

Department of Health and Human Services

OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL

JOBS SKILLS ASSESSMENT



Richard P. Kusserow
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

The purposes of this report are to describe the assessment process and identify useful assessment practices in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS).

Background

The primary goal of the Family Support Act of 1988 (Public Law 100-485) is to decrease dependency on the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) grant by providing education, training and employment opportunities for grantees through the JOBS program. States are required to conduct an "initial assessment" of JOBS participants' work readiness and employability. The results of this assessment are used to construct the "employability plan" which specifies a permanent employment objective with goals and activities leading up to that objective.

Federal regulations provide general guidance and few requirements for assessment activities, leaving the specifics of form and content to States' discretion. The regulations do require the "initial assessment" be based on the person's family circumstances, prior work experiences, job skills, and educational and support services needs. Assessment methods may include testing, interviews, counseling, and the use of self-assessment instruments. If a State tests for literacy, basic skills, aptitudes, and so on, the regulations encourage the State to use "nationally recognized, standardized, or industry-developed" instruments in order to avoid inappropriate placements and misspent funds.

Methodology

States which have "mature" programs were chosen intentionally, "mature" being defined as having a lengthy operating history (e.g., having had the regular Work Incentive [WIN] program or WIN Demonstration through most of the 1980s) and a track record of offering a fairly comprehensive range of services. We selected five States and, with the help of State-level JOBS administrators, selected two sites within each one. We conducted site visits in the States of California (San Bernardino and Yuba counties), Michigan (Bay and Kent counties), Massachusetts (Hampden and Worcester counties), and Nebraska (the Southeast District and the Omaha District). In the State of Florida, telephone interviews replaced site visits at the Ft. Meyers and Orlando Districts. At each site, structured interviews were conducted with the local administrator, two experienced line supervisors, and two experienced case managers or equivalents.

Conclusions — The Current State of JOBS Skills Assessment

Skills assessment is still in an early phase of development. Under very general Federal guidelines, local welfare agencies are experimenting with diverse approaches to assessing the job skills of participants. A variety of assessment tools, events and practices are being used within a process on which uniform agreement as to its exact content and sequences is still lacking. Thus, it would be premature to identify specific tools and practices as the most effective and efficient, or the most valid and reliable.

Some principles and useful practices are emerging. Even at this early date, it is possible to make several observations about the nature of assessment in local agencies and to describe some of its more regularly occurring stages and events. It is not, for example, an event which transpires at a single point in time. Rather, assessment is an ongoing process continuing throughout the participant's tenure in the JOBS program. Its content is not limited to skills testing, but encompasses a variety of formal and informal activities and decisions. Assessment is at the heart of three major functions performed by case managers for the local agency: 1) identifying the participant's employment strengths and weaknesses, 2) tailoring the service strategy to meet the participant's needs, and 3) monitoring progress toward the participant's employment goal.

More experience and research are needed. For this report, we have developed a description of the assessment process from data collected at ten "mature" sites. We have discussed assessment as several sometimes discrete, sometimes overlapping, stages or sets of activities: initial assessment, a preliminary labor market sort, extended assessment, the employability plan, and job readiness. We believe this descriptive report provides useful guidelines for practitioners in the field and will also be useful to those formulating a research or evaluation agenda in the area of JOBS skills assessment.

Departmental Comments

We are appreciative of comments received from the Administration for Children and Families on the working draft of this report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>THE CONTEXT OF JOBS</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>INITIAL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>PRELIMINARY LABOR MARKET SORT</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>EXTENDED ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>EMPLOYABILITY PLAN</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>JOB READINESS</i>	<i>23</i>

APPENDIXES

- Appendix A: Literature Sources and Interviews*
- Appendix B: Formal and Informal Tools and Practices*
- Appendix C: Elements of Effective Assessment*
- Appendix D: Employability Plan as a Documentation Device*
- Appendix E: Checklist for Determining Job Readiness*

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purposes of this report are to describe the assessment process and identify useful practices in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS).

Background

▶ *The Federal Context for the JOBS Program*

The primary goal of the Family Support Act is to increase family self-sufficiency and to decrease dependency on the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) grant by providing AFDC recipients the opportunities to upgrade their work skills or learn new skills as participants in the JOBS program.

Title II of the Family Support Act (Public Law 100-485) establishes the JOBS program under title IV-F of the Social Security Act.¹ JOBS is the operating welfare-to-work program in the Department of Health and Human Services, replacing and expanding current authority for education, training, and work programs in title IV-A (AFDC) and title IV-C (Work Incentive [WIN] program and WIN Demonstration) of the Social Security Act.

States were required to implement the program by October 1, 1990. By October 1, 1992, the program must be available on a statewide basis where feasible, accounting for the number of eligible participants, the condition of the local economy, and other relevant factors. The JOBS program in every State must include a variety of educational activities, job skills training, work experiences, job readiness activities, job development and job placement activities, as well as support services (e.g., transportation and child care). The State's IV-A agency (welfare agency) has the responsibility for the administration, or the supervision of the administration, of the JOBS program and may contract out various program activities.

In regard to assessment activities, States are required to conduct an "initial assessment" of JOBS participants' work readiness and employability. Federal regulations provide general guidance and few requirements for the "initial assessment," allowing States to determine specifics of form and content. The regulations do require the initial assessment to account for the participant's family circumstances, prior work experiences, current job skills, and

¹ Federal Register, October 13, 1989, Part II, DHHS/FSA, 45 CFR Part 205 *et seq.* .

educational and support services needs. Assessment methods may include testing, interviews, counseling, and the use of self-assessment instruments. If a State tests for literacy, basic skills, aptitudes, etc., the regulations encourage the State to use "nationally recognized, standardized, or industry-developed" instruments before placing JOBS participants in order to avoid inappropriate placements and misspent funds. No time period for completing the assessment is specified except that it must be done "within a reasonable time frame prior to participation [in the JOBS program]."²

The regulations also require the creation of an "employability plan" based on the data collected from initial assessment activities. The employability plan is the **action plan** for the participant. It must state a permanent employment objective or outcome, describe the activities the participant will complete (e.g., complete high school, go through nurse aide training), and specify any support services to be provided. It must also account for the participant's preferences and needs to the extent allowed by available resources and local job opportunities. The regulations encourage, but do not require, States to include a schedule of activities necessary to achieve employment by a specified date.

Scope

For this report, we focus on overall assessment practices inside the local agency and do not review specific assessment activities and tools in the education, job training, and the individual or group job search component.

Methodology

► *Learning About Assessment*

Given the tremendous flexibility in the Federal regulations, we anticipated that States and localities would be fairly diverse in conceptualizing, setting up and managing the assessment of participants' job skills. In order for us to fill in the conceptual gap between the broad policy statements in the regulations and the actual implementation of assessment in local agencies, we performed four tasks.

First, we reviewed current literature on welfare-to-work programs, federally supported training programs, assessment-related activities in these programs, and literature on skills testing.³ Relative to the JOBS program, we began to understand assessment as:

² Federal Register, *ibid.*, p. 42178.

³ See APPENDIX A for a list of sources.

- an ongoing process rather than intermittent event;
- a complex process, comprised of formal and informal aspects⁴, involving all levels of agency staff;
- the core activities in three major functions performed by JOBS case managers: 1) identifying the participant's employment strengths and weaknesses, 2) tailoring the service strategy to meet the participant's needs, and 3) monitoring progress toward the employment goal;
- influenced by factors internal and external to JOBS. Assessment is a subsystem within other systems — JOBS program, local IV-A agency, local community, the State, and the Federal government.

