Employment Counselor Survey Results

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# Methodology

We sent a consent form for participation in our study to 427 contacts pulled from Workforce One (WF1), DEED’s client tracking system. We created this list of contacts based on their status in WF1 as a primary case manager to participants in the Dislocated Worker (DW) or Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult programs, programs funded by an Adult Workforce Development grant (AWDP), or at Twin Cities RISE! or the Opportunity Industrialization Centers (OICs). The contacts were asked to confirm on the consent form that they regularly provided on-going, one-on-one employment counseling to job seekers.

Seventy-four indicated on the form or via email that they did not regularly provide on-going, one-on-one employment counseling to job seekers. These contacts were removed from the sample, leaving a total of 353 valid contacts. Overall, of the 353 valid contacts in our sample, 176 completed the consent form, for a completion rate of 50%.

Of these 176 contacts, 13 chose to not participate in our study, leaving 163 contacts consenting to participate, a consent rate of 46%. These 163 contacts were given to DEED's telephone survey vendor, Issues & Answers. Letters notifying contacts of an upcoming call were sent by the vendor, reminding contacts of the purpose of the study and providing them with a toll-free number to call to complete the interview at their convenience. The vendor began making calls on Thursday, April 2, 2015 and made their last attempts at contacting counselors on Tuesday, April 21, 2015.

Interviews were completed with 137 counselors, for a response rate of 39% (calculated from the 353 valid contacts in our study). A breakdown of responding contacts by group (DW, WIA, AWDP) is presented below. Throughout this report, contacts from organizations receiving direct appropriations from DEED (such as Twin Cities RISE! and the OICs) are included as part of the Adult Workforce Development Program results.

In some place in this report the data is broken out by program (DW, WIA, AWDP) or by region (northern MN, central MN, Metro, southern MN). **Because we do not know how many employment counselors are in the state, the results presented here should not be interpreted to be representative of counselors in any program or any region of the state. The results should not be generalized into common practices in any program or region, but instead should be seen as a first piece of data where none existed before.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Program Name** | **Number of valid contacts** | **Number responding to invitation** | **Number consenting to participate** | **Number completing the survey** | **Percent of valid contacts completing the survey** |
| **Adult Workforce Development** | 113 | 54 | 45 | 37 | 33% |
| **Dislocated Worker** | 84 | 46 | 43 | 34 | 40% |
| **WIA Adult** | 156 | 76 | 75 | 66 | 42% |
| ***ALL PROGRAMS*** | ***353*** | ***176*** | ***163*** | ***137*** | ***39%*** |

# Results

## Intake Processes

The first portion of the interview asked counselors to think about their experiences with a specific program (Dislocated Worker, WIA Adult, AWDP grantee, Twin Cities RISE!, the OICs), and the first question asked about the formal intake process at their agency for that program. Counselors were presented with a list of four processes and an "other" option and asked which, if any, were used by the program.

Responses reveal that, on average, a job seeker is required to complete a minimum of 3 steps in order to complete the intake process. The most common required steps were meeting one-on-one with a staff person (94%), providing a written application (84%), and attending an in-person orientation session (70%).

*Number of respondents: 37 AWDP, 34 DW, 66 WIA, 137 All Programs*

The most commonly paired of these requirements were providing a written application and meeting on-on-one with a staff person; 79% of counselors said they required both of their applicants. The two second-most common pairings of requirements combined attending an in-person orientation session with either providing a written application (64%) or meeting one-on-one with a staff person (64%).

Of those with "other" requirements as part of the intake process, the most commonly mentioned were the use of skills assessments and the provision of official documentation, including high school or college transcripts, vaccination records, or verification of unemployment status or income.

## Enrollment Decisions

Counselors were then asked if there have been times when they've had an applicant for their program who was eligible on paper, but that they decided not to enroll based on other factors.

*Number of respondents: 36 northern MN, 12 central MN, 61 metro, 28 southern MN, 137 All Regions*

Over half of the counselors indicated they had experienced this, with those in northern Minnesota reporting doing this most frequently, and those in southern Minnesota reporting having done this the least. When asked to identify what factored into their decision to not enroll the applicant, nearly a third of those responding mentioned the motivation of the applicant and the presence of barriers in the applicant's life.

## Significant Barriers that Prevent Enrollment

We were interested in honing in on why some applicants who are otherwise eligible might not be enrolled. Counselors were asked if there have been times when they wanted to work with someone with a barrier to employment that was so significant that they couldn't enroll them.

