



Conducting a Needs Assessment

Many people who use or abuse alcohol or other drugs also hold jobs. According to the 2006 *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*, about 75 percent of the estimated 17.9 million illicit-drug users ages 18 and older were holding full- or part-time jobs.¹ The same survey found that most binge drinkers and heavy drinkers were employed.²

From multiple studies, we also know that substance use and abuse lead to high costs to the economy, society, and the health of the Nation. For example, the Office of National Drug Control Policy estimates that, in 2002, drug abuse cost the United States \$180.9 billion³ (see chart). These costs reflect lost productivity, increased injuries, accidents, health care costs, bullying, harassment, theft, white-collar crime, and disease (including tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases).⁴

To prevent or reduce alcohol- and other drug-related problems in workplaces, many employers have instituted drug-free workplace programs or components. Others have employed health and wellness programs with overlapping drug-free workplace program components, and with drug screening as a commonly implemented component. The American Management Association conducted a survey in 2004 that found that about 62 percent of employers conducted



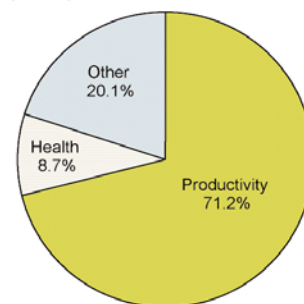
tests for illegal or controlled substances.⁵ The employers surveyed by the association conducted workplace drug testing to screen applicants for jobs and to test

employees for fitness for duty and for reassignment. Meanwhile, other employers have

begun to emphasize prevention efforts, such as workplace health and wellness programs, including health and risk assessments.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

But how can a workplace determine what it specifically needs? A needs assessment for a drug-free workplace program can systematically analyze “how things are” and how the program can improve the organization and help meet employees’ needs. Much information is now available to help employers select programs and program components that can be the most useful for their workplaces. However, because these programs and components can be costly, it makes sense to complete a needs assessment first.

**Distribution of Cost of Drug Abuse, 2002
By Major Cost Components**



What Does a Needs Assessment Do and How Can Workplaces Go About Doing One?

In brief, a needs assessment can gauge the extent of costs related to substance abuse. These costs may arise from accidents, injuries, and high turnover rates. A needs assessment can also address workplace legal mandates, executive mandates, mission, goals, culture, internal and external constraints, facilities, resources, and the knowledge base. And it can use a variety of techniques to measure the extent of the needs and to identify program components that are likely



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to be the most useful in addressing those needs. Components might include focus group meetings, consultations with key personnel, examination of work products, analysis of

workplace administrative data, and employee, management, and union surveys.

Needs Assessment Map

Decide Who Conducts the Needs Assessment

Some employers hire consultants to conduct needs assessments and evaluations.¹⁰ However, hiring outside help may not be an option for organizations with limited resources. Just as a policy and program doesn't have to be complex and costly to be effective, a needs assessment doesn't have to be complicated. Anyone—from a business owner or organization head to an HR representative to an outside consultant—can conduct a basic needs assessment within an organization, appropriate to the organization size. The needs assessment can be tailored to the amount of resources a company has to address this issue.

Involve Others

One key to the success of any drug-free workplace policy and program is to involve employees and union officials from the very beginning of the needs assessment process. Employers whose



workplaces are unionized may need to bargain with the unions about the drug-free policy and program. They certainly will want to enlist their cooperation and support in the early stages

of assessing needs. Employers will probably also want to include both supervisory and nonsupervisory employees in this process.

Articulate the Mission and Goals

Success can mean different things to different

people. Some employers, for example, may want primarily to meet the legislative requirements. Other employers may want to improve productivity and the return on their investment. Still others may want to change the lives of their workers and their workers' families.

When starting to assess workplace needs, it is helpful to ask some key questions. For example:

- What legislative or regulatory requirements must the organization meet with respect to substance use and abuse?
- Are there employees in safety-sensitive roles? For example, are there employees who administer health advice, medicine, or services, or employees who drive vehicles, operate machinery, handle chemicals, or work with the public—particularly with children?
- Are there employees in jobs that are security sensitive? For example, are there employees who are responsible for confidential ideas, products, plans, or documents; employees who are responsible for accounting, cash, inventory, or stock; or employees who work offsite, such as traveling salespersons, home workers, or home health care workers?
- Do certain employees perform functions that are of extreme importance to the organization? For example, are there accountants who handle large sums of money, sales persons who represent the company to key buyers, employees who monitor nuclear power dials, or supervisors who manage many employees?

