

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment process can be put into context by examining it in stages. This outline focuses on different stages in the assessment/IEP process. Remember that assessments prepared for other WIA programs may be used if you have negotiated reciprocity in your Memorandum of Understanding with the Local Workforce Board.

STAGE I — ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION.

Eligibility determination is part of the overall assessment process, and includes meeting the minimum standards for age, income, residency and unemployment requirements.

STAGE II — INFORMATION GATHERING.

- Most Suitable Community Service Assignment (CSA). An interview shall be conducted with each participant to determine the most suitable community service assignment. This assignment should accommodate the needs of the applicant/participant. The needs of the host agency or project are to be considered secondary to those of the applicant/participant.
- Appropriate Employment and Training Objectives. An interview shall be conducted with each participant to identify the appropriate employment and training objectives.
- Prepare Assessment in Partnership with Participant. The assessment shall be made in partnership with the new participant.
- Consider the Participant's:
 - Preferences
 - History, including all aspects such as work, practical life experiences (homemaking, parenting), military service, education, personal background, prior training
 - Skills
 - Interests
 - Talents
 - Physical capabilities
 - Need for supportive services
 - Aptitudes
 - Potential for performing community service assignments
 - Potential for transition to unsubsidized employment
 - Training needs
 - Reason for applying to/expectations of the program

— Barriers

- Identify Abilities. The assessment of each participant shall take into consideration his/her physical capabilities.
- Require Consistency with RA / ADA. Assessments for physical ability shall be consistent with section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
- Assignment. Grantees shall seek a community service assignment that will permit the most effective use of each participant's skills, interests, and aptitudes.

STAGE III — INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYMENT PLAN.

The Individual Employment Plan is based on the assessment and the 6-month reassessments. Some points to consider in the IEP are the following:

- Expandable Goals. The goals developed shall be expansive (but clearly defined) and include items such as:
 - Employment
 - Training needed
 - Community Service Assignment
 - Quality of life
 - Aspirations
- Mutual Partnership. The IEP shall be:
 - Developed in partnership with the participant
 - Contain the signatures of the participant and appropriate staff
- Action Steps with Appropriate Time Frames: The IEP shall include specific:
 - Action steps
 - Approximate dates for undertaking and completing action steps
- Appropriate Support Services. The participant's support service needs identified in the assessment shall be reflected in the IEP. To the extent practicable, plans to provide the needed services shall be described.
- Assessment / Reassessment. The grantee shall use the assessment or reassessment as a basis for developing or amending the IEP.

STAGE IV — REASSESSMENT / RECERTIFICATION

The reassessment can be a continuous process, but must be done every 6 months. The second reassessment may be prepared when the eligibility

recertification is done and should include consideration of previous assessment findings.

- Update the IEP and Conduct a 6-Month Review.
 - Evaluate progress
 - Explore needed support services
 - Determine potential for transition
 - Review employment and training objectives
 - Demonstrate mutual partnership in development of time frames for specific action steps
 - Link with joint participant/staff signatures

- Consider Alternative Community Service Assignments.
 - Assess potential for greater opportunity (ies)
 - Enhance potential for transition to unsubsidized employment
 - Consider best interest of participant
 - Determine training opportunities

SETTING THE TONE for the ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Be sure you establish the right atmosphere. Find a private place where interruptions and phone calls are unlikely. Make it a formal session in which the applicant/participant has your full attention. The seating arrangement can be more important than you think. The image of a superior sitting behind a desk is uncomfortably close to the image of a judge presiding in court. Two chairs at a conference table are better. Better yet: two comfortable seats around a small table. You want to encourage discussion. Present yourself as a helpful counselor, not as an authority figure.

Conducting the Assessment Interview:

- I. Beginning the interview
 - Greet the participant cordially
 - Make sure you are both seated comfortable
 - Establish rapport: adopt an informal, interested and sincere manner
 - Respect individuality and preserve self-confidence of participant
 - Try to provide an informal, relaxed atmosphere that stimulates the free exchange of information
 - Begin by commenting on some aspect of the applicant's/participant's background

- II. Drawing out the participant
 - Use language the participant understands
 - Use leading or suggestive questions only to return the discussion to the right topic, or to call the participant's attention to facts they might overlook
 - Ask one question at a time
 - Begin with questions least likely to arouse resistance or defensiveness
 - Avoid yes or no questions; choose questions that encourage participants to speak freely
 - Check participants' understanding of questions by restating the answer
 - Use participants' answers to lead to other questions
 - Avoid superficial judgments
 - Be objective
 - ™ Suppress personal likes and dislikes
 - ™ Allow for normal tension in the participant until he becomes comfortable with the assessment process. Remember, the participant may feel nervous or threatened by the process. It is your responsibility to put him at ease in order to gain the information you need to guide the next steps in the assessment process.