From this task a working definition of assessment developed. We view assessment as much more than "skills testing" (generally considered to be a formal event in which one or more standardized or teacher-constructed tests are administered), and more than an initial interview with a case manager who collects baseline information on the participant. Both of these events are included in a broader concept of assessment: *the formal and informal evaluative processes, decisions and events occurring within the agency from the participant's entrance into the JOBS program to her/his exit from the program.*

Second, we talked with some program and assessment experts inside and outside the Federal government to verify our initial impressions about assessment and to discuss their ideas, viewpoints and experiences.⁵ We asked these experts to identify what they consider as essential elements of effective or useful assessment, particularly in the context of welfare-to-work programs.

Third, from the literature review and the discussions with experts we developed an inventory of what the experts regard as essential elements of effective assessment.⁶ Finally, we used this inventory to help us identify useful assessment practices.

▸ *Sample Selection and Data Collection*

Since the focus of this report is describing assessment and identifying useful assessment practices, we decided to choose States having "mature" welfare-to-work programs. "Mature" is defined as having a lengthy operating history (e.g., having had WIN Demonstration or regular WIN throughout most of the 1980s) and a track record of offering fairly comprehensive services. We reasoned that focusing on States which had

⁴ See APPENDIX B for an explanation of formal and informal assessment tools and practices vis-a-vis the JOBS program.

⁵ For a list of interviewees, see APPENDIX A.

⁶ See APPENDIX C for a listing of the elements of effective assessment.

already laid the groundwork for the JOBS program would enable us to immediately benefit from their experiences in integrating assessment into the program.

In a previous Office of Inspector General study on JOBS implementation practices, the "mature" criterion was used to select a purposive sample of eight States, diverse in their program structures, demographic factors, economic conditions and geographical location.⁷ We selected five States from this eight-State sample.

In each selected State, we asked the JOBS administrator to select two local welfare agencies (each in a different county) which had a lengthy operating history and excelled in most or all JOBS program activities, especially assessment. We conducted site visits in the States of California (San Bernardino and Yuba counties), Michigan (Bay and Kent counties), Massachusetts (Hampden and Worcester counties), and Nebraska (the Southeast District and the Omaha District). In the State of Florida, telephone contact replaced site visits at the Ft. Meyers and Orlando district offices.

At each site, we conducted structured interviews with the local administrator, two experienced line supervisors, and two experienced case managers or equivalents. Data collection activities occurred in September and October of 1990.

We also reviewed copies of available State and site-specific policies, technical assistance and procedures guides regarding assessment; formal and informal interagency agreements governing the provision of assessment services; current JOBS program component and participant flow charts; any studies or formal evaluations of the assessment system; and participation/outcome data.

⁷ "Working Toward JOBS," OEI-12-90-00960, June 1990.

THE CONTEXT OF JOBS

The nature and extent of assessment activities inside the agency are influenced by a variety of factors internal and external to the agency. The interaction within and between internal and external factors creates a complex, dynamic environment for the JOBS program and the assessment process.

The External Environment

Federal laws, regulations and guidelines set the stage for the JOBS program and assessment activities. Another set of factors — the health of State, regional and local economies, and the politics surrounding welfare programs and their funding — constitutes the infrastructure of the external environment. Availability, coordination and delivery of education, employment and job training services at the State and local levels are other factors influencing the nature and extent of the JOBS program and assessment activities.

▶ *Local and Regional Economic Conditions Form the Infrastructure*

As States and local agencies continue implementing the JOBS program and assessment activities, some external factors are more likely to affect decision-making than other factors. Because of the very nature of the program, local and regional economic conditions greatly influence the degree of its success. The strategies employed to manage these sets of conditions vary from one local agency to another. For example, given the economic conditions of seasonal work and limited diversity in community or regional industries, a local agency might choose the strategy of implementing a more "streamlined" JOBS program and assessment process (i.e., very limited use of formal assessment activities and staff time). In a few Florida locales, the majority of JOBS participants are directed into jobs supporting the seasonal tourism industry, e.g., food service, maintenance and repair, domestic service, clerical and sales jobs.

Another example of economic conditions influencing decisions about the JOBS program and the extent of assessment activities is the case of Yuba County, California. The county has among the highest unemployment ($\approx 14\%$) and poverty ($\approx 16\%$) rates in the State. Although seasonal agricultural work is available, there are also available positions from year-round employers in retail sales, service industries and government. Rather than focus on seasonal jobs, the administrator has chosen the strategy of increasing the competitiveness of JOBS participants for the scarce, above-minimum-wage jobs in the area. For this welfare agency, the strategy has had the effect of emphasizing the importance of the assessment process in detecting the skill proficiencies and deficiencies of participants, identifying and dealing with barriers to employment, and tracking progress as participants prepare for employment. The agency's commitment to this particular strategy

of dealing with rather adverse economic conditions is reflected in the allocation of two staff positions devoted to formal assessment of JOBS participants.

▶ *Federal and State Commitment and Financial Support Are Crucial*

Along with economic circumstances, the degree of Federal and State commitment and financial support for welfare-to-work programs also strongly affects the JOBS program and skills assessment. Theoretically, the JOBS program has immense potential for helping individuals overcome barriers generated by poverty and for giving communities incentives to offer opportunities. Providing job training and educational opportunities to welfare recipients now in order to recoup the investment later in the form of more productive, taxpaying citizens makes sense to nearly everyone. But the investment in a new program with such an ambitious goal has to be fairly sizable in the first few years in order to receive significant returns in the future.⁸ The Federal government and most State and local governments are currently in a cycle of fiscal belt-tightening which is likely to last for years.⁹ Thus, if JOBS is to realize its potential, efficient use of limited resources and a long-term commitment to the program at all levels of government are necessary.

At the State level, California's GAIN and Massachusetts' ET Choices, prototypes for JOBS, are examples of two "mature" welfare-to-work programs which have received a high degree of commitment and financial support from their State legislatures years before JOBS was created. In contrast, some States' legislatures have treated welfare-to-work programs with neglect and minimal funding. The priorities of State-level decision makers often are mirrored at the local level in the willingness of local businesses, and education and training facilities to accommodate welfare recipients as new employees, students and trainees.

The Internal Environment

The quality and extent of assessment activities are also affected by a variety of factors inside the local agency. These include budget constraints, the degree of staff commitment to implement JOBS and effective assessment, having case management and specialized JOBS units, and access to an information storage, retrieval and processing system.

▶ *Agency Commitment to JOBS Is Important*

Among all the agency staffs we interviewed, we found a commendably high degree of

⁸ Connors, Kathleen A., "The Gathering Storm: Welfare in a Depressed Economy," Public Welfare, Winter 1991; Sherwood, Kay E. and David A. Long, "JOBS Implementation in an Uncertain Environment," Public Welfare, Winter 1991.

⁹ Hass, Lawrence J., "Spreading the Pain," National Journal, June 22, 1991.

commitment to JOBS and to the use of every community resource in meeting the goals and challenges of the program. The administrators, supervisors and case managers who were also supervisors or caseworkers during the now defunct WIN program (most of our interviewees) viewed the JOBS program as a substantive change for the better. All of them had witnessed positive changes in participants' lives as a result of the program which, in turn, strengthened their commitment. However, they were concerned that the JOBS program and their work with recipients were being thwarted by shrinking budgets for support services (e.g., child care and transportation) and other contracted services, and by heavy caseloads (the average is ≈100 JOBS clients per case manager), resulting in less time to spend with each participant.

