

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

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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?

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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

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NOW TO THE ACTUAL ASSESSMENT

Assessment

- **An open-ended process that lasts throughout a participant's enrollment**
 - **Must be updated/documented 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

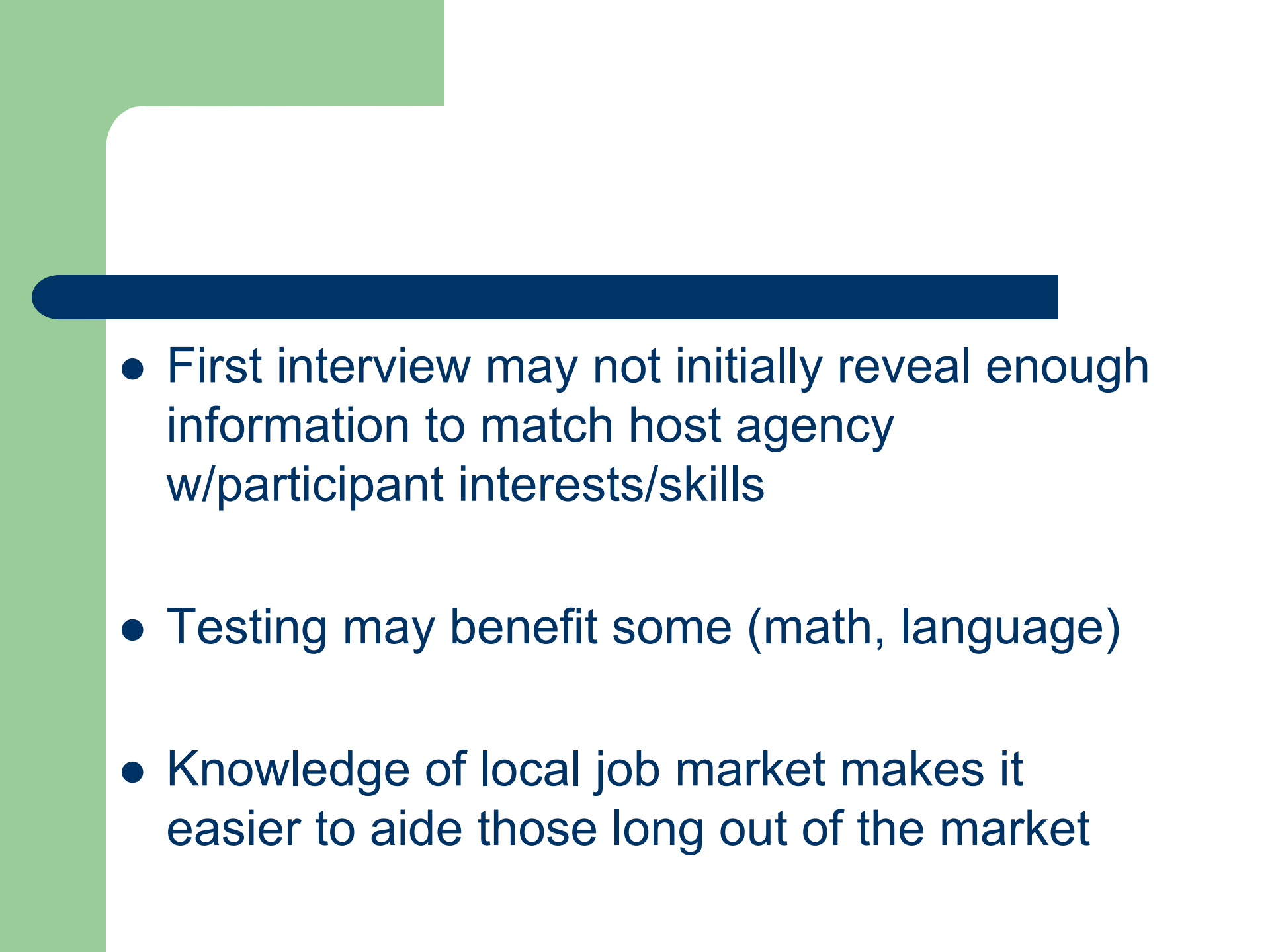
- What job related skills do they possess?
- What transferable skills might they have?
- What “hidden” skills/abilities haven't been considered?
- What is their ability to learn new skills?

