COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

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Title: Assessment Services for Adult, Dislocated Workers and Youth Programs

PURPOSE
To describe the assessment services that are required to be available for adults, dislocated workers and youth in WIA, and to provide guidance for a comprehensive framework for conducting an effective assessment program.

REFERENCES
P.L. 105-220, Workforce Investment Act, Section 129 and 134.
Federal Register, August 11, 2000 (Volume 65, No. 156) U.S. Department of
Labor Workforce Investment Act; Final Rules, 20 CFR Part 663.
Virginia Workforce Investment Act Policy 00-5, Youth Programs under Title I of the Workforce Investment Act.
Testing and Assessment: An Employer's Guide to Good Practices (1999), U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Policy and Research.
http://wdr.doleta.gov/opr/fulltext/document.asp?docn=6032
Tests and Other Assessments: Helping You Make Better Career Decisions (2000), United States Department of Labor's O*NET Project.
http://wdr.doleta.gov/opr/fulltext/document.asp?docn=6034

POLICY STATEMENT
The purpose of assessment is to help individuals and program staff make decisions about appropriate employment goals and to develop effective service strategies for reaching those goals. The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) strongly believes that meaningful service planning cannot occur in the absence of effective assessment practices. They also believe there is no single correct approach to conducting assessment - it could be accomplished through the use of any number of formalized instruments, through structured interviews, or through a combination of processes developed at the local level. Further, assessments could be conducted by the One-Stop operator, by a partner agency, or by an outside organization on a contract basis. Because there are differences in the legal and program requirements among the various programs that might provide assessments, USDOL is not of the opinion that there can be a required single assessment source for WIA. They do, however, support efforts to create common intake systems and to share data across programs, thereby eliminating duplication of effort for program staff or customers. They also believe that assessments, evaluations, and service strategies developed by partner agencies for individuals are the product of that agency's unique expertise, and, therefore, should be given careful consideration. They encourage Local Boards and partner agencies to develop Memorandum of Understandings (MOU's), with required and optional partners that provide for procedures to ensure that, where appropriate, partner assessments will be accepted as valid for WIA, and WIA assessments will be accepted as valid for partner programs. Of course,

to be acceptable, an assessment, from any source, must provide the information needed by the One-Stop operator or the partner program. Local Boards and partner programs should work together to develop assessment tools that will serve all partner interests. If necessary for WIA purposes, the One-Stop operator may choose to supplement assessment information provided from another agency. Given the limited funding available, it is important to avoid duplication of services.

Assessment Services

<u>Adults and Dislocated Workers Programs</u>

An initial assessment of skill levels and the services needs of each participant is to be completed. This assessment "provides preliminary information regarding the individual's skill levels, aptitudes, interests, (re)employability and other needs." As a core service, the initial assessment is necessarily a brief, preliminary information gathering process that, among other things, will provide sufficient information about an individual's basic literacy and occupational skill levels to enable the One-Stop operator to make appropriate referrals to services available through the One-Stop and partner programs.

A comprehensive assessment shall be given if a participant is (I) unemployed and is unable to obtain employment through core services; and (2) has been determined by a one-stop operator to be in need of more intensive services in order to obtain employment; or (3) is employed, but who is determined by a one-stop operator to be in need of such intensive services in order to obtain or retain employment that allows for self-sufficiency. This assessment, which is an intensive service, is a more detailed examination of these issues and may explore any number of things relevant to the development of a person's Individual Employment Plan (IEP). These might include some combination or all of the following: educational attainment; employment history; more in-depth information about basic literacy and occupational skill levels; interests; aptitudes; family and financial situation; emotional and physical health, including disabilities; attitudes toward work; motivation; and supportive service needs. It is expected that all partner agencies in the One-Stop, under any applicable State policies, will work to achieve consensus on the required components of the assessment system for the One Stop system at any local level. In doing so, they should take into account any special assessment needs that may be experienced by individuals with disabilities and other populations with multiple barriers to employment. As we proceed with the implementation of WIA we will consider gathering 'best practices' on the delivery of assessment services to share with the system.