▶ *Case Management and Specialized JOBS Units Strengthen Program Performance*

Staff concerns about tight budgets and heavy caseloads seemed to be mitigated somewhat by two staff arrangements working in tandem: a specialized JOBS unit and case management. Not all the agencies we visited had organized a special JOBS unit, and not all had case management. In agencies which had both, the arrangement seemed to promote consistency in JOBS policy and procedures, case managers who were efficient information and community services specialists, and consistency and continuity of participants' contacts with the agency.

▶ *A Data Processing System Saves Time and Effort for All Agency Staff*

Adequate data collection and information synthesis appeared to be vital for identifying, documenting and managing participants' employment barriers and strengths. We noted that most local agencies in our sample had installed data processing systems to help case managers and supervisors organize the bulk of the information about participants. Agencies with more basic systems could produce "canned" reports (e.g., quarterly reports which have a fixed format — the same variables and the same data manipulations for every report), while agencies with more sophisticated (and more expensive) systems could produce reports tailored to fit the particular needs of different staff members.

A user-friendly, readily available data processing system seemed to be a valuable tool for saving case managers, supervisors and administrators significant time and effort in compiling and aggregating data about participants. It also greatly assisted in monitoring participants' progress through JOBS components and activities, cutting down on the "paper shuffle."

INITIAL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Typically, within the week after the JOBS orientation session, the participant met with the case manager to begin the **initial assessment**. Using a mixture of formal and informal tools and practices, the case manager collected and examined a body of data about the participant in order to judge the extent of "job readiness." This included assessing whether the participant had adequate basic education skills (especially language and math skills) to satisfy potential employers' requirements; the extent to which the participant's vocational interests and aptitudes, employment history, work experiences and current skills matched labor market demand; whether likely jobs would adequately support the participant's family; whether the participant had appropriate work attitudes and behavior; and the type and extent of support services needed.

Case Managers Perform Critical Tasks

We found the case manager's principal tasks during the initial assessment were 1) to identify and document barriers to employability, as well as the individual's particular strengths, 2) to decide which barriers can be managed within the strictures of agency resources and the individual's life circumstances, and 3) to create a workable strategy of agency service delivery and participation by the individual. Within the operational framework of these principal tasks, the case managers performed several ongoing roles as needed, such as:

CASE MANAGER'S ROLES VIS-A-VIS THE PARTICIPANT DURING THE INITIAL ASSESSMENT

- ▶ Establishing a "partnership" with the participant, and ensuring the individual knows the rules of the partnership, i.e., the rights and the responsibilities of participation in the program;
- ▶ Giving the participant as much control as possible over decisions affecting her/his life;
- ▶ Building the participant's self-confidence and urging her/him to make the most of the opportunities offered by the program;
- ▶ Making the participant aware of the skills and employability strengths she/he already has;
- ▶ Discussing employment possibilities with the participant while considering the participant's expressed vocational interests and labor market demands;
- ▶ Encouraging the participant to set employment goals which are realistic, i.e., appropriate to the participant's abilities and family financial responsibilities;
- ▶ Requesting the participant to investigate specific vocational choices before deciding on education and/or work training goals and activities in the participant's employability plan;
- ▶ Working with the participant to determine support services;
- ▶ Creating the employability plan with the participant in the spirit of the JOBS partnership.

In performing these tasks, the case manager built crucial rapport with participants, helping to anchor their commitment to the program and motivating them to complete it.

Identifying Barriers to Employment Is Central to the Initial Assessment

The case manager's first major task in the assessment process was identifying and documenting barriers to employability. The JOBS program targets AFDC grantees, aged 16 to 59, who historically have had difficulty gaining employment. Included are those with a history of welfare receipt, parents under the age of 24 without a high school diploma or without current work experience, and adult family members whose youngest dependent is within two years of being ineligible for AFDC. These recipients generally experience multiple barriers to employment involving various combinations of individual and community-level problems as summarized below.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYABILITY

- ▶ Lack of education and communication skills (including language barriers) to meet employers' requirements;
- ▶ Lack of training, current or transferable job skills, work experience, or work maturity skills to meet employers' requirements;
- ▶ Self-esteem problems, lack of self-confidence in the ability to learn and adapt to new situations;
- ▶ Lack of access to safe and affordable public transportation in the community;
- ▶ Lack of a permanent address and/or lack of adequate, safe and affordable community housing;
- ▶ Lack of adequate, safe and affordable child care in the community;
- ▶ Acute and chronic physical and mental health problems due to inadequate nutrition, drug addiction, stress, lack of access to adequate health care in the community, etc.;
- ▶ Problems with the criminal justice system and having a criminal record;
- ▶ Discrimination by employers, health care facilities, landlords and others in the community on the basis of being poor, old, female, black or Hispanic, disabled, having a criminal record;
- ▶ Family circumstances such as the presence of violence and abuse in the home, chaotic or crisis-oriented family life, lack of parenting skills and knowledge, lack of child support from absent parents, caring for special-needs children, or sick or disabled adults in the home.

Because some barriers are so deeply-rooted in the community, family or individual, they have more severe, enduring consequences for the long-term employability of the poor. Barriers such as years of substandard public education, the presence of violence and abuse in the home, chronic health problems, and caring for an incapacitated child or adult in the home decrease a person's chances for maintaining employment. For these tenacious barriers, the JOBS program is not a panacea, although it can ameliorate the effects of some barriers in the lives of individuals through its cumulative impact. For the less difficult barriers, JOBS does offer assistance and opportunities to diminish their effects.

Tailoring Service Strategies for Special Target Groups Has Intended and Unintended Benefits

The case manager's second and third tasks, determining affordable and workable service strategies, can be difficult for participants with multiple barriers. In some instances, these tasks have been made less arduous by recognizing that distinct groups of AFDC grantees each have their own cluster of barriers requiring a fairly predictable array of services. Young parents are an apt illustration. Because of their inexperience in the world of work, parenting and adult relationships, the strategy for young parents (under the age of 24) typically involves a combination of the following services.

SERVICE STRATEGY FOR YOUNG PARENTS

- ▶ Assistance in obtaining child support from absent parents;
- ▶ Treatment for a drug or alcohol addiction, if needed;
- ▶ Finishing the high school degree;
- ▶ Vocational interests and aptitude testing, and career counseling;
- ▶ Obtaining child care and transportation assistance;
- ▶ Vocational education and/or job training;
- ▶ Receiving instruction in social skills and instrumental tasks, e.g., how to parent, household management and budgeting, increasing self-esteem and self-confidence, realistic planning and goal setting, problem solving, managing stress, building and maintaining healthy relationships with adults, work maturity skills and other pre-employment preparation.

JOBS programs in States as diverse as Nebraska and Massachusetts have made it one of their priorities to address the specific cluster of barriers faced by AFDC recipients who are young parents. They have contracted to develop and implement special programs such as Operation Bridge in the Omaha district (NE), the Young Parent Program in the Southeast district (NE), and the Pregnant and Parenting Youth Program in Hampden County (MA). These programs usually furnished individual and group instruction and counseling for several weeks on a variety of problems and issues faced by young parents and workers. Through case notes, formal reports, telephone contact and in-person meetings, contractors provided input to case managers about identified barriers, progress made by each participant, and any recommendations for further action or specific services.

Beyond the intended, formal purposes of specialized service programs for target groups, some unintended benefits also may occur as a result of these programs. For example, some Nebraska staff members noted that a positive by-product for participants who attended meetings for young parents was their further empowerment as a result of creating their own information networks, informal support groups, and friendships. These informal groups tended to acquire a life of their own, enduring beyond the confines of the program.

