STRATEGIES TO COLLECT DATA ON BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT[1]

Focus on Intake and Orientation

Well-planned orientation and intake allow programs both to pinpoint the services learners need and to accomplish many data-related tasks, including identification of Barriers to Employment. They help learners start programming with a foundation for success, and it's a prime time to collect important information and data about those in the program. Learners become knowledgeable about the program parameters, and staff determine how to serve their academic, career, and social service needs and track their progress and outcomes. Furthermore, obtaining complete learner records at this point reduces the need to expend resources to capture missing information in the future.

Through comprehensive orientation and intake, programs can achieve the following:

- *Help learners understand the purpose* of the intake and registration forms and why data are being collected. Explaining the importance of the information will encourage learners to be forthcoming with details programs need. For example, there is more value to learners if the process helps teachers tailor instruction and allows staff to track their progress. It is also useful to explain to learners that programs are required to collect participant information so that funders know the money is being used for the intended purposes.

- *Reassure learners that their information is confidential* and is used to better serve them; their data will not be personally identifiable when submitted to funders. If learners understand that their privacy will be protected, they will feel more comfortable sharing the information needed to document both their activities and progress.

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[1] Excerpt from NRS Tip Sheet Enhancing Intake to Improve Services: Collecting Data on Barriers to Employment

- *Assess learner needs* through the interview process. In these interviews, programs will discover the education, employment, and support services they need to achieve positive outcomes. These conversations provide opportunities to ask learners questions about Barriers to Employment and challenges to their participation, to collect interest and need surveys, and to conduct testing.

- *Identify short- and long-term goals*. As staff discuss needs with learners, they can establish what can be achieved in the short term and what will require a longer time commitment. For instance, if the learner is a displaced homemaker, staff can assess how programming can best address their recent loss of income.

- *Identify barriers to participation* in education and employment. Through the interview process, staff can uncover Barriers to Employment as well as other barriers that could impede learner participation in the program. For instance, staff may learn about transportation needs, behaviors and habits that might interfere with attendance or engagement, or learning challenges, as well as Barriers to Employment such as housing insecurity, their caretaker status, or a record of arrest or conviction.

- *Identify support systems* learners have in place to help them persist in the program. Staff can learn if learners have family members who will support their commitments to classes and schoolwork; if they belong to community groups that will encourage them; or if their employer is willing to assist with a flexible schedule. It is helpful to learn who will facilitate their success, and where there may be gaps in support that could hinder their progress toward labor market entry.

Strategies to Improve the Intake Process

- *Develop a questioning protocol* that will elicit comprehensive answers from learners. This may require adapting some language and including clarifying terminology and examples when describing the Barriers to Employment to learners. Using simplified and straightforward language allows learners to respond to questions more easily and accurately.

- *Develop observation skills* within the staff so that they can identify issues that learners may not think to raise. For example, a learner may think that only people with limited mobility have disabilities, and not recognize that their late-onset hearing loss is also a recognized disability.

- *Provide the definitions as stated in the law and provide further explanations to staff* to ensure they understand the meaning of the terms. Provide the complete language as it is written in the legislation and provide examples and interpretations, so intake staff have a broader context in which to apply the definitions when meeting with learners.

- *Establish data collection procedures and pilot test them* to make sure they are easy for staff and learners to understand and easy for staff to implement. Test the questions and the forms with small groups of staff and learners to determine whether they are clear before they are used program-wide.

- *Design data collection forms or companion resources* that include definitions, examples, and questions to assist staff in collecting complete information. Also, update forms so that they align with the current legislation. Create reference resources for staff when there is not space within intake forms to include all these details.

- *Train staff* who conduct intake and those who do data entry. Make sure those doing intake know what questions they should ask and how to pose follow-up questions. Have them practice and role-play asking learners questions; provide scripts initially, so that staff can get familiar with the process. Make sure data entry staff can identify the information within an intake form and know how to code it.

- *Develop and implement a quality control system* for both hard copy and electronic data. Monitor a few interviews and examples of data collection and data entry to ensure that they are in alignment.

Descriptions of Barriers to Employment

Below are the classifications that describe the barriers students may face that make it harder to achieve employment outcomes[2].

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[2] Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. (August 2019). Technical assistance guide for performance accountability under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Retrieved from https://nrsweb.org/sites/default/files/NRS-TA-Aug2019-508.pdf

Displaced homemaker: The participant has been providing unpaid services to family members in the home and (a) has been dependent on the income of another family member but is no longer supported by that income; (b) is the dependent spouse of a member of the armed forces on active duty whose family income is significantly reduced because of (i) a deployment or a call or order to active duty pursuant to a provision of law, (ii) a permanent change of station, or (iii) the service-connected death or disability of the member; and (c) is unemployed or underemployed and is experiencing difficulty in obtaining or upgrading employment.

English language learner, low literacy level, cultural barriers: The participant has either (a) limited ability in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language; (b) an inability to compute and solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job in the participant's family or in society; or (c) a perception of him-or herself as possessing attitudes, beliefs, customs, or practices that influence a way of thinking, acting, or working that may serve as a hindrance to employment.

Exhausting Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) within 2 years: The participant is within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under Part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), regardless of whether he or she is receiving these benefits at program entry.

Ex-offender: The participant is a person who either (a) has been subject to any stage of the criminal justice process for committing a status offense or delinquent act, or (b) requires assistance in overcoming barriers to employment resulting from a record of arrest or conviction.

Homeless or runaway youth: The participant lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; is a migratory child who in the preceding 36 months was required to move from one school district to another due to changes in the parent's or parent's spouse's seasonal employment in agriculture, dairy, or fishing work; or is under 18 years of age and absents himself or herself from home or place of legal residence without the permission of his or her family (i.e., runaway youth). However, a participant who may be sleeping in a temporary accommodation while away from home should not, as a result of that fact alone, be recorded as homeless.

Long-term unemployed: The participant has been unemployed for 27 or more consecutive weeks.

Low-income: The participant (a) receives, or in the 6 months prior to application to the program has received, or is a member of a family that is

receiving in the past 6 months assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the TANF program, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, or State or local income-based public assistance; (b) is in a family with total family income that does not exceed the higher of the poverty line or 70% of the lower living standard income level; (c) is a youth who receives, or is eligible to receive, a free or reduced-price lunch; (d) is a foster child on behalf of whom State or local government payments are made; (e) is a participant with a disability whose own income is the poverty line but who is a member of a family whose income does not meet this requirement; (f) is a homeless participant or homeless child or youth or runaway youth; or (g) is a youth living in a high-poverty area.

Migrant and seasonal farmworker: The participant is a low-income individual who for 12 consecutive months out of the 24 months prior to application for the program involved has been primarily employed in agriculture or fish farming labor that is characterized by chronic unemployment or underemployment and faces multiple barriers to economic self-sufficiency.

Individual with disabilities: The participant indicates that he or she has any disability, defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the person's major life activities, as defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Single parent: The participant is a single, separated, divorced, or widowed individual who has primary responsibility for one or more dependent children under age 18 (including single pregnant women).

Youth in foster care or who has aged out of system: The participant is a person who is currently in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system.