Link Each Goal to Something Measurable

If one of the goals is to "have an employee who is drug-free," determine exactly what this means and how this will be measured. Such broad goals are

often measured by defining more concrete, strategic objectives, such as “increased volunteer use of the EAP.”

Get a Baseline

Document what the workplace is like before the drug-free workplace policy and program are implemented. This pretest, or baseline, information gives something to compare with after the policy and program have been developed and implemented. To develop a useful baseline for a drug-free workplace policy and program, a workplace can do the following:

1. Collect and Analyze Data on the Current Situation

Qualitative Data. For example, what do supervisory and nonsupervisory employees say about the safety, health, and productivity of the workplace before the program is implemented? What is the morale of the company before the program? What are other organizations in the industry and in the area doing to promote health, safety, and productivity? What are the characteristics of the organization (e.g., small business; employees who are home workers)? How does management work with unions? What is the corporate culture toward alcohol and other drugs? Is alcohol served at company functions? What is the corporate perspective on health and wellness of employees? How supportive are supervisors and managers toward employees’ work-life family needs? Are employees fearful of colleagues who are abusing drugs?

Quantitative Data. For example, what are the numbers on turnover, absenteeism, tardiness, use of health care benefits, and workers’ compensation claims? What is the percentage of loss, including theft, accidents, and poor-quality goods?

2. Understand Legal and Other Requirements

Review national, State, and local industry requirements for safety. Determine whether there are any statutes offering financial benefits for

having a drug-free workplace policy and program. Some of these benefits include garnering preference in contract bids and getting workers’ compensation premium discounts or other reductions.

3. Identify Future Needs and Goals

What is the business development plan? How will the policy and program affect this?

4. Identify Resources

Look at internal and external resources for implementing a policy and program.

Estimate the Costs and Benefits

Rising health care costs have increased pressure on employers to monitor costs, cost effectiveness, and cost-benefit ratios for all health care services, including substance abuse–related services.¹¹

Even though the exact economic costs and



benefits of a drug-free workplace policy and program can be difficult to measure, reasonable estimates can be calculated. Returns on investment (ROIs) have varied across industries

and geographical locations, but some have been dramatic. One study, for example, found a \$27 to \$1 ROI in a major transportation company, and this was considered a conservative estimate.¹² The costs that programs have addressed include injury, lost productivity, employee turnover, health care, workers’ compensation, job dissatisfaction, litigation, and crime.

A drug-free workplace policy and program can help achieve multiple goals and outcomes, some of which are easier to measure than others. The main goal and outcome, which is most obvious, is to reduce or eliminate workplace drug use. Another may be to increase the safety of one’s employees and the public. Others may be less obvious, but also important, such as promoting

healthy behaviors at work, encouraging workers to develop a team focus, and creating a supportive work environment. Try to measure progress in many, if not all, of these goal and outcome areas when evaluating the program's success.

Most of all, remember this: although it may take a while before some cost savings become visible, improvements in employee morale may be evident right away.

Describe the Process

Document the steps taken to develop and implement the policy and program. Recording this information can help an employer improve the process later on. Some steps that might be taken and that should be documented include developing consensus by building a team, revising the policy to incorporate feedback from others, addressing legal requirements, and assessing employees' strengths and their areas in need of improvement.

Find a Way to Compare

It can be helpful to compare what the workplace looked like both before and after implementing the policy and program, as a way to show savings and costs.

Another powerful way to show change is to compare the organization's efforts with the efforts of another organization. Some professional groups encourage this kind of comparison. Another way is to compare one of the organization's worksites (for example, one that has an extensive drug-free workplace program) with another of the worksites (for example, one that has only very basic drug-free workplace training).

Evaluation should be ongoing. Don't be discouraged if results aren't apparent right away. The cycle of evaluation encourages ongoing reassessment of the goals, objectives, means for achieving those objectives, and ways of measuring processes and outcomes. The evaluation results will contribute to informed decisions about

whether, and in what ways, the policy and program can be improved.

Some States offer financial incentives to encourage businesses to adopt drug-free workplace programs, including

1. A reduction in workers' compensation premiums
2. A reduction in unemployment insurance premiums
3. Tax deductions in an amount equal to the amount of expenditures for employee assistance programs, treatment, or testing for illegal drugs

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