*Number of respondents: 36 northern MN, 12 central MN, 61 metro, 28 southern MN, 137 All Regions*

Less than one-third of all respondents indicated they had encountered this issue. Northern Minnesota had the highest reported incident rate, with over 40 percent indicating they had faced situations where they were unable to enroll an applicant due to the presence of significant barriers. Statewide, those that had experienced this indicated that their program can’t do much differently to enroll applicants with these types of significant barriers, as without the resources to address the barriers the applicants would be unsuccessful in the program.

## Limited English Skills and Accommodations

Switching focus from enrollment processes, counselors were asked if they worked with applicants who have limited English skills. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents indicated that they do, with the highest rates coming from the metro area (85 percent) and southern Minnesota (68 percent).

*Number of respondents: 36 northern MN, 12 central MN, 61 metro, 28 southern MN, 137 All Regions*

We followed this with a question about the accommodations provided to those applicants with limited English skills. The two most common accommodations provided to applicants were translation/interpretation services and referrals to adult basic education or English as a second language classes.

## Outreach Activities

The last question focusing on counselor experiences with certain programs asked about the outreach their agency engaged in to raise awareness of the program. Results reveal the average agency engages in six different types of outreach, the most common of which is receiving referrals from partner agencies and attending career fairs.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Outreach Activity** | **All Programs** | **Northern MN** | **Central MN** | **Metro** | **Southern MN** |
| Receives referrals from partner agencies | 93% | 97% | 75% | 95% | 93% |
| Attends community meetings | 82% | 83% | 92% | 79% | 82% |
| Attends Career Fairs | 89% | 100% | 100% | 82% | 86% |
| Places print, radio, television, or online ads in local media | 55% | 89% | 83% | 36% | 43% |
| Recruits potential participants from WorkForce Center workshops | 85% | 92% | 100% | 77% | 86% |
| Places print materials in WorkForce Centers | 85% | 97% | 100% | 74% | 86% |
| Places print materials in other public areas | 74% | 89% | 83% | 64% | 71% |
| Other | 12% | 8% | 0% | 18% | 7% |

*Number of respondents: 36 northern MN, 12 central MN, 61 metro, 28 southern MN, 137 All Regions*

The only activity in which less than three quarters of the agencies engaged in was the placement of ads (print, radio, television, or online) in local media. Among the "other" outreach activities listed by counselors were connecting with government and non-profits (like housing departments or law enforcement centers) and engaging in broad community outreach (using street recruiting or partnering with community organizations).

## What Makes a Client a Good Candidate for Long-term Training

In transitioning to thinking more broadly about their experiences with any program, counselors were asked to think about clients who enroll in longer-term training. We defined this term as training that may be in a classroom or on the job, that lasts a few weeks, a few months, or even longer.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Code** | **Count** | **Percent** | **Code Description** |
| Motivation | 55 | 40% | Motivation; They’re eager and willing; Their interest in it; Their enthusiasm about it; Passion to get a good job |
| Finances | 43 | 31% | Financial; Able to provide for themselves; Stable source of financial backing |
| Planning and Research | 39 | 28% | Planning; Labor market research and conduct an interview with members in the field; Research packet; Research the job |
| Commitment | 38 | 28% | Commitment; Follow through; Willing to do what it takes; Commitment to the training plan |

*Number of respondents: 137*

Counselors indicated that clients who are good candidates for this type of training are those who are highly motivated, have either a stable financial situation or a financial support network, who complete the necessary planning and research, and who show a strong commitment to the program.

## Barriers to Enrolling in Long-term Training

Having asked what makes a client a good candidate for long-term training, we then asked counselors to name the most common barriers to enrolling in this type of training that they’ve observed in their work with clients.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Code** | **Count** | **Percent** | **Code Description** |
| Finances | 82 | 60% | Lack of income; Being able to financially survive going to school; Debt concerns; Loan default; Cannot afford long-term training without a job |
| Transportation | 52 | 40% | Lack of transportation; For our area, length of commute; Transportation in a rural area; Getting to and from where the training is; distance to training |
| Child care | 45 | 33% | Lack of daycare; The means of child care; They don’t have child care; Odd hours of training, child care services are not available |
| Physical & Mental Health | 22 | 16% | Depression or mental health issues; Health issues, mental, chemical, or physical health issues that can hold them back; Health issues, either themselves or family members |

*Number of respondents: 137*

The primary barrier identified by counselors was the financial situation facing the client. In addition, counselors referred to issues surrounding access to transportation and child care as barriers to enrolling in long-term training. The physical or mental health of the client was also mentioned.

