

Minnesota Business Enterprises Program

State Services for the Blind

Department of Employment and Economic Development

Certified as Qualified

**The Process to Become a Licensed Blind Vendor in the
Minnesota Business Enterprises Program**

(Updated 2024)

MINNESOTA BUSINESS ENTERPRISES PROGRAM

The process to become CERTIFIED AS QUALIFIED

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I. OVERVIEW

This document provides a detailed description of the process a person goes through in order to become a student in the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and eventually Certified as Qualified to be a Licensed Blind Vendor (LBV). Understanding the process and the commitment that it takes to become a LBV will afford a prospective applicant the ability to make an informed choice about the possibility of becoming a LBV.

The document is composed of three sections – Introduction, Discovery, and Training. The first section – Introduction - provides a brief explanation of the BEP and answers common questions people ask when first exploring the BEP.

The second section – Discovery - provides an opportunity for the prospective applicant to learn more about the BEP and to speak and work with current BEP LBVs. After the extensive exploration of the BEP in steps one and two, the BEP believes that the potential applicant and their counselor will have the information they need to determine if pursuing a career to become a LBV is the best choice for them.

The third section – Training - outlines the training process to become Certified as Qualified and then a LBV. When a prospective applicant decides to start training to become a LBV, an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) is written and the prospective applicant becomes a BEP student. This Training section consists of three steps:

- A. Formal Education Training
- B. BEP Course Work Training
- C. BEP On-the-Job and Vending Machine Training

These steps are designed to produce qualified and informed BEP LBVs. These individuals are deemed capable and competent to operate their own BEP business in an efficient and effective way with the overall goal of maximizing profitability. A BEP student's progress and success will ultimately be determined based on their motivation and desire to succeed.

The prospective applicant's counselor and the BEP director reserve the right to request that the prospective applicant/BEP student participate in additional assessments or obtain specific training as needed at any time during the prospective applicant/BEP student's pursuit to become Certified as Qualified.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. What is the BEP?

The BEP provides an opportunity for qualified blind Minnesotans to become independent and self-employed through a profitable vending business enterprise of their own. The BEP is composed of franchised vending and convenience store businesses providing services in public buildings and private industry under the jurisdiction of Minnesota State Services for the Blind (SSB).

B. What are the minimum requirements to becoming a LBV in the BEP?

To become a LBV in the BEP, a prospective applicant must meet the requirements identified in Minnesota (MN) Rule Chapter 3321.200.

MN RULE Chapter 3321.200

1. be documented as legally blind by a certified medical professional.
2. be citizens of the United States; and
3. be CERTIFIED AS QUALIFIED for the operation of a vending stand by the rehabilitation staff of SSB, Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)

C. What types of businesses does the BEP develop and support?

Businesses developed and administered include:

1. Vending Machine Businesses
 - a. Stationary locations
 - b. Routes
2. Small Convenience Stores/Micro Markets

D. Where does the BEP receive its funding and what is it used for?

Funding for the BEP comes from federal and state government, assessments on LBVs and commissions received from private-party vendors operating vending machines at Minnesota Highway Rest Areas and other state and federal property locations. These funds are primarily used for BEP staff salaries, operational expenses and the purchase of vending machines and other equipment.

E. What authority does the BEP operate under?

The legal basis for the BEP is derived from the Randolph-Sheppard Act, Public Law 93-516, and MN Statutes (MS) [248.07, Subdivisions. 7-11](#).

The Randolph-Sheppard Act provides the authority for the State Licensing Agency (SLA) to carry out the provisions of the act. SSB is the SLA in Minnesota.

The provisions of the Randolph-Sheppard Act and MS 248.07 provide the SLA with an exclusive authority to develop vending businesses in all federal and state owned and leased buildings and properties. The SLA is authorized under the federal law to select, train and license persons who are legally blind and a citizen of the United States to operate these vending businesses.

III. DISCOVERY

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: All requirements during the Discovery process are completed as assessments.

To become a BEP student, a prospective applicant must:

- Be determined eligible for the WorkForce Development (WFD) unit of SSB.
- Provide documentation to your counselor that you are legally blind.
- Provide documentation to your counselor that you are a United States citizen.

and complete the following requirements in the order listed below:

- A. Review the attributes of a successful LBV with your counselor.
- B. Complete an extensive interview with the BEP Director.
- C. Complete three LBV Informational Interviews and participate in a BEP Assessment.
- D. Complete at least one Job Shadow and Situational Assessment Experience (SAE).