Informal groups/networks can provide valuable support for parents who are finishing the high school degree, for those taking vocational education courses, and for those in a job training regimen or looking for work. Very often, these groups can help members develop a feeling of community or belonging with persons similarly circumstanced and struggling for a better life. They also may strengthen certain constructive ideas and behavior, and can help members overcome a sense of alienation from the mainstream. (See text box.)

Informal support groups can reinforce JOBS messages by convincing members to adopt certain values and expectations, such as:	
<u>VALUES</u>	<u>EXPECTATIONS FOR BEHAVIOR</u>
Education	▶ <i>get the GED at least</i>
Work	▶ <i>get training + learn as many skills as time permits + secure the best available job + do the best you can and always strive for improvement</i>
Self-sufficiency	▶ <i>don't depend on government programs for financial support - be personally responsible for supporting your family</i>

Although the Initial Assessment Is Usually an In-House Activity, Some Agencies Utilize Contractors

Although case managers in most agencies performed the initial assessment in-house, some agencies contracted with a business or an outside agency for these services. For example, the local agency in Kent County, Michigan, contracted with the Career Development Center to provide initial assessment activities. In the initial assessment, a battery of tests was administered to all participants, such as the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education), specially normed for adults, used by the Center to measure reading and math skills; the GATB (General Aptitude Test Battery) for general learning ability and dexterity; the Hall Occupational Orientation Inventory for value priorities; USES Interest Inventory for work interests; and explorations of the individual's current skills, employment barriers, personal strengths, and career goals. Results were reported to the agency and to a JTPA (Job Training Partnership Act) vocational counselor who then worked with the JOBS participant to develop an employability plan.

Most Agencies Limit or Omit Formal Testing During the Initial Assessment

In contrast to Kent County, Michigan, other local agencies either elected not to conduct formal testing in the initial assessment, or they did so to a lesser extent by choice or by requirement. The State of California, for example, required counties to administer a reading test and a math test from the criterion-referenced CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System). In Yuba and San Bernardino counties, CASAS tests were administered and scored during the JOBS orientation session. Test results added

"objective" measurements to the body of information collected about the participant, and were subsequently used as bench marks to make decisions and set short-term goals.

If the score for each test was above 215 and the participant had a high school diploma or had worked in the last two years, the California case manager usually directed the participant to the job search component. If scores were at or below 215, the case manager generally recommended remediation, pursuing the General Education Degree (GED) or taking an ESL course (English as a second language) before sending participants to the job search component. Participants who were jobless after completing the activities in the job search component (the **preliminary labor market sort**) were given an **extended assessment**, and a more or less permanent plan of employability was then created.

Formal Testing During the Initial Assessment Has Advantages and Disadvantages

The chief advantage of formal testing in the initial assessment stage is the inclusion of "objective" standards in the evaluation of the participant's literacy, learning ability, work interests and skills. By using the test results along with other available information, the case manager may generate more informed and timely decisions about the participant. Another advantage is that some formal testing at this point may eliminate the need for an extended assessment later. If we operate on the principle that decisions made about the participant in the initial assessment should be based on more information rather than less, then it is useful to do at least some formal testing at this point.

On the other hand, formal testing in the initial assessment can be costly in several ways. Tests usually must be purchased. They must be administered under certain conditions, e.g., a moderately spacious, fairly quiet, well-lighted and ventilated area, in order to control for extraneous factors. Many norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests must be administered, scored and/or interpreted by specially trained people. In addition, several caveats must be remembered in using test results, e.g., avoiding the temptation to make decisions about a participant based almost solely on test results, and realizing that tests are not always accurate and reliable indicators of future performance.¹⁰ As a rule then, local agencies relegated most or all of the formal testing to the extended assessment stage in which some participants were tested on an "as needed" basis by outside providers qualified to administer and interpret test results.

¹⁰ Auspon, Patricia and Kay Sherwood, Assessing JOBS Participants: Issues and Tradeoffs, New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1992x.

The Conclusion of Initial Assessment Activities

At the end of the initial assessment stage, either a temporary or permanent employability plan was created to guide the diverse paths of JOBS participants. Some participants went on to an **extended assessment**. Others began **education component activities** by pursuing education remediation, an ESL course, the GED certificate, an Associate's degree or a series of vocational education courses. Some participants entered the **job training component**. Certain participants were directed into a **specialized service program** to address specific employment barriers. Participants judged as "job ready" were sent to the **job search component** (a "labor market sort").

Other agencies used an assessment-like practice, which we call the **preliminary labor market sort**, wherein all or most participants were required to go through an individual or group job search immediately upon entering the JOBS program, sometimes without an initial meeting with a case manager. Only participants remaining jobless after completing these activities were allowed to take part in other JOBS components. The advantages and disadvantages of this particular labor market sort are discussed next.

THE PRELIMINARY LABOR MARKET SORT

We found that the preliminary labor market sort (our term) to be a mandatory, front-end job search which sifts those who are "job ready" from those who are not. In agencies employing this practice, all or most JOBS participants are given job-search training and are required to search for employment as either their first formal activity after an initial meeting with a case manager, or their second formal activity after completing a remedial course in adult basic education, an ESL course or the GED. Various named Job Club, Job Workshop, Group (or Individual) Job Search, and so on, it functions as an assessment practice by testing participants' current abilities and skills against labor market demand very soon after their entrance into the JOBS program.

The Preliminary Sort Is an Assessment Practice Having Advantages and Disadvantages for the Agency and Participants

Because of its mandatory nature and early placement in JOBS, some controversy surrounds this filtering technique. Similar to its operation in the former welfare-to-work program (WIN), the preliminary sort works to the advantage of the local agency and "job ready" participants having work skills competitive enough to earn wages above the minimum. However, it seems to further disadvantage those who are not "job ready" and those with less competitive work skills — the most needy of all JOBS participants. The advantages and disadvantages are as follows.

ADVANTAGES OF THE PRELIMINARY LABOR MARKET SORT

- ▶ To the benefit of the local agency, it has the potential of putting a significant proportion of participants to work immediately. To the extent that this occurs, it can initially (1) decrease the program costs of investing in education and training for those JOBS participants who find jobs, (2) decrease or eliminate AFDC payments for those same participants, and (3) increase the "success rate" of the JOBS Program.
- ▶ For participants who get jobs, it has the potential of increasing self-esteem, reinforcing the positive aspects of being self-sufficient, thus mitigating the "welfare stigma."
- ▶ It educates all or most JOBS participants early in the program in techniques for finding a job and getting hired, and in the attitudes and behaviors valued by employers.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE PRELIMINARY LABOR MARKET SORT

- ▶ The initial success of the preliminary sort in achieving job placements may be offset by the extent to which the "revolving-door" syndrome (or recidivism) exists. Those who are not adequately prepared to compete in the marketplace (e.g., participants who obtain minimum-wage service jobs as a result of the sort) may return to the JOBS program at a later date.

One of the effects of this early labor market sort is to even out or reduce the number of JOBS participants being served at any one time. The caveat for the agency, however, is that expenditures may be reduced over the short term, but not necessarily over the long term.

- ▶ Going through this early job search may mean that receiving needed services, e.g. further education and vocational training, is delayed for weeks or months.
- ▶ For those who fail the preliminary sort, the experience can have negative psychological consequences. It may reinforce a sense of failure about getting and keeping a job, and a sense of resignation about being dependent on welfare — "It doesn't matter how hard I try, I don't get anywhere." In turn, this sense of failure can decrease motivation to participate in the program.

