



TX Sense Abilities

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PROGRAMMING

What Should I Charge for Contractual Services?

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Abstract: Professionals such as Teachers and Orientation and Mobility Specialists may work part time for a school district on a contractual basis. The author discusses current pay rates and practices primarily in Texas.

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So, you're interested in working as a contractual VI professional (TVI or COMS), but you aren't sure what you should charge. The good-news/bad-news is that there isn't a single response to the "What should I charge?" question. Instead, you should consider an array of options.

Please be aware that school districts often contract for services of many types, such as OT and PT services and other professional services. Most districts will have policies on what they are able to pay. Sometimes there is room for negotiations, but it may have a narrow range.

Still, the question remains: what should I know before I enter into a conversation about contracting with a school district? What questions should I ask?

Based on an informal survey of VI professionals from multiple states, in 2010 consultants were paid between \$60 and \$150 per hour for contractual work. (\$60-\$100 is a more typical range in Texas.) This was the 3rd time this survey was completed. While the dollar amounts may change the factors have remained constant. Factors that affect the rates are listed below.

Student attendance

- Is the rate charged available only if the student is available? Or regardless, even if the student is sick, or attending a school function or field trip?
- Is there a cancellation time? For example, if the district informs you that the student isn't available with less than 12 hours notice, will you still get all or a portion of the fee?

Direct and indirect services

Is there a ratio of direct and indirect services, such as the time needed for lesson planning or report writing? For example, for every 5 hours of direct service, is one hour of indirect service credited for planning, consulting, report writing?

Travel time

- Is it included in the rate? Is the travel rate from portal-to-portal? Is travel time charged at a lower rate?
- When significant travel is involved, either between students or getting to and from the district, a district may offer a different rate for that time. It could be as low as 50% of the standard rate.

Mileage or Travel costs

- Is it available? Is it included in the rate? Is it an extra fee? What is the current rate? What documentation is required?
- As gas prices change, or travel time increases, are rates subject to change? If mileage isn't charged, but gas costs are reimbursed, what documentation is required?

Evaluations, assessments and report writing

- How will evaluations be completed? Will they be charged at the same rate as when you work with a student? Is it included in the rate? Is it an hourly rate or a flat fee? Is the time needed for report writing accounted for, either at a flat rate or as a ratio?

Collaborative consultation with other staff members

Is it included in the direct service rate? Is there a rate difference between collaborative consultations and direct service? Or is it charged as part of the entire service hour/unit?

Contract or subcontract

Is the consultant billing the district, or there is an agency that provides the service and the VI professional is a sub-contractor? If you are a subcontractor, the billing organization will keep part of the fee. You should be aware of the percent they keep.

Geography

- Professional consultants in the northeast and California charged more than in the mid-west and south. Additionally, locations that are very rural or very urban may have different fee structures.

Replies in the higher ranges tended to exclude travel time and/or mileage. Replies in the lower ranges seemed to be "portal to portal" and payment was due even if the student didn't show up or was otherwise unavailable.

In almost all instances, no taxes are withheld, no medical insurance is paid. You are well advised to talk with a tax accountant prior to starting to ensure that you're knowledgeable about your tax obligations.

Here are 3 examples of how a district may contract with a VI professional. Many other scenarios are possible. Hopefully, it will give you an idea of what you can expect.

1. A district may pay on the lower end of the range: \$80 per hour. However, it will pay even if the student doesn't show up (possibly with a cap on absences), and will pay that same rate for assessments and evaluations and consulting with other educators. The district will also pay mileage at a standard rate, but will not pay for travel time.
2. A district may pay in the mid-range of the scale for direct services, but the non-direct services are billed on an item-by-item basis. The travel time to see the student is more than an hour. So travel time is reimbursed at 50% of the hourly rate; no mileage reimbursement is included. Assessments and evaluations are paid at a flat fee. Functional vision evaluations and learning media assessments will cost \$400.
3. A district will pay at the high end of the range: \$150 per hour. However, if the student doesn't show up, the TVI or COMS won't get paid. No mileage or travel time reimbursement is available. The contractor is paid for 1 hour per week to consult with other team members. Those evaluations necessary to determine eligibility may be billed for the amount of time needed to assess the student, but not other required assessments.

Hopefully, this will help you determine what you need to charge and what questions you need to ask. Contracting can be a wonderful employment option for many people, but you should be informed before you embark on this service option.
