THE PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Strategies for Obtaining and Using Essential Information
A good Assessment is crucial to meeting program goals

- Provides the most effective framework for identifying “most in need” participants
- Establishes the IEP foundation
- Guides decisions on community service assignment, training goals and eventual placement and retention strategies
Assessment versus IEP

- Information-gathering versus decision-making
- The assessment process helps you:
  - ask the right questions
  - collect the right information
  - provide the right guidance to help the participant create, decide upon and implement their IEP
Steps to a Successful Assessment Process

- Lay the groundwork at participant orientation
- Recruit training sites that support your goals
- Do not rush participants through the process
- Ensure staff members know community resources
- Provide staff training to make certain good interview/counseling skills are used
Making the Most of Orientation Sessions

- Invest time in a clear, detailed orientation
- Set high expectations from the very start
  - Be very clear about what you expect of applicants
  - This is the time for both parties to decide if the program is the right fit
- Prepare applicants for the on-going assessment process
- Stress IEP and Job Development aspects
  - It’s not doing for the site – it’s training at the site
  - It’s not hoping for success – it’s planning for it
  - It’s not accepting a job offer – it’s seeking a job
- Constantly reinforce these high expectations
What do you cover during orientation?

What do you give to applicants?
Training Sites Must Support Your Goals

- Training sites must support participant’s assessed needs and IEP
  - Develop sites that will support program’s purpose

- Develop more sites than participants
  - Stronger bargaining position
  - Options for moving participants
Are you satisfied with your current host agencies?

- Do you have enough?
- Are they the same ones you’ve been using for years?
- Are they true partners, or just a place to house your participants?
- What might you do to change the situation?
REMEMBER ...
Role of Host Agencies

- SCSEP is a training program designed to meet the needs of participants ... not host agencies
  - Host agency does play an integral role in both the program and each participant's development and eventual achievement of IEP goal

- Host agencies do not "own slots" nor do they have “positions to be filled” by the program
Finding Suitable Host Agencies

- Agencies with the ability to hire
- Agencies offering good training or providing particularly important community service
- Agencies that assist with the job search process through their contacts with other agencies and local businesses
- Agencies that provide a supportive environment for participants with multiple and/or significant barriers, that can also offer short-term opportunities for participants prior to IEP development
Finding Host Agencies

Melissadata.com/lookups/index.htm

Federal Resources
Nonprofit Organizations
Get information on nonprofits by ZIP, Name or Tax I.D.
Role Of A Waiting List

- Make an effort to develop host agencies in all 4 categories, so you have options for new participants as well as for rotation of current participants.
Host Agencies Must Support Your Goals

- Host agencies must support participant’s IEP
  - Develop a variety of sites so you will have multiple training opportunities that support a variety of IEP goals
- Develop more sites than participants
  - Reduces your “dependency” on host agencies
  - Enables you to insist on host agency compliance with participant training plan
  - Gives you options for transferring participants
- Set high expectations for host agencies
  - Expect meaningful on-the-job training
  - Expect support for participant’s IEP & job search
- You do not need to continue using host agencies that do not meet your expectations
Assignment & Reassignment

INITIAL ASSIGNMENT

- Based on the initial assessment
- Made as soon as practical and appropriate following orientation and assessment
  - Community service assignment constitutes enrollment; Time lag is possible between enrollment and beginning at the host agency
  - Preemployment training phase may be used if further time and information is needed to develop the best possible training plan
- Project staff must seek a community service assignment that permits the most effective use of the participant’s skills, interests and aptitudes
How/When to Develop Participant Assignment Description

- Upon developing host agency agreement
  - *General* description only of possible community service assignments

- Following participant assessment
  - Final agreement on assignment description
  - Should meet participant training needs and fit into host agency services

- Dated, and revised when duties are substantially changed
Length Of Time At A Host Agency Assignment

- Based on participant IEPs
- SCSEP is a participant-centered program ... host agencies do not "own slots" or have "openings" to be filled by participants
NOW TO THE ACTUAL ASSESSMENT
Assessment

- An open-ended process that lasts throughout a participant’s enrollment
  - Must be updated/documentated twice per 12 month period

- Provides information on:
  - Interests
  - Skills
  - Education/training
  - Work experience
  - Real and perceived barriers to employment
Minimum Requirements
DoL OW Bulletin 96-1

- Made in partnership w/each participant
- Consider skills, talents, training, work history, and capabilities
- Identify appropriate training & employment objectives
- Identify needed supportive services
- Must be the basis for the IEP
- Must be the basis for host agency assignment
- Should be signed by participant & PD
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
Two Types of Assessment Procedures

