

# **BEP FAQ's**

## **What is the Business Enterprise Program (BEP)?**

This Rehabilitation Services Administration program, in a close partnering relationship with rehabilitation services administration's Vocational Rehabilitation program (VR), offers legally blind persons the opportunity to become independent entrepreneurs capable of achieving their fullest potential through as business people within the guidelines of the Business Enterprise Program.

## **How does BEP work?**

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor, following evaluation, places the individual in a formal training program which includes management practices, foodservice and vending operations, retailing, marketing, sanitation, accounting, and personnel functions among others. Upon satisfactory completion of this extensive training and licensing, the individual, through the VR Counselor, may apply for placement in a BEP facility.

## **What about BEP funding?**

There are limited state funds required to support the program, however vocational rehabilitation works closely with the BEP and supports potential operators through the application, screening, and selection process. All funds are derived from vending machine income, operator's contributions, based on a percentage of their facility profit(s) and matching funds from federal programs and grants.

## **What kinds of concepts are included in the program?**

- Cafeterias
- Snack Bars
- Branded Concepts
- Micro-Markets
- Highway Rest Stop Vending
- Corrections Vending
- Vending Routes
- Military dining
- Office Coffee Service
- USPS Vending

## **What kinds of locations are BEP facilities located in?**

- Federal buildings
- State buildings
- County buildings
- Municipal buildings
- Military Bases
- Military Entrance Centers
- Military Training centers

## **What qualifications do I need to become a BEP Operator?**

- Candidate must be legally blind
- Candidate must be a citizen of the United States
- Candidate must be at least 18 years of age
- Candidate must be a client of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

The VR Counselor and AzBEP Training Coordinator will work in close partnership to assist the candidate as they complete the application process. Once application file is completed, a screening committee will determine acceptance into the training program. The training program is 6-9 months in duration, and provides trainees a solid foundation for operations management and many of the courses can lead to certification from the National Restaurant Education Foundation.

## **Where can I get more information?**

Randolph-Sheppard Vendors of America ([randolph-sheppard.org](http://randolph-sheppard.org))  
National Association of Blind Merchants ([blindmerchants.org](http://blindmerchants.org))  
Department of Education ([ed.gov](http://ed.gov))  
National Federation of the Blind (NFB) ([nfb.org](http://nfb.org))  
National Council of State Agencies for the Blind ([ncsab.org](http://ncsab.org))  
Arizona Department of Economic Security ([azdes.gov/rsa/sbvid/bep](http://azdes.gov/rsa/sbvid/bep))



## Randolph Sheppard Info

- The Business Enterprise Program (BEP) was created following the enactment of the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, 20 USC 107 et. seq., as amended in 1954 and 1974. The 1936 act was enacted to provide blind persons with remunerative employment, enlarge their economic opportunities, and encourage their self-support through the operation of vending facilities in federal buildings.
- The Vending Facility program authorized by the Randolph-Sheppard Act provides persons who are blind with remunerative employment and self-support through the operation of vending facilities on federal and other property. The program was intended to enhance employment opportunities for trained, licensed blind persons to operate facilities. The law was subsequently amended in 1954 and again in 1974 to ultimately ensure individuals who are blind a priority in the operation of vending facilities, which included cafeterias, snack bars, and automatic vending machines on federal property. The program priority has broadened in most states through state laws to include state, county, municipal, and private locations as well. Under the Randolph Sheppard program, state licensing agencies recruit, train, license, and place individuals who are blind as operators of vending facilities located on federal and other properties. The act authorizes a blind individual licensed by the state licensing agency to conduct specified activities in vending facilities through permits or contracts.
- The Federal Randolph Sheppard Act, 20 U.S.C. § 107, Mini Randolph Sheppard Act, Arizona Revised Statutes 23-504, and the Federal Interstate Highway Act, Title 23 govern the program, Chapter 1, Subchapter I, Sec. 111. govern the program, with Arizona having a very strong "Mini Randolph-Sheppard" act providing priority for state, county, and municipal buildings in Arizona.
- In Arizona the program operates under the Arizona Department of Economic Security. The US Department of Education monitors and consults with programs at the federal level.
- An agency or department contacts the BEP if they choose to have vending or merchandising locations in their building, BEP surveys the 'site' and then presents the survey to the Arizona Participating Operators Committee (APOC) for review, making recommendations for type of facility, viability, and potential income. The program also identifies new opportunities and makes contact with agencies or entities. APOC then votes on if the site is viable, and if the site is viable for an operator to run as a new facility, be included with an existing one, or be subcontracted. This allows the program to grow and expand into new areas until a person who is blind is trained to take over these sites. A facility can be a single building, or be comprised of multiple 'sites' each having vending.
- The individual BEP operators function as a quasi-independent business people within the guidelines of the BEP program.
- The BEP is responsible for identifying potential business opportunities, negotiating contracts with facility grantors, designing and equipping the facility, as well as providing initial stocks and supplies. The facilities and operators are regulated and monitored by the BEP, which also provides ongoing supervision and management services.
- The BEP funds a health and retirement program for blind operator program participants, in addition to upward mobility training on topics related to their businesses and lives.
- In Arizona the program and its operators manage vending and food service locations in every county in the state. Included in this are snack bars, convenience stores, cafeterias, markets, and more. The program is responsible for the operation of over 4800 vending machines state wide, and contracts with a wide variety of federal, state, county, municipal, private, and military locations to provide services.
- The blind operators, as independent business owners, contribute to the local economy through taxes and job creation. BEP operators employ over 275 people state wide, and in addition to the 30+ people who work blind as operators, many of their businesses employ people with disabilities in their companies.