<u>Youth Programs</u>
An objective assessment of skill levels and services needs of each participant is to be completed. This objective assessment shall include an examination of basic skills, occupational skills, prior work experience, employability, interests, aptitudes (including interests and aptitudes for nontraditional jobs), attitudes towards work, motivation, behavioral patterns affecting employment potential, and family situation. The assessment shall include an evaluation of the participant's barriers to employment including financial resources and supportive service needs. The objective assessment is to be a client-centered, diagnostic approach to evaluate the needs of participants without regard to services or training programs available in a local area. It should

include a full array of options including structured interviews, career guidance instruments, basic skills tests, and behavioral observations.

The objective assessment shall include, as appropriate, assisting the participant to establish eligibility for PELL Grants, student loans and other forms of financial aid. This examination of the capabilities, vocational potential, barriers to employment, and supportive service needs of a participant is to be used to develop a realistic employment goal and a service strategy. The objective assessment is an ongoing process and should not be viewed as a one-time event. The objective assessment is to be revised regularly when additional needs are identified or goals achieved.

Assessments conducted by other human service, education, or employment and training programs that have been completed within the year of application for service may be used rather than requiring the participant to undergo duplicate assessment.

Principles of Assessments

Local areas should use the following principles of assessment as a comprehensive framework for conducting an effective assessment program.

Use assessment tools in a *purposeful manner*
Assessment instruments, like other tools, are helpful when used properly but can be useless, harmful, or potentially illegal when used inappropriately. Often, inappropriate use results from not having a clear understanding of what you want to measure and why you want to measure it. It must first be clear as to what is to be accomplished with the assessment program in order to select the proper tools to achieve those goals.

Assessment strategies should be based on both an understanding of the kind of employment and education opportunities that exist in an area and the population to be assessed. Once the purpose is clear, an appropriate assessment tools can be selected and used in an effective manner. Only tests that are appropriate for an identified purpose should be used.

Use the *whole-person approach* to assessment
An assessment instrument may provide important information about an individual. However, no assessment tool is 100% reliable or valid; all are subject to errors, both in measuring characteristics and in predicting performance. Moreover, a single assessment instrument only provides a limited view of a person's qualifications. Using a variety of tools to measure skills, abilities, and other job-relevant characteristics provides a solid basis upon which to make important career and employment-related decisions and minimizes adverse impact.

Use only assessment instruments that are *unbiased* and *fair* to all groups
Unbiased and fair tests should be used. Decisions based on tests that are biased are likely to increase the potential for customer complaints or other allegations from members of the lower scoring groups. Fairness evidence should be reviewed before selecting tools by examining the test manual and independent test reviews.

Use only *reliable* assessment instruments and procedures
If a person takes the same test again, will he or she get a similar score, or a very different score? A reliable instrument will provide accurate and consistent scores. Use only reliable tools to meaningfully interpret test scores and make useful career or employment-related decisions. Test manuals will usually provide a statistic, known as the reliability coefficient, providing an indication of a test's reliability. The higher the reliability coefficient, the more confidence there is that the score is accurate.

Use only assessment procedures and instruments that have been demonstrated to be *valid for the specific purpose* for which they are being used
Validity is one of the most important issues in selecting assessment tools. It refers to (1) the characteristic the assessment instrument measures, and (2) how well the instrument measures the characteristic. Validity is not a property of the assessment instrument itself; it relates to how the instrument is being used.

A test's validity is established in reference to a specific purpose; it may not be valid for different purposes. For example, a test that may be valid for predicting someone's "job knowledge," may not be valid for predicting his or her "leadership skills." You must be sure that the instrument is valid for the purpose for which it is to be used. Selecting a commercially developed instrument does not relieve you of this responsibility.

The test manual usually provides a statistic, the validity coefficient that will give an indication of the test's validity for a specific purpose under specific circumstances. It measures the degree of relationship between test performance and job performance (i.e., job-relatedness of the test).