1. Interviews, observations and documents … used to get a feel for participant’s work behavior and ambitions, and to determine most-in-need factors

2. Standardized measures designed to provide valid information on skills, interests, knowledge
Purpose of the Assessment Interview

- Discover participant’s expectations
  - Ask what the participant expects from the program
  - Clarify your purpose
- Seek early clues about where the participant wants to go
  - Uncertainty about job preferences
  - Strong preference for job/work environment
- Learn what the participant has done/will do to secure employment
- Discover & explore skills, abilities, limitations
Organizing Assessment Information
[indicators for most-in-need factors]

- Participant’s background & work history
- Participant’s work interests & goals
- Participant’s skills, knowledge & abilities
- Participant’s barriers to employment
- Participant’s personality & support system
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?
• What is their transportation situation?
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?

- Another opportunity to identify most-in-need individuals (social, geographic isolation)
● First interview may not initially reveal enough information to match host agency w/participant interests/skills

● Testing may benefit some (math, language)

● Knowledge of local job market makes it easier to aide those long out of the market
1. Ensure Staff Know Community Resources

2. Provide Interviewing/Counseling Skills Training To Staff
Resource Checklist

● One-Stop Staff
  - Entire assessment
  - Testing

● Support Services
  - AAA Information, Referral & Assistance resources

● Training Resources
  - One-Stop partner programs
  - Investigate local training resources
  - Host agencies
Staff Training Resources

- Libraries (Books, workbooks and videos on interviewing and counseling skills)
- One-Stop Staff
- Community College Courses
- MSW Interns
- Retired Caseworkers (NASW Chapter)
- Rutgers U. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development; Working Ahead --- front-line staff curriculum; preparation for professional certification
  - www.heldrich.rutgers.edu
Relationship of Assessment to Performance Measures
Assessment allows you to see the total person and how they fit both the training site and future job goal.

- Community service hours, placement, retention, earnings increase measures

Assessment is a continuous process that ensures participants are trained for viable employment opportunities.

- Fluid process, not a 1-time form
- Updated regularly: whenever new skill achieved or barrier overcome; Minimum time: twice within twelve months
- Training and services reflected on the IEP must enhance and improve the participant’s skills and lead to higher level skills that will enhance employability
- Provides the opportunity to analyze each applicant in terms of likelihood for contributing toward achievement of performance measures

- Selection of appropriate applicants (regs. are clear that all applicants need not be selected)
- Service level, most in need measures

- Success hinges on fit with the training site and job, as well as thoroughly identifying fit with barrier definitions
Initial Assessment: The Opportunity To Identify Most-in-need Individuals
Definition: Disability

- A *condition* attributable to mental or physical *impairment* that results in substantial functional limitations in 1 or more areas of major life activities
  - Self care
  - Receptive and expressive language
  - Learning
  - Mobility
  - Self-direction
  - Capacity for independent living
  - Economic self sufficiency
  - Cognitive functioning
  - Emotional adjustment
Determining Disability (without asking the question)

- Ask the applicant if s/he is currently, or in the past has received, receiving services/benefits from agencies or programs such as:
  - SSI
  - SSDI
  - Food Stamps
  - Vocational Rehabilitation agency
  - mental health agency
  - developmental disabilities agency
  - independent living center
  - disability agencies-Easter Seal Society, Goodwill, VA, etc.
● Ask the applicant if s/he needs an accommodation to participate in the program
  – give examples (e.g., interpreter, large print, etc.)

● Ask the person if s/he needs any workplace accommodation
  – e.g., assistive technology, Braille, TTY, large print, flexible schedule, etc.) to perform the essential job functions

● Remember … identifying disability as a most-in-need factor must be made by the applicant, not the interviewer
Cultural, Social or Geographic Isolation

- Ability to perform normal daily tasks or capacity to live independently is hindered by cultural, social or geographic isolation, including isolation caused by racial or ethnic status
  - Not solely a matter of objective criteria
  - Based on individual’s perception … associated with loneliness, sadness and other forms of emotional distress
  - Often comes about as a result of loss of spouse or other significant family member, loss of job, or other precipitating life event

- When do you Probe? What do you probe for? How?
Displaced Homemaker

- An individual who has been providing unpaid services to family members in the home and who:
  - Has been dependent on the income of another family member and is no longer supported by that income
  - Is unemployed or underemployed and is experiencing difficulty in obtaining or upgrading employment

- When do you probe? What do you probe for? How?
Other Social Barriers

- Any other social barriers or personal circumstances that may keep someone from easily connecting with others or present barriers to employment:
  - Prior felony conviction
  - Transgender
  - Personal hygiene issues
  - Certain phobias