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)*

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- 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

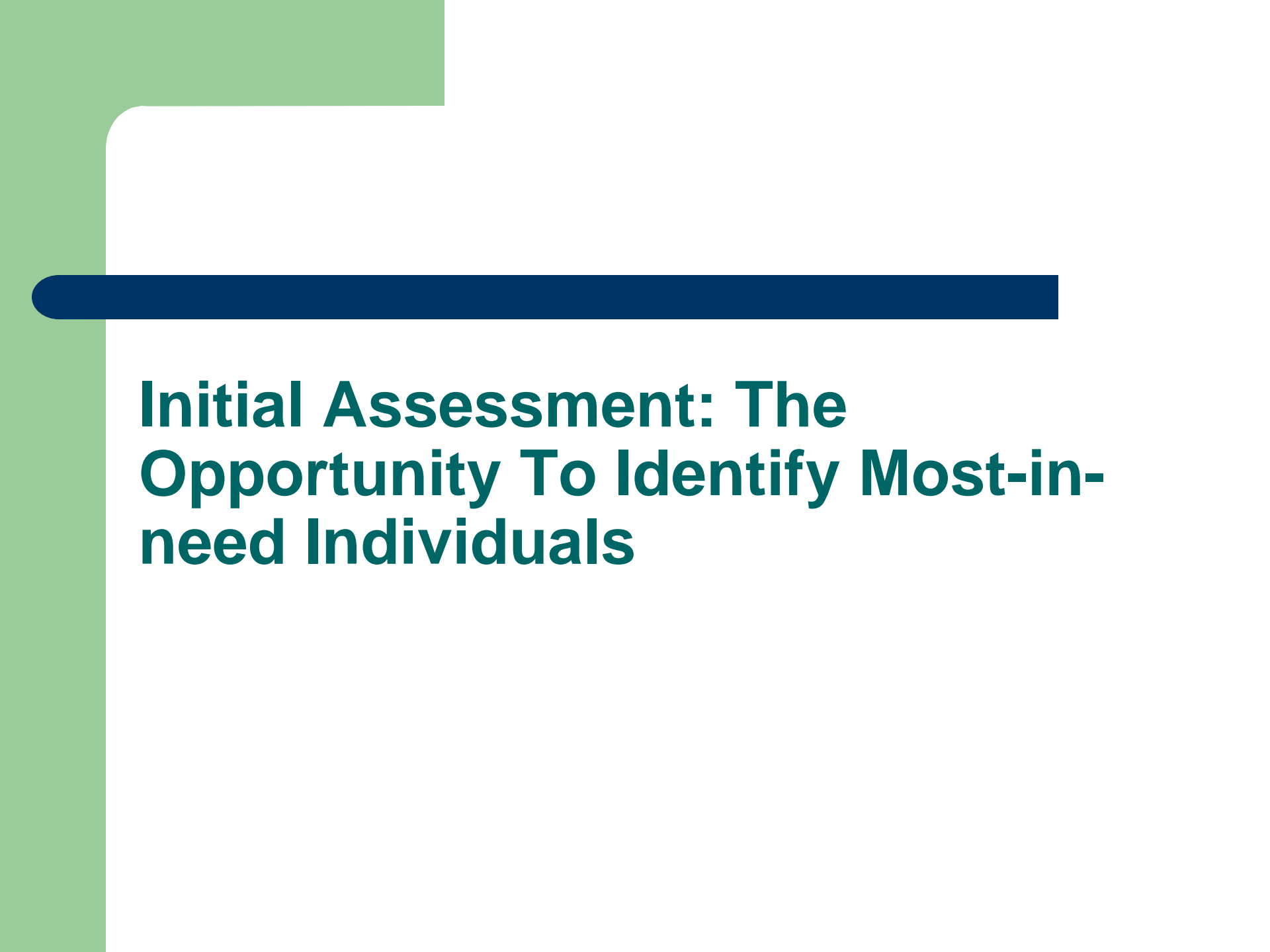
- Assessment allows you to see the total person and how they fit both the training site and future job goal

- 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

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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