An alternative for avoiding the disadvantages of this practice for participants who are not job ready is to target this device to volunteers and those exhibiting a high degree of job readiness. The case manager and/or employment expert would play a critical role in determining the job readiness of new participants by carefully considering the body of information collected during the initial assessment. For the agency, advantages of preselection might translate into higher placement rates for those participants who go through the preliminary sort.

Participants who were jobless after the conclusion of these early job search activities either completed initial assessment activities with their case manager and/or were given an **extended assessment**, after which a more or less permanent employability plan was created.

EXTENDED ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Typical Extended Assessment Activities

Formal testing tools, i.e., mostly norm-referenced (or standardized) and some criterion-referenced tests, were used extensively by assessment providers, but not to the exclusion of informal assessment tools and practices. Based upon the formal and informal assessment results, providers recommended a range of jobs or, more often, specified two or more jobs on which the participant should concentrate her/his future job search. Providers usually furnished case managers with a written summary of each participant's extended assessment activities and experiences within 10-15 working days after clients were assigned to extended assessment.

A Subset of Participants — Usually Those With Serious Employability Problems— Receives Extended Assessment Services

Participants engaged in extended assessment due to one of two conditions. One condition was a high degree of uncertainty regarding the participant's achievement levels, aptitudes, occupational interest areas, and/or having an irregular, part-time or nonexistent work history. The other condition was that the participant had failed to satisfactorily accomplish activities in one or more JOBS components. Failure to secure employment during the preliminary labor market sort or subsequent labor market sorts, and the failure to perform acceptably in an education or a training component activity, often triggered the agency to send the participant for additional assessment or a total reassessment. Hence, only a subset of participants received further testing, a subset which predictably experienced severe employment barriers. As one supervisor in Massachusetts stated, providers of extended assessment services must expect and be equipped to deal with these problems because "there is no reservoir of 'problem-less' participants."

Most Agencies Contract for Extended Assessment Services

Among agencies using extended assessment as part of their JOBS programs, most preferred to rely on the competence and experience of outside providers to deliver these services rather than conduct them in-house. Agencies hired providers of extended assessment services who met their criteria for effective service delivery, usually some variation of the three "E"s: expertise, experience and economy. Thus, agencies often utilized the assessment services offered by JTPA and local community colleges because of their long experience with vocational education and job training programs, their expertise in assessing job skills, and their fairly reasonable costs for providing these services.

Career Research by Participants Builds Skills and Yields Other Benefits

As one of the participant's final activities in the extended assessment, we found providers usually requested each client to research several careers pinpointed by assessment results. Beyond the obvious goal of educating the participant about these particular careers, the process of researching career information seemed to yield other benefits for the participant. We inferred the participant gained (or sharpened) some very valuable skills such as learning to use a library and its resources, learning to access computerized career information in "canned" databases (e.g., information similar to that contained in the Department of Labor's Dictionary of Occupational Titles has been packaged in computer programs for easy access to users), and learning to summarize and synthesize information. This exercise also seemed to give the participant a feeling of more control over some choices and decisions. While it required somewhat more time than other activities, the skills acquired and the reinforcement of the value of self-sufficiency made it time well-spent.

Providers Are Expected to "Match" the Case Manager in Knowledge and Skills

When asked to talk about the keys and problems to successful coordination with providers of extended assessment services as well as lessons they have learned, agency staffs offered what amounted to a list of qualifications their providers either do have or should have in order to work effectively with agency personnel and JOBS participants. We found that assessment providers did much more than test and interpret results. More often than not, many of the roles and tasks of the provider staff matched those of agency case managers. The two greatest differences were that the provider staff works with participants on a more time-limited basis, and their main focus was assessment.

Below is a list of qualifications which agency staffs said their assessment providers currently demonstrate or should demonstrate. To illustrate the convergence of knowledge, tasks and skills between assessment providers and agency case managers, providers' qualifications which "match" case managers' roles and tasks are identified by asterisks (*).

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

The assessment provider staff must have:

- professional credentials, knowledge and experience in setting up assessment processes, using assessment tools, and evaluating test results;
- * the knowledge and flexibility to operate an assessment process in which participants are assured they cannot fail — the "sense of failure is the greatest barrier" for participants to overcome;
- a testing protocol in which a variety of tests are administered (e.g., aptitudes, achievement, career/vocational interests), assessment is geared to the specifics of the local labor market, and overtesting and using tests known to be biased (e.g., GATB) are avoided.

CLIENT-ORIENTED SKILLS

The assessment provider staff must have:

- * extensive knowledge about the poor and their life circumstances;
- * realistic expectations of what participants can accomplish during their brief tenure in the program;
- * empathy and sensitivity to participants' needs and problems;
- * the skills to effectively communicate and work with participants;
- * the ability to personalize assessment and spend as much time with each participant as feasible;
- * the skills to build participants' self-esteem;
- * the flexibility to experiment with new ideas and ways of doing things, making changes as necessary to better accommodate participants' needs.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE PROGRAM AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The assessment provider staff must have:

- * knowledge about the JOBS program's philosophy, policy and procedures, and agency assessment;
- * knowledge about the roles, responsibilities and expectations of both the assessment expert and the agency case manager;
- * knowledge about, and productive contacts with, community resources helpful to participants, the local labor market and employment prospects.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR WORKING WITH AGENCY STAFF

The assessment provider staff must have:

- regular contact with agency staff, giving timely progress reports on participants;
- the skills to work with the case manager to iron out participant-related problems and assessment-related issues;
- the ability to write timely, clear, concise, and comprehensive reports for agency staff which summarize participants' assessment experiences and recommendations.

Because agency case managers and assessment experts share many roles and tasks, it makes sense for agencies and providers to conduct joint training for their staffs. The topics of joint training sessions could include: provider and agency policies, procedures, and assessment processes; responsibilities of case managers and provider staff; philosophical orientation to JOBS and the assessment process; understanding the needs of various participant subgroups; and, maintaining realistic expectations of participants and crafting practical strategies for handling barriers.

Extended Assessment Can Be Done In-House

The agency in Yuba County, California, offered an alternative to the usual practice of hiring an outside provider of extended assessment. In March of 1989, the agency streamlined the externally-located extended assessment process, originally designed and implemented by Yuba College, and instituted the current in-house process with two full-time assessment counselors. Both counselors had training and experience in assessment prior to being hired at the agency, one at the local community college and the other at the local JTPA office. Like their external counterparts, the assessment counselors were expected to have the same knowledge bases and skills as noted above, and to perform several major tasks for the agency: 1) to administer several formal tests¹¹ to all who failed the preliminary labor market sort, 2) to interpret test results, 3) to guide participants in selecting three career choices based on interest, test results and labor market demand, 4) to prepare an assessment profile of each client, and 5) to work with each participant and respective case manager in recommending courses of action.

Another factor playing an important part in the success of Yuba County's in-house extended assessment was the leadership of the agency administrator. The administrator maintained an open-door policy, encouraging staff to talk about what they think is working and what is not. The administrator viewed change as a fact of life, something to be welcomed when it improves the lives of participants and makes the work of the staff more efficient and rewarding. In fact, the agency had a reputation beyond the county lines for "practicing innovation" and regularly was asked for advice by other counties.¹²

¹¹ Administered tests in Yuba County's in-house extended assessment process are:

- **Career Ability Placement Survey (CAPS)** — measures ability in eight areas (mechanical reasoning, spatial relations, verbal reasoning, numerical ability, language usage, word knowledge, perceptual speed and accuracy, manual speed and dexterity);
- **Career Occupational Preference Survey (COPS)** — measures degree of interest in 14 clusters of occupations;
- **APTICOM** has three test batteries — Interest Battery measures the degree of interest in performing various tasks; Aptitude Battery measures aptitudes in ten areas of functioning (e.g., general learning ability, verbal aptitude, numerical aptitude, etc.); Education Skills Battery measures competency in reading and mathematics;
- **Myers-Briggs** is a personality type indicator and measures tendencies in eight modes of perception and judgment. Approximately half of the participants are administered this test. (Only one of the assessment counselors uses the Myers-Briggs.)