A. Attributes a prospective applicant should possess to become a LBV.

Please review EXHIBIT A of this document. EXHIBIT A contains several of the essential attributes that current successful LBVs possess. Does the prospective applicant possess these attributes?

The prospective applicant and their counselor should discuss these prior to scheduling an interview with the BEP Director.

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: Exhibit A is a list of those attributes that current and former LBVs and BEP staff identified as being essential to a person's success as a business owner/operator. This list is not intended to be used to prohibit individuals from pursuing the BEP as a career.

B. BEP Interview

THE INTERVIEW (Schedule for 1 hour)

As a result of the discussion about the attributes a prospective applicant should possess, the counselor may set-up an interview for the prospective applicant with the BEP Director. The counselor and prospective applicant will attend this meeting. The counselor and prospective applicant will provide the BEP Director documentation that the prospective applicant meets the minimum requirements to become a BEP student.

This meeting will be an opportunity for the BEP Director to interview the prospective applicant. The BEP Director will provide a detailed description of the BEP, the expectations of BEP student's and BEP LBVs options for employment, timelines for training and employment. This is an opportunity for the prospective applicant to obtain comprehensive information about the BEP so that the decision to pursue this opportunity is an informed one. At the completion of the interview the BEP Director will provide the prospective applicant with the contact information of current LBVs who have agreed to be a part of the interview process.

C. Licensed Blind Vendor Interviews – BEP Assessment

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: This assignment is specifically intended for the prospective applicant. Counselors should not schedule the interviews or the job shadowing for the prospective applicant.

The BEP Director will provide the prospective applicant with a list of questions to ask the BEP LBV. The prospective applicant will be required to complete the BEP interview forms and return them to their counselor and the BEP Director. The BEP Director will also schedule a BEP assessment for the prospective applicant to participate in. The BEP assessment will take place at SSB and will be an opportunity for the prospective applicant to participate in everyday job tasks which BEP LBVs complete as a normal part of their daily activities.

At the completion of the assessment, the assessor will compile a report on the prospective applicant's performance for the BEP Director and counselor.

The BEP Director will schedule a meeting with the counselor and prospective applicant to discuss the phone interviews and the BEP assessment.

If the counselor, prospective applicant, and BEP Director continue to agree that becoming a BEP LBV is a realistic career goal, the process continues.

D. Situational Assessment Experience (SAE) and Job Shadow

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: The instructor will be paid for their time conducting the SAE, writing the SAE report, travel time and mileage. The job shadow trainer will be paid for the time spent with the prospective applicant during the job shadow. The job shadow trainer will be paid \$15 an hour up to \$120 per day for one week (5 workdays). Additional job shadow assignments could be scheduled if deemed necessary by the BEP director or counselor.

The SAE is completed in the BEP training room at SSB. An SAE is similar to a Community Based Assessment. During the SAE, the prospective applicant will learn about and participate in the responsibilities and daily activities of a BEP LBV. The SAE instructor will provide the counselor and BEP Director a report with their findings.

The BEP Director will schedule the job shadow and provide the counselor and prospective applicant with information about the location of the job shadow and the trainer's contact information, the dates and times of training and the expectations of the prospective applicant during the training. The job shadow trainer will provide a job shadow report which identifies things the prospective applicant did well during the job shadow and opportunities for improvement.

What's next?

At the completion of the SAE and job shadow, the BEP Director will schedule a meeting with the counselor and the prospective applicant to discuss the outcome of the two experiences. The reports will be shared and discussed with the prospective applicant. If all parties agree that becoming a BEP LBV continues to be a realistic career goal, the counselor will create an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). The prospective applicant begins training to become an LBV.

IV. TRAINING

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: IPE to become a LBV. Services required to reach this goal are contained in the remainder of this document. Many of the training requirements can be completed anywhere in the state. Some of the training will take place at SSB. The prospective applicant is now a BEP student.

There are three steps in the Training process. The rationale for these steps is explained after the description of each step.

- A. Formal Education Training
- B. BEP Course Work Training
- C. BEP On-the-Job and Vending Machine Training.