- How and when to probe?
Poor Employment History or Prospects

- Likelihood that an individual will not obtain employment without the assistance of SCSEP or other workforce program:
  - No substantial employment history
  - Basic skills or English language deficiency
  - Displaced homemakers
  - School dropouts
  - Persons with disabilities
  - Homeless
  - Individuals residing in socially & economically isolated rural and urban areas where employment opportunities are limited
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

- Individual who has limited ability in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language (well enough to fully participate in the program)
  - Native language is a language other than English
  - Lives in a family or community environment where a language other than English is dominant

- When in doubt... ask
Literacy Skills Deficient

- Individual computes or solves problems, reads, writes or speaks English at or below 8th grade level, or cannot do so at a level necessary to function on the job, in the family or in society.

- How to determine without asking? Testing?
Conducting the Assessment Interview
Purpose of the Assessment Interview

- Discover participant’s expectations
  - Ask what the participant expects from the program
  - Clarify your purpose
- Seek early clues about where the participant wants to go
  - Uncertainty about job preferences
  - Strong preference for job/work environment
- Learn what the participant has done/will do to secure employment
- Discover & explore skills, abilities, limitations
Remember: you are having a conversation ... listening ... not filling out a form

- Establish an atmosphere of trust, acceptance, and support
- Be always aware of your facial expressions and posture [read the participant’s as well]
- Communicate with warmth and genuineness
- Recognize strengths and positives
• Identify with the participant’s feelings and concerns
• Reflect back what you’ve heard to be certain you understand what was said

  *what I hear you saying…*
  *you feel…*
  *it sounds as if…*
  *in your experience…*
  *I get the impression that…*
- Do much less than 50% of the talking
- Do your best to elicit responses
  - Tell me about …
  - Help me understand …
  - Interesting, please tell me more …
  - How did you feel about that …
- Frequently check if you are understanding accurately
  - Repeat or summarize
  - Ask if you heard correctly
• Listen carefully. Does the participant:
  ● Give direct, responsive answers
  ● Appear confident
  ● Have recent job search experience
  ● Appear motivated

• Learn areas of high interest
  – Ask about “favorite job” or “dream job” … Look for:
    ● display of excitement
    ● smiles
    ● short response time
    ● other positive nonverbal clues
    ● negative nonverbal clues (acting wary or fidgeting)
- Find out why the participant has come to the program
  - Probe for perceived needs (expectations of you and the program)
  - Find out the most urgent need/pressing problem ... handle first
- Look for strengths and barriers
  - transportation, family situation, friendship support system, health status, confidence and self-esteem
- Look for patterns in the information you gather
In Sum: Interviewing And Counseling Skills Are Important To Develop

- Engage the participant in a conversation
  - Ask open ended – “how” & “why” questions
  - Ask lots of follow-up & probing questions

- Establish rapport
  - Understand the meaning of what you are hearing, including underlying emotions and feelings
  - Watch your body language & facial expressions

- Be prepared
  - Don’t let the participant go off on tangents or otherwise derail the conversation

- Guide the conversation
  - Focus on gaining relevant/appropriate information
  - Don’t act until you know/understand relevant info.
  - You are not ready to document the assessment or make a host agency assignment until you know & understand every relevant thing about the participant
  - Reflect back what you think you heard - correct misunderstandings
More Formal Assessment Procedures

- Paper & Pencil/standardized measures should be used when there is:
  - participant lack of direction
  - question of the validity of participant’s self-perception
  - concern about realistic perception of the participant

- Take care that standardized assessment tools are appropriate instruments for older workers
  - consider criterion-based rather than norm-based tests
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
- Jist Publications (assessment tools & workbooks)
Evaluating Your Forms

- Does your assessment form provide you with enough information to make appropriate host agency assignments?
- Cover all the pertinent information just discussed?
- Is information synthesized?
- What would be a better process to include needed information?
Elements of a Good Assessment Form

- Face sheet summarizing:
  - Strengths (skills)
  - Barriers
  - Job preferences
  - Support service needs
  - Area to check & date if initial or 6-month update
  - Host agency assignment (s)

- Additional sheets:
  - Education, training, and work history
  - Probing questions with open-ended space
  - Checklists (skills, talents, aptitudes, hobbies, barriers to employment, job values, etc.)

- Signature lines and dates
- Acknowledgement statements
ACTION PLANNING
Issues to Consider

- Do you need to enhance the breadth and depth of your assessment process? Do you need to standardize the process among local projects?
- New…more…host agencies
- Evaluate current host agencies
- Development of outside training resources/support services
- Linkages with WIA partners for services
- Linkage with One-Stop for assessments &/or testing
- Evaluate current position descriptions; redo as appropriate