¹² The State has supported innovation here and has summoned the agency to do several special projects and pilot programs. One of these is the creation of an automated information system, GAIN Employment Management System (GEMS). A case manager worked with Digital Equipment Corporation and Price-Waterhouse to set up the system which came on-line in September of 1988. Twenty of California's fifty-four counties are now in the GEMS consortium.

► *Advantages of In-House Extended Assessment*

For Yuba County, the advantages of placing the extended assessment process inside the agency were unmatched by external assessment providers:

- the agency had direct control over the process — changes or modifications in the form or content of the extended assessment could be effected immediately;
- tremendous *esprit de corps* and cooperation existed between case managers and counselors;
- a significant amount of personal attention could be given to each participant during assessment and afterwards;
- counselors were available to case managers and participants without delay for consultations and problem solving;
- after the extended assessment, the counselors retained some responsibility for guiding the progress of participants throughout their tenure in the program.

The high degree of satisfaction expressed by all the agency interviewees with the in-house assessment process ("[Every agency should] have one like ours!") and the negligible number of participants who were reassessed spoke well for the efficacy of the assessment process. It also affirmed one counselor's philosophy: "Do it well the first time to avoid problems later." For those agencies which might have some interest in moving the extended assessment in-house, Yuba County's experience deserves serious consideration.

EMPLOYABILITY PLAN

Typical elements of the employability plan are an overall employment goal, affiliated education and/or job training goals, and any support services necessary to achieve the designated goals. Each of the affiliated goals may have specific activities which the participant must accomplish in a "satisfactory" manner as defined by the service provider. Two other elements — results from any formal testing and results from participation in one or more specialized service programs — are included if the employability plan is used as a documentation device by the agency.¹³ In practice, the employability plan was often regarded by agency staffs as an agreement between the participant and the agency, carrying with it the possibility of sanctions (e.g., a reduction of the AFDC grant) if the agreement is not fulfilled (e.g., because of nonparticipation).

The Optimum Effectiveness of the Employability Plan Can Be Achieved Through a "Reasonable Flexibility" Approach

A vast middle ground exists between the employability plan being extremely rigid and extremely flexible. It seemed to us that an optimally effective plan allows the case manager and the participant jointly to make changes if a course of action does not work. Also, because discrete groups of AFDC recipients have distinctive needs, some participants will require more guidance and structure during their tenure in the JOBS program, while others will require less. The case manager is the key to developing a plan which is "reasonably flexible" and financially feasible for the agency. In assessing the participant's current and potential employability, the case manager applies her/his informed judgment to shape (or reshape, if necessary) the plan to fit the needs of the participant.

We found a participant's success in requesting changes in employability plan goals or activities depended on the degree to which the local agency views the document as flexible, the conditions prompting the request and the timing of the request. In California, for example, the participant could initiate a change within 30 days after starting education or training activities; after 30 days the participant must experience extenuating circumstances of consequence (e.g., medical reasons) in order to alter the plan. In contrast, Nebraska's employability plan was a very flexible document. Reasonable modifications and redirections could be incorporated at any time. While data were not collected which directly examine the association, we speculated that different ways of viewing and managing the plan may be related to economic conditions in the State or local region, the extent of available community resources, the extent of agency fiscal resources (e.g., the poorer the economic conditions, the more rigid the plan), and/or the perceived nature of people in poverty (e.g., people in poverty need a lot of guidance and structure, and thus a more rigid employability plan).

¹³ See APPENDIX D for an example of the format of an employability plan used as a documentation device.

Rewards for Interim Successes Motivate Participants and Build Their Confidence

A laudable practice mentioned by agency staffs was to build into the employability plan as many successes and rewards as possible. The intended effect was to boost participants' self-esteem and motivation. Completion of a specialized service program, an ESL course, or an ABE (adult basic education) course were reasons for congratulations. Letters of congratulation, tokens (e.g., small medals or certificates) or informal gatherings were vehicles to recognize these achievements. For more significant successes, such as earning the GED or satisfactory completion of a series of vocational training courses or assignments, some agencies held periodic formal ceremonies to which community dignitaries were invited. These in-house and public observances served as rewards and further encouragement for JOBS participants and their case managers, and also had a tremendous public relations value for the JOBS program.

JOB READINESS

Job Readiness Is Determined By a Combination of Objective and Intuitive Factors

Determining the "job readiness" of a participant is a process that combines objective factors and intuitive considerations. As the case manager monitored the participant's progress in JOBS education and training components, she/he received fairly regular oral and/or written reports from the service provider evaluating the participant's progress. If a provider indicated progress was "not satisfactory,"¹⁴ the case manager consulted with the participant and made adjustments to the goals and activities specified in the employability plan. Otherwise, the participant proceeded to complete the activities as specified in the original plan. Thus, the most often mentioned objective indicator used by case managers and supervisors to determine the participant's job readiness was "meeting the goals of the employability plan" or, in other words, the satisfactory completion of courses and activities in the education and training components designated in the plan.

Yet, completing these activities was only a necessary-but-not-sufficient condition for success in finding employment. Other **objective indicators** reported by case managers and supervisors to judge job readiness were: the reduction in the number and severity of barriers (e.g., child care, transportation, substance abuse and other health problems); meeting the minimum qualifications of chosen employers in terms of education, work experience and current job skills; whether the participant's career choice was adequate to support her/his family and reflects labor market availability; adequate job maturity skills; learning job finding skills; and appearance (e.g., appropriate clothes and grooming). More **intuitive factors** mentioned by case managers and supervisors were the participant's attitude toward work and maturity (i.e., being positive, enthusiastic, self-confident, reliable and responsible), degree of willingness or motivation to work, emotional stability, whether the participant herself/himself felt ready, and whether the case manager "sensed" the participant was ready.

Checklists Assist Case Managers in Determining Job Readiness

Some agency staffs used a checklist during the assessment process to track the progress of participants in reducing barriers to employability and in acquiring job skills. These instruments were used as assessment tools to help the case manager determine job readiness. For example, the agency in Omaha, Nebraska, had a checklist comprised of seven major categories with 3 to 18 items under each one which case managers used to monitor progress and to determine job readiness.¹⁵

¹⁴ An education provider, for example, usually defines "unsatisfactory" as a grade below C or a grade point average below 2.00.

¹⁵ See APPENDIX E for this checklist.

APPENDIXES

LITERATURE SOURCES AND INTERVIEWS

Data for the conceptual work on assessment were gathered from discussions with experts and a review of existing literature. The primary sources are:

(1) Pre-research discussions with:

- Dr. Gerri Fiala, Office of Policy and Legislation, Department of Labor, Washington, D.C.;
- Ms. Lori Strumpf, Director of the Center for Remediation Design (a project of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Association of Private Industry Councils, National Job Training Partnership, and the National Association of Counties), Washington, D.C.;
- Dr. Bertha King, Dr. Carroll Towey, Dr. Sarah Newcomb, Dr. James Parker, and Dr. Ron Pugsley, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Department of Education, Washington, D.C.;
- Ms. Patricia Rickard, Director of the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, San Diego, California;

(2) The following written sources:

Auspon, Patricia and Kay Sherwood, Assessing JOBS Participants: Issues and Tradeoffs, New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1992x (forthcoming publication).