A. Formal Education Training

1. Complete the **Chicago Lighthouse's BEP online training program**. This training is specific to those individuals interested in becoming LBVs. The training consists of 11 separate modules. The cost of the training is \$4,500.00. BEP students will need to go to the following website link to register for this training: <https://bep.chicagolighthouse.org/NABM-BEP.asp>
2. Obtain a **Minnesota Food Protection Manager Certificate** from the Department of Health (DOH) State of MN. This is a one-day class. A workbook will be required for this class. The class and workbook will cost approximately \$165. A BEP student can learn more at the following link: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/food/cfpm/index.html>
3. Complete the **Preventing Sexual Harassment** online training 2-hour supervisor class. The class costs \$35. The BEP student can register and take the class at the following link: <http://courseforsexualharassment.com/>

At the completion of each training the BEP student will receive a certificate of completion. The BEP student will provide a copy of these certificates to their counselor.

When the BEP student has completed all required Formal Education Training, the counselor will schedule a meeting with counselor, BEP student and BEP Director. At this meeting the counselor will provide the BEP Director with documented evidence that the BEP student has met the Formal Education Training requirements. The BEP student now moves on to the BEP Course Work Training.

FORMAL EDUCATION TRAINING RATIONALE

The vending industry is highly competitive. To be a successful business owner in this industry a person must be able to manage every aspect of their business efficiently and effectively. BEP businesses typically have several vending machines at different locations. A LBV must be able to provide their customers with the products they want, in the quantity they want, and when they want it. The BEP believes the following abilities and competencies are essential to achieving this goal: Understanding what it means to be a LBV, communicating effectively with customers and colleagues, traveling to and from multiple locations, ensuring product integrity, understanding the financial details of their business, possessing basic computation skills and having the ability to use a computer.

LBVs must be able to complete many tasks including: counting money, making deposits, providing change for customers, keeping thorough business records, reviewing and understanding their profit and loss statements, implementing marketing strategies, signing and understanding legal contracts, reading and understand legal documents, communicating clearly and professionally, both verbally and in writing, with customers and colleagues, conduct inventories, place and receive product orders, hire and manage staff,

stay current with all industry changes, and stay current with the existing and future requirements mandated by law governing the activities of all small business owners.

Though LBVs can employ staff to help them with some of these tasks, the LBV must understand that they are ultimately held responsible for the operation of their business. For example, if a business owner employs an accountant to handle the financial record keeping for their business, the business owner still needs to be able to review the financial records and determine if the information is accurate. If the accountant breaks the law, the business owner can be held liable.

Because LBVs can employ staff and work closely with customers, it is important they understand their responsibility to ensure their workplace is free of harassment. Understanding this obligation is critical to their success as a business owner.

By successfully completing the Formal Education Training, the BEP believes the BEP student will possess and display the competencies needed to be a successful LBV.

B. BEP Course Work Training

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: Counselors should be prepared to generate an authorization to pay for uniforms and maintenance tools for the BEP student. The uniforms will be needed prior to the BEP student's On-the-Job Training (OJT) and the tools will be provided to the BEP student when they start their OJT. The BEP Director will provide the details for these purchases to counselor when they meet at the completion of the Formal Education Training.

The BEP Director will schedule a date for the BEP student to attend BEP Course Work Training.

During this training, the BEP student will be provided with copies of and trained in all laws, rules, regulations, and policy and procedure documents that govern the BEP. The BEP student will learn about the State's policy related to Respect in the Workplace.

At the completion of this training, the BEP student will be scheduled for BEP accounting orientation training and vending machine orientation training.

The accounting orientation training usually takes one day. During this training the BEP student will learn about the financial documents used in the BEP to create profit and loss statements. They will learn what their responsibility is related to these documents and best practices for completing these documents on time.

The vending machine orientation training usually takes one week. This timeframe may vary depending on the BEP student's aptitude. During this training the BEP student will learn how all BEP vending equipment works and how vending machines are cleaned, maintained, and filled. The BEP student will also learn how to troubleshoot common vending machine error messages and how to make common repairs.

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: The vending machine orientation training will take place in the BEP training room at SSB. Counselors need to be prepared for additional costs associated with this training related to the BEP student's potential travel expenses and possible overnight stays in a hotel.

During these trainings the BEP student will be tested to verify their understanding of the subject matter.

Once the BEP student successfully passes the BEP Course Work Training, they will start OJT training with a BEP LBV.