Use assessment tools that are appropriate for the *target population*
An assessment tool is usually developed for use with a specific group; it may not be valid for other groups. For example, a test designed to predict the performance of office managers may not be valid for clerical workers. The skills and abilities required for the two positions may be different, or the reading level of the test may not be suitable for clerical workers. Tests should be appropriate for the individuals tested, that is, the target population. The manual should indicate the group or groups the test is designed to assess. Your target population should be similar to the group on which the test was developed, or normed. In determining the appropriateness of an instrument for a target group, also consider such factors as reading levels, cultural backgrounds, and language barriers.

Use instruments that have *understandable and comprehensive documentation*
Are the instructions for administration and interpretation understandable? Is the information sufficiently comprehensive to evaluate the suitability of the instrument? Carefully
evaluate the documentation provided by the test publisher to be sure that the tools you select do the job you want them to do and furnish you with the information you need. If the documentation is not understandable or complete, there is a risk of selecting inappropriate instruments.

Test manuals should provide information about both the development and psychometric characteristics of tests. They should cover topics such as procedures for administration, scoring and interpretation, the recommended uses of an instrument, the groups for whom the test is appropriate, and test norms. They should also include a description of the validation procedures

used, and evidence of validity, reliability, and test fairness.

Ensure that administration staff is *properly trained*
Assessment instruments must be administered properly to obtain valid results. Consult the test publisher and administration manual for guidelines on the qualifications and training required for test administrators. These requirements will vary depending on the nature and complexity of the test. Only suitable staff should be selected. Administrators should be given ample time to learn their responsibilities and should practice by administering tests to other staff before administering tests to customers. Some test publishers may run training sessions for test administration and interpretation
.
Administration staff should also be trained to handle special situations with sensitivity. An example would be responding to a request for accommodation based on a disability.

Ensure that *testing conditions are suitable* for all test takers
There are various extraneous influences that may affect the reliability and validity of an assessment procedure. For example, noise in the testing room, poor lighting, inaccurate timing and damaged test equipment may adversely affect test takers. Staff should ensure that the testing environment is suitable and that administration procedures are uniform for all test takers.

Provide *reasonable accommodation* in the assessment process for people with disabilities
To ensure that qualified individuals with disabilities have an equal chance to demonstrate their potential, accommodations in the assessment process may be necessary. Under the ADA, reasonable accommodation may involve ensuring physical accessibility to the test site, modifying test equipment or the testing process, or providing qualified assistance to the test taker. For example, administering a Braille version of a test, allowing extra time to complete the test, or supplying a reader may be appropriate. It is important to become familiar with the types of accommodations that can be made without invalidating test results. If reasonable accommodation involving test administration cannot be made, consider alternative assessment strategies.

Maintain assessment instrument *security*
All materials used in the assessment process, whether paper-and-pencil or computer-based, must be kept secure. Lack of security may result in some test takers having access to test questions beforehand, thus invalidating their scores. To prevent this, test users should, for example, keep testing materials in locked rooms or cabinets and limit access to those materials to staff involved in the assessment process. Security is also the responsibility of test developers. The security of a test may become compromised over time. To protect security, test developers periodically introduce new forms of tests.

Maintain *confidentiality* of assessment results
Assessment results are highly personal. Service providers and program operators administering tests must respect the test takers right to confidentiality. Assessment results should only be shared with those who have a legitimate need to know. This would include staff involved in interpreting assessment results and making program and service delivery decisions. Personal

information should not be released to other organizations or individuals without the informed consent of the test taker.

Ensure that scores are *interpreted properly*
Tests are used to make inferences about people's characteristics, capabilities, and future performance. The inferences should be reasonable, well founded, and not based upon stereotypes. If test scores are not interpreted properly, the conclusions drawn from them are likely to be invalid, thus leading to poor decision-making.

Ensure that there is solid evidence to justify test score interpretations and the decisions made based on those scores. The test manual should provide instructions on how to properly interpret test results.

Additional Information:

The Virginia Community College System is available to provide technical assistance to Local Workforce Boards, One-Stop Operators and Training Providers to ensure effective and efficient operation of WIA programs.

RECISIONS

APPROVED
Chancellor, Virginia Community College System

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