearing. Read [Representing Yourself at an Administrative Hearing](#).

Should I get legal help?

If you are unhappy with your IRP and could not resolve the problem on your own, get legal help before DSHS puts you into sanctions. Read [WorkFirst Sanctions](#).

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- ❖ **Finding legal help:** If you have a low income and live outside King County, call CLEAR at 1-888-201-1014. If you live in King County, call 211.
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