BEP COURSE WORK TRAINING RATIONALE

There are many responsibilities SSB has as the SLA for the BEP. One of these is to train qualified candidates to be successful BEP LBVs of profitable businesses.

The BEP was created by law. There are many obligations that are mandated by law with which the SLA and the BEP LBV comply with. To be a successful LBV and a good steward of the BEP, the SLA believes a BEP student must understand their responsibilities and obligations as a future LBV.

During this training the BEP student will be provided with copies of all laws, rules, policies, and procedures of the BEP. The BEP believes that providing this information to the BEP student is critical to their success and the success of the BEP as a whole.

C. OJT Training and Vending Machine Training

NOTE TO COUNSELORS: The OJT portion of the training is comprised of two OJT assignments. One assignment will be with a BEP LBV and the other will be conducted at the BEP business the BEP student is assigned to. The OJT trainings could take place anywhere in Minnesota where the BEP has a vending business. The OJT with a BEP LBV will be scheduled for three weeks. The OJT trainer will be paid \$15 an hour up to \$120 per day for three weeks (15 workdays) as well as transportation, lodging and possible business-related expenses for the BEP student. Additional OJT assignments could be scheduled if deemed necessary by the BEP director or counselor. The BEP Director, counselor and BEP student will discuss the specifics prior to initializing the OJT. The second OJT will be scheduled when a BEP business becomes available for a student to operate. This OJT will be scheduled for 90 days. Additional OJT assignments could be scheduled, or OJT timeframes adjusted depending on the BEP student's progress.

The BEP Director will schedule the OJT with a BEP LBV. The BEP Director will provide the counselor and BEP student with information about the location of the OJT, the BEP LBV's contact information, the dates and times of the OJT training and the expectations of the BEP student during the OJT training. The OJT with the BEP LBV is an opportunity for the BEP student to hone their skills in preparation for their 90-day independent OJT. Once the BEP student has successfully completed the OJT with the BEP LBV, they will await an opportunity to complete an OJT on their own.

The next OJT training will occur when a BEP business becomes available for the BEP student to operate. The BEP Director will discuss the OJT opportunity with the BEP student and their counselor. During this discussion, they will also review possible expenses related to the OJT. If all parties are in agreement that the BEP student should accept the OJT opportunity, the BEP Director will schedule a timeframe to inventory the BEP student into the business.

This OJT training will be scheduled for 90 days. During this time the BEP student does everything expected of a LBV. This includes filling, cleaning, and maintaining vending machines, completing business ledgers, managing product inventory, reviewing profit and loss statements, making required payments, and working with customers. The BEP student will also receive additional vending machine training.

During the OJT, the BEP student, BEP staff and the counselor will meet regularly to discuss how the BEP student is doing, troubleshoot issues, provide training, and answer questions the BEP student or counselor may have. During these meetings, BEP staff may identify growth opportunities for the BEP student and make adjustments to the OJT to ensure that the BEP student is involved with and exposed to the appropriate job duties necessary for them to become Certified as Qualified.

At the completion of the 90 days, the BEP Director and BEP staff will meet to discuss the BEP student's progress. At this time, a decision will be made by the BEP Director to license the BEP student or extend the OJT. The BEP student, BEP staff and counselor will meet to discuss the decision and next steps.

Once a BEP student successfully completes the second OJT training, they will sign a BEP OPERATOR AGREEMENT and become a LBV. As a LBV in the BEP, they will start accruing seniority that will be considered when they bid on future BEP vending business opportunities.

OJT RATIONALE

An OJT is a structured training method designed to broaden a BEP student's skills and increase their productivity. It is a "real world" experience where the BEP student's skills and abilities will be tested to determine if they are capable and competent to operate a BEP business. An OJT in the BEP is particularly appropriate for developing proficiency skills unique to the job duties and situations the BEP student will be exposed to and required to master as a LBV.

The OJT provides an opportunity for the BEP student to apply the information they have gained during the process to becoming Certified as Qualified. This real-world experience will provide the opportunity for the BEP student to further develop the skills and experiences needed to become a successful LBV.

The BEP believes that the OJT is effective in increasing the morale, productivity, and professionalism of the BEP as a whole.