Curnan, Susan P. and Gerard F. Fiala, "Assessing Employability for Results," paper for the National Governors' Association, Washington, D.C., March 1986.

Federal Register, October 13, 1989, Part II, DHHS/FSA, 45 CFR Part 205 et seq.

Goldman, Leo, "Qualitative Assessment," The Counseling Psychologist, vol. 18, no. 2, April 1990.

Grubb, W. Norton, Cynthia Brown, Phillip Kaufman, and John Lederer, "Order Amid Complexity: The Status of Coordination Among Vocational Education, Job Training Partnership Act, and Welfare-to-Work Programs," a paper for the U.S. Congress, the Secretary of Education, and the Secretary of Labor, January 1990.

Gueron, Judith M., "Reforming Welfare with Work," occasional paper #2, Ford Foundation Project on Social Welfare and the American Future, 1987.

Gueron, Judith M., "Work-Welfare Programs," in H.S. Bloom, D.S. Cordray and R.J. Light (eds.), Lessons from Selected Program and Policy Areas, New Directions for Program Evaluation (series), no. 37, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988.

Healy, Charles C., "Reforming Career Appraisals to Meet the Needs of Clients in the 1990s," The Counseling Psychologist, vol. 18, no. 2, April 1990.

Morris, Robin, Lori Strumpf, and Susan Curnan, "Using Basic Skills Testing to Improve the Effectiveness of Remediation in Employment and Training Programs for Youth," a paper for the National Commission for Employment Policy, RR-88-05, May 1988.

Strumpf, Lori, "Assessment Parameters," one-page handout at the National Governors' Association Conference, Washington, D.C., January 1990.

Strumpf, Lori, Pamela Friedman, Patricia Rickard, and Jane Equez, "Improving Workplace Skills: Lessons from JTPA," a white paper presented at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Partnership for Training and Employment Careers, Phoenix, Arizona, April 1989.

United States General Accounting Office, Job Training Partnership Act: Services and Outcomes for Participants with Differing Needs, HRD-89-52, June 1989.

United States General Accounting Office, Work and Welfare: Analysis of AFDC Employment Programs in Four States, HRD-88-33FS, January 1988.

United States General Accounting Office, Work and Welfare: Current AFDC Work Programs and Implications for Federal Policy, HRD-87-34, January 1987.

FORMAL & INFORMAL TOOLS AND PRACTICES

Assessment is conceptualized broadly as the formal and informal evaluative processes, decisions and events occurring from the participants' entrance into the JOBS program to her/his exit from the program. Although the focus of this study is chiefly on activities occurring inside the welfare agency, this definition is inclusive of all evaluative activities which occur in the welfare agency and in organizations which provide contracted services.

The judicious reliance on both types of assessment tools and practices forms the basis for an effective assessment process in the agency. **Formal assessment** is any **official** (i.e., endorsed by the agency in policy or procedures) **tools** (i.e., devices used for documentation) **and practices** (i.e., patterned, recurring events or routines), occurring on a regular basis, in which information is collected and used to make decisions about participants, such as:

- **official agency tools and practices involving all or most JOBS participants**, e.g., the use of agency forms and/or data processing system (tools) to document participants' current life circumstances, work and educational histories, participants' education and work training goals, etc.; and ongoing practices like mandatory interviews with participants, maintenance of case notes, the management of the employability plan, labor market sorts;
- **norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests** (tools) to describe and evaluate academic skill levels, work skill competencies, vocational interests, capabilities;
- **official reports** (practices) written by skilled evaluators and/or case managers on the performance and capabilities of JOBS participants; and,
- any officially prescribed **career research** by participants.

Likewise, **informal assessment** includes **unofficial tools and practices**, which may or may not occur on a regular basis, to collect information and to make decisions about participants, such as:

- direct or reported **observations** of participants;
- **conversations** with participants;
- **nonmandatory self-evaluations** by participants, e.g., in the form of journals about their experiences in the JOBS program; and,
- **career research** by participants.

AGENCY ASSESSMENT

	TOOLS	PRACTICES
FORMAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Agency forms to document the participant's circumstances ▶ Norm-referenced (standardized) and criterion-referenced tests ▶ Case notes ▶ Employability Plan (EP) ▶ Data processing system ▶ Job Readiness checklist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Interviews with participant ▶ Career research by participant ▶ Labor market sorts ▶ Maintenance of case notes ▶ Maintenance of the EP ▶ Reports on participant's capabilities & performance
INFORMAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Self-evaluation instruments, e.g., self-progress journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Conversations ▶ Observations ▶ Self-evaluation ▶ Career research

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT¹⁶

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

An effective JOBS assessment process in the local welfare agency:

- ▶ operates as an on-going process from intake to exit;
- ▶ is conducive to the case management approach;
- ▶ coordinates closely with external agencies to provide assessment services;
- ▶ measures the attainment of employment-related functional competencies for long-term employability (e.g., language, computational, occupational skills, work maturity);
- ▶ makes use of both formal and informal assessment tools and practices in making decisions about JOBS participants;
- ▶ follows the "golden rule" of efficiency: only assess for what you need to know and will use;
- ▶ accounts for constraints and opportunities generated by the local labor market and local employers' expectations;
- ▶ incorporates JOBS participants' capabilities, interests and career goals as much as possible, and provides participants with appropriate and timely feedback.

¹⁶ Our interviews with Dr. Gerri Fiala, Department of Labor, and Ms. Lori Strumpf, Center for Remediation Design, were instrumental in formulating this conceptual framework of assessment.

POLICY GUIDELINES

Effective JOBS assessment is guided by policy statements specifying:

- ▶ where assessment fits in the participant flow;
- ▶ the responsibilities of the agency, supervisors and staff regarding assessment;
- ▶ the nature, purposes and uses of informal and formal assessment techniques and practices in the agency;
- ▶ the coordination with external agencies for assessment services, each contractor's responsibilities, and the nature and purposes of assessment techniques used by these agencies;
- ▶ the guidelines for using results from the informal and formal assessments in making decisions about participants;
- ▶ the guidelines for the employability plan in terms of its required elements, documentation of assessment data, and conditions under which the plan can be revised;
- ▶ the guidelines for determining "satisfactory progress" in the education component and in the training component;
- ▶ the guidelines for determining job readiness;
- ▶ ongoing staff training and development in assessment procedures and practices;
- ▶ the guidelines for periodic re-evaluation of the assessment system and subsequent adjustments.

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES

Effective assessment is practiced by administrators and supervisors who:

- ▶ assure adequate, continual staff training and development in assessment procedures and practices, and the responsibilities of case managers;
- ▶ promote cooperation with a wide array of external agencies at state and local levels to procure assessment services;
- ▶ provide adequate, current technical assistance and procedures manuals for the staff, implementing policy guidelines for:
 - why and when to use informal and formal assessment in the participant flow of the program,
 - when and how to request external assessment services,
 - how to use the results from both the informal and formal assessments in making service strategy decisions,
 - how to construct and maintain the employability plan,
 - what constitutes "satisfactory progress" in the education component and in the training component, and how to monitor participants' progress in these components,
 - what constitutes "job readiness" for participants;
- ▶ adapt assessment to constraints and opportunities in the local labor market, the expectations of local employers, the JOBS program budget, participation and outcome data;
- ▶ consider the cost-effectiveness of the entire process (i.e., What is the best combination of techniques and practices which will tell us what we want to know, but will cut costs and use of staff time?);
- ▶ encourage regular feedback from staff on assessment procedures and practices, solicit input from assessment experts whenever possible, and incorporate improvements into policy and procedures.