There are four communication skills you can use to keep an interview in control and on target:

1. Silence. If you sit in room silently with a participant after asking a question, he will eventually talk. Silence is never offensive or judgmental, and can't put the participant on the defensive or look for ways to second-guess the process.
2. Use open-ended questions. There are two ways to ask a question. The first and most common is the close-ended question, which results in a simple "yes" or "no" answer. This will provide you with very little useful information. Stay as close as you can to open-ended questions, which usually begin with "how" and "why".
3. Listen. The participant should do a lot, if not most of the talking. Practice active listening so you can understand as much as possible of what the participant is saying. There are three parts to active listening:
 - a) Selective listening. Here you sort out the pertinent information from what the participant is telling you.
 - b) Responsive listening. It is important to let the participant know you are listening; yet you shouldn't interrupt. You can do this nonverbally using nods of the head, smiles, or facial expressions.
 - c) Empathetic listening. This technique uses restatement to reflect what is said back to the participant. It doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with what is being said, but lets the participant understand that you are listening and understand.
4. Measure the reaction. There is no way you can predict the reaction you will get to suggestions listen, and know when to be quiet and when to talk. And remember to "read" the nonverbals. Usually a participant's eyes, face, mouth and body provide additional information about the meaning of the words that are being said. For example: "Mary, you tell me that employers don't like older people is the cause for your lack of finding a job. But you seem a little nervous. Is there some other reason?"

SOME FINAL LISTENING TIPS

- *Limit your own talking.* You can't talk and listen at the same time.
- *Think like the participant.* You'll understand their problems and needs better if you use their point of view.
- *Don't interrupt.* A pause, even a long one, does not always mean a participant had finished saying everything he wants to.
- *Concentrate.* Focus your mind on what the person is saying. Practice shutting out external distractions.
- *Take very brief notes.* Use key words or phrases so the participant is unaware of the specific information being recorded. You can fill in your notes after the interview...use your time together to listen and interact!
- *Listen for ideas, not just words.* Try to get the whole picture, not just isolated bits and pieces.
- *Listen for overtones.* You can learn a great deal about people by the way they say things, the way they react to what you say.
- *Make occasional interjections.* An occasional "yes" or "I see" shows the participant you're still with him.
- *Turn off your own worries.* This isn't always easy, but personal fears, concerns and problems form a kind of "static" that can blank out what's being said to you.
- *Prepare in advance.* Review all forms, files, and checklists prior to the interview so your mind is free for careful listening.
- *React to ideas not people.* Don't let any curiosity or irritation you may feel about the participant's appearance or manner distract or upset you.
- *Don't argue mentally.* Don't get caught up in reacting to everything the participant is saying, or you'll lose track of what's being said.
- *Don't jump to conclusions.* Don't make unnecessary assumptions about what the participant is going to say, or try to complete his sentences before he has finished.

Some Questions to Get Answers to During the Assessment Process

Participant's background & work history

- What kind of jobs have they had in the past?
- What skills have they acquired from the jobs?
- What job-related skills have they acquired from other past experiences?
- What possible barriers to employment are suggested by their background/work history?

Participant's work interests & goals

- What kind of work are they interested in at this point in their life?
- What goals can they and/or will they set for themselves?
- How do their skills, knowledge & abilities match their work interests?

Participant's skills, knowledge & abilities

- What job-related skills do they possess?
- What transferable skills might they have?
- What "hidden" skills/abilities haven't been considered?
- What is their ability to learn new skills?

Participant's barriers to employment

- What is their transportation situation?
- What supportive services might they need?
- Are they lacking any basic education?
 - English proficiency
 - Literacy
 - GED
- What skills do they need to obtain to qualify for the job they want?

Participant's personality & support system

- Does their personality match their job goal?
- Will their personality help them get a job?
- What inner drive/ambitions will help them get through?
- Who can they count on, and for what?
- Are there people who can help them network to a job?

What to address in the information-gathering stage

- Skills & talent
- Interests
- Preferences
- Physical capabilities
- Aptitudes
- Training needs
- Barriers
- Need for support services
- Potential for unsubsidized placement
- Potential for host agency performance
- Reason for applying /expectations
- Work history
- Transportation

MORE FORMAL ASSESSMENT **PROCEDURES**

Basic Skill Measures

- ⊗ Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE)
- ⊗ Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)
- ⊗ Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)
- ⊗ Tests of Basic Education (TABE)
- ⊗ Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised (WRAT_R)

Skill, Aptitude, or Ability Measurements

- ⊗ Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS)
- ⊗ General Aptitude Test Battery (GATB)
- ⊗ Realistic Assessment of Vocational Experiences (RAVE)

Interest Inventories/ Temperament Measures

- ⊗ Career Values Card Sort
- ⊗ Career Orientation Placement and Evaluation Survey (COPES)
- ⊗ Career Orientation Preference System (COPS)
- ⊗ Reading-Free Vocational Interest Inventory, Revised (RFVII)
- ⊗ Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII)
- ⊗ Self-Directed Search (SDS)
- ⊗ USES Interest Inventory