BEP VENDING MACHINE TRAINING RATIONALE

In order to be effective and efficient in all areas of one's business, a business owner must understand how to operate every aspect of their business. In the vending industry this means keeping your equipment clean, full, and working.

Every LBV must be able to work with vending machines. They must be able to recognize the different machines that are a part of their business, understand how these machines function and know how to fill, service and clean each vending machine. By doing this, the LBV will have satisfied customers, prolong the life of the vending machines, and maximize their sales and profits.

Though the vending machines are owned by the State of Minnesota, the LBV must maintain this equipment as if they owned it themselves. The BEP has limited funds to manage this program and it is essential that the life of all vending machines is maximized.

EXHIBIT A

ATTRIBUTES OF A SUCCESSFUL LBV

- 1. Positive Personality:** A LBV must have the ability to work well with others. A LBV's success depends on the LBV's ability to satisfy the needs of customers and business associates. A LBV must be friendly and approachable and be a problem solver. A LBV must develop positive working relationships to ensure success in their business.
- 2. Charismatic:** Entrepreneurs practicing the art of business success know the power of networks. They take the time to identify and build relationships with key peers, mentors, and advisors. A LBV in the BEP must be able to use their Positive Personality to build relationships with others. This inner network provides support, direction, and an increased number of people that can assist the business owner in achieving success.
- 3. Focused on Customer Satisfaction:** Business success requires an unwavering commitment to the customer. This commitment encompasses a mindset of understanding the customers' world. Understanding the customer's wants and needs provides the business with a greater opportunity to earn a loyal customer base. A LBV in the BEP must know who their customers are and focus on providing service and products customers want. Doing this will result in a more successful business for the LBV and increased sales/profits.
- 4. Motivated and Opportunity Focused:** The LBV in the BEP must have a desire to be a business owner. 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 student's first opportunity will not be the business or in the location that they desire the most. BEP student's must be motivated to take any opportunity that provides them future opportunities. Problems are a regular part of business life. Staff issues, customer misunderstandings, the list is endless. To achieve business success, look at both sides of the coin. Every problem has an opportunity. A LBV in the BEP must be opportunity focused in order to continually improve the quality of service they are providing to their customers.
- 5. Self-Starter/Self-Reliant:** A LBV in the BEP is expected to set schedules for themselves, place orders, keep vending machines clean, full, and working at all times, submit information to the BEP on time and keep their customers satisfied. Often the expectations are not at the convenience of the LBV and can interrupt the LBV's personal time. The LBV will need to be able to prioritize these work duties in order to meet their responsibilities. A career in the BEP is not a Monday through Friday, 8 to 5 job. It is not uncommon for a LBV to work an odd schedule that includes nights and weekends.
- 6. Adaptability:** Business success requires the ability to adapt to changing situations. Nothing ever goes as planned. The world of business is full of surprises and unforeseen events. A LBV in the BEP must possess the ability to adapt to change. A LBV may have a plan; however unknown circumstances may alter those plans. Understanding this potential and being able to change course and act swiftly can be the difference between success and failure. Being flexible gives LBVs the ability to respond to changes without being paralyzed with fear and uncertainty.
- 7. Manage Stress Well:** We all feel pressure and stress. How a LBV handles stressful situations could be the difference in success and failure. Customers, colleagues, and employees can sometimes be difficult to work with. A LBV in the BEP must be able to control their emotions and treat everyone with respect. A LBV in the BEP is a representative of not only their business, but of the entire program.
- 8. Productive and a Multi-Tasker:** Productivity is the cornerstone of business success. A LBV in the BEP must formulate the habit of continually looking for a better way to make their business more

productive. This attribute will create more time to focus on the critical issues that drive sales and profit. Productivity can be enhanced by technology, automation, outsourcing, and improving business processes.

- 9. Honest and Humble:** Business success requires the ability to know your strengths and weaknesses. Being open and honest about yourself and your business creates growth as an individual and as a company. Don't spend time developing weaknesses. Find help for weak areas, enabling you to focus on strengths. Building our strengths is the path to mastery and success. Know yourself and your business.
- 10. Have Stamina:** A LBV in the BEP performs the majority of their work standing, bending up and down, pulling and pushing carts of merchandise and filling, cleaning, and repairing vending machines. While performing their job duties, the LBV will be expected to carry loads of 25 pounds or more on a regular basis and at times use their hands and arms in continuous repetitive motions.