STAFF GUIDELINES

Effective assessment is practiced by staff members who:

- ▶ are client-oriented, i.e., always attempt to account for participants' needs, interests and goals;
- ▶ regularly monitor participants' progress, giving timely feedback to them from intake to exit;
- ▶ encourage participants' commitment to the JOBS program and solicit input from them about the program;
- ▶ give continual feedback to supervisors about assessment practices that work or do not work.

EMPLOYABILITY PLAN AS A DOCUMENTATION DEVICE¹⁷

Participant's Name: _____
 Social Security # : _____
 Case #: _____
 Social Worker: _____
 Date of Session: _____
 Date of Exit: _____
 Assessor: _____

PARTICIPANT'S BACKGROUND

Personal History:

Employment History:

Educational Background:

EMPLOYMENT GOAL

Specific Occupational Goal:

General Occupational Goal:

Testing Results Which Support Assessment's Authorization of Employment Goal:

	REQUIRED APTITUDES*	PARTICIPANT'S SCORE**
MATH LEVEL:		
LANGUAGE LEVEL:		

[* ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR]

[** AS MEASURED BY THE APTICOM TESTING]

¹⁷ This document is Yuba County's "GAIN Assessment Employment Development Plan."

TESTING RESULTS SUMMARY (continued)

► **CAPS: Career Ability Placement Survey**

STANINE SCORES - PRIMARY ABILITY SCORE

1. Mechanical Reasoning
2. Spatial Relations
3. Verbal Reasoning
4. Numerical Ability
5. Language Usage
6. Word Knowledge
7. Perceptual Speed and Accuracy
8. Manual Speed and Dexterity

OCCUPATIONAL CLUSTER

PREDICTION
OF SUCCESS

1. Science Professional
2. Science Skilled
3. Technology Professional
4. Technology Skilled
5. Consumer Economics
6. Outdoor
7. Business Professional
8. Business Skilled
9. Clerical
10. Communication
11. Arts Professional
12. Arts Skilled
13. Service Professional
14. Service Skilled

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES RELATED TO GOAL

Goal to be Attained Upon Completion of Program:

Local Labor Market:

Approximate Period of Time Needed for Goal Achievement:

Resources Available to Obtain Training/Education for this Occupation:

- _____ R.O.P.
- _____ YUBA COLLEGE
- _____ PREP ASSIGNMENT
- _____ OJT
- _____ CET
- _____ OTHER:

POTENTIAL OF PARTICIPANT TO ACHIEVE GOAL

Assessment Supports this Participant's Employment Goal of:

This Support is Justified by:

TESTING RESULTS

OTHER:

BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING GOAL

In order for this client to be successful in attaining employment in the occupation of _____, as well as in obtaining training/education for this career, the following barriers have been identified and need to be considered in order to develop strategies so they can be removed and/or minimized.

PERSONAL:

- child care
- family responsibilities
- health
- housing problems
- lack of family support
- legal problems
- other:

- motivation/procrastination
- personal counseling needs
- personal limitations
- self-confidence
- substance abuse
- transportation

WORK WORLD:

- lack of occupational/career information
- unrealistic view of work world
- limited work experience
- poor work attitude
- other:

EDUCATION/TRAINING

- few academic skills\remedial work may be necessary
- other:

SUPPORTIVE SERVICES NEEDED FOR ACHIEVING GOAL

- child care
- ancillary expenses
- tools
- clothing
- books
- supplies

- transportation
- personal counseling
- learning disability testing (if eligible)
- other:

Prepared By: _____ Date: _____
Reviewed By: _____ Date: _____

CHECKLIST FOR DETERMINING JOB READINESS¹⁸

1. **Is this person job ready?**
 - Has education or training in field for which jobs are available
 - Is motivated to do job search
 - Has basic job search skills (e.g., knows how to prepare resume, resume is written, knows how to obtain interviews, knows how to present self during interview, etc.)
 - Has adequate work experience; previous skills and knowledge transferable
 - Potential barriers such as child care, transportation, client health, can be successfully managed

2. **Is this person's understanding of his/her own strengths and weaknesses and knowledge of employment and/or education opportunities adequate?**
 - Is able to describe job-related skills or interests
 - Is aware of his/her own strengths and weaknesses
 - Is able to make decisions about education or training options based on awareness of skills and interests
 - Is able to identify job possibilities based on information about own skills/knowledge/interests
 - Has adequate information about either the current job market or educational opportunities
 - Knows how to access either the job market or education/training resources

3. **Is this person a candidate for education or training?**
 - Has High School diploma or its equivalent
 - Has skills required in labor market (skills are developed and current)
 - Actual work experience is relevant to current job market

¹⁸ This document is from Omaha, Nebraska, entitled "Job Support Assessment Tool."

4. **Is this person ready to participate in education or training?**

- Is already motivated to obtain education/training
- Is currently enrolled and participating in education/training program
- Can identify type of education/training program most appropriate for self, e.g., university or college, community college, on-the-job training, correspondence course
- Barriers such as child care, transportation, financial aid for education costs, problems experienced by non-traditional students, etc., can be successfully managed

5. **Does this person have adequate personal resources?**

- Is in good physical health
- Has adequate homemaking skills (e.g., budgeting, nutrition, meal preparation, sanitation)
- Has adequate parenting skills
- Has adequate social and communication skills
- Has adequate problem-solving abilities and personal resourcefulness (history of adequate coping)
- Free from drug/alcohol addictions
- Has normal intelligence (e.g., is not mentally retarded)
- Free from severe psychiatric disability
- Is coping with "family development tasks" such as adjustment to parenthood, or single parenting, or aging, dependent parents, etc.
- Is able to read and write
- Is able to control temper
- Has realistic expectations of self and of self-as-worker
- Is willing to work toward change
- Has positive coping style (e.g., does not resort to denial, hostility, apathy)

6. **Does this person have adequate family support/resources?**

- Members are physically healthy
- Members have normal intelligence
- Members are free from drug or alcohol addiction
- Members are free from severe psychiatric disability
- Conflict is resolved without resorting to violence
- Members share responsibility for running household
- Adults (if more than one in home) share responsibility for raising children

- ___ Expectations of each other are realistic and humane
- ___ Are able to work together to solve problems
- ___ Members coping with "family development tasks" (e.g., adjustment to new baby, or divorce, or child leaving home, or grandparent needs)
- ___ Members support each other's efforts to change
- ___ Adults (if more than one in home) share authority
- ___ Roles are flexible (e.g., disabled father willing to run household while mother works outside home)
- ___ Are able to use community resources appropriately (.e.g., family is neither isolated nor overly dependent)
- ___ Members are law-abiding

7. **Are physical/community resources adequate?**

- ___ Job opportunities
- ___ Safe, affordable housing
- ___ Available, affordable transportation
- ___ Adequate child care facilities/providers
- ___ Counseling resources (mental health, drug/alcohol, vocational/job, educational)
- ___ Educational resources and opportunities
- ___ Educational financial aid
- ___ Parenting, budgeting, independent living classes and/or other teaching/support groups
- ___ Medical and dental resources
- ___ Recreational resources
- ___ Crisis clinics and hot-lines
- ___ Food and clothing pantries
- ___ Emergency housing or shelter care
- ___ Teaching homemaking services
- ___ Legal services
- ___ Special needs financial services (e.g., utility deposit)
- ___ Job training opportunities
- ___ Community members work together to improve community services, etc.