## Barriers to Obtaining High-quality, Living-wage Employment

Retaining the focus on barriers faced by clients, we asked counselors to instead focus on the outcomes of clients, namely the path to high-quality, living-wage employment. Anticipating that some counselors might refer to labor market conditions or employer-related issues, we specifically asked them to focus on those personal circumstances that clients face which could potentially be addressed through the program.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Code** | **Count** | **Percent** | **Code Description** |
| Skills/education | 71 | 52% | Lack of credential; Lack of needed skill; Lack of education; They do not have a specific degree or certification that is required to get the job |
| Transportation | 34 | 25% | Transportation around here is always an issue; No public transportation; Don’t have a car or driver’s license; Lack of transportation |
| Child care | 29 | 21% | Lack of quality around the clock child care; We don’t have a way to help with child care; Child care issues; Lack of child care |
| Soft skills | 21 | 15% | Lack of discipline and lack of staying committed to their goal; Lack of motivation; Poor communication, poor follow through; Self-confidence |
| Work history | 17 | 12% | Lack of education and lack of experience. Even the ones who get education, the employers still want experience, so it's either or; Limited experience; A stable work history; Prior employment history |

*Number of respondents: 137*

Counselors named the lack of relevant skills or an education as the primary barrier to obtaining high-quality, living-wage employment. Tied to some of these responses was a reference to experience or work history, where if a client has the skills or education necessary, they lack the work experience required, or vice versa. Perhaps predictably, counselors also referred to issues surrounding access to transportation and child care in their responses. Soft skills, which includes motivation, discipline, communication and self-confidence, were also referenced.

## Addressing Barriers to Long-term Training and High-quality, Living-wage Employment

The final question on barriers asked counselors to think of the barriers they had just named and to discuss the steps they have taken to help clients address those barriers.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Code** | **Count** | **Percent** | **Code Description** |
| Provide information/advice | 85 | 62% | Discuss the benefits that education brings; Steps to move forward; Giving them resources and help out as much as we can; Offer assistance; Career coaching; We identify these barriers and formulate a plan |
| Referral | 38 | 28% | Refer to resources; Referrals to appropriate agencies; Referrals that offer help; Referrals to human service; Refer to counseling agents; Rehab services; Referrals for housing |
| Training | 38 | 28% | Short term training; Workforce training; Gain additional skills through education; With the education we offer adult education classes; Provide training for different labor markets |
| Answer unclear | 38 | 28% | Everyone is so different; Following through; Whatever they can utilize; Programs; Assistance available and resources |

*Number of respondents: 137*

Responses to this question were not always clear and tended to lack the full articulation that typified responses to the prior questions. As a result, some responses were simply coded as providing an unclear answer to the question. Where responses were coded, the interpretation of the response was more vague and general.

Counselors tended to talk about working with clients one-on-one, and providing clients with information and advice that were specifically for their circumstances. Counselors also identified referrals as a means to addressing barriers, but again these responses were often vague and did not always indicate where the client would be referred to, or for what services the client would be referred. Similarly, those counselors that spoke about training often did so in general terms, sometimes to the point of simply saying “training.”

## Diversity/Cultural Competency Training

The survey closed by asking counselors about the priority their agency places on select policies or practices. The first policy inquired about was the use of diversity or cultural competency training. After defining this term as *any training which results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures*, counselors were then asked if their agency required them to attend diversity or cultural competency training.

*Number of respondents: 36 northern MN, 12 central MN, 61 metro, 28 southern MN, 137 All Regions*

Over half the respondents indicated that such training was required, though there was variation by region. Counselors from central and southern Minnesota were more likely to indicate that such training was not required of them.

For those who indicated that diversity or cultural competency training was not required of them, a follow-up question asked if their agency provides opportunities to attend such training. Over 80 percent of this group of counselors indicated their agency did provide them opportunities to attend diversity or cultural competency training.

*Number of respondents: 15 northern MN, 7 central MN, 26 metro, 16 southern MN, 64 All Regions*

## Agency Prioritization of Disparity Reduction Strategies

The survey closed by reading to counselors a list of potential disparity-reduction strategies, informed by the team’s prior research, and asking counselors to rate the priority (low, medium, high, none, unsure/don’t know) their agency places in each strategy.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Strategy** | **High priority** | **Medium priority** | **Low priority** | **Not a priority** | **Unsure/ don't know** |
| Reaching out to underserved communities | 69% | 19% | 6% | 3% | 4% |
| Enrolling a diverse group of applicants | 66% | 20% | 6% | 4% | 5% |
| Enrolling a diverse group of clients into training | 66% | 22% | 6% | 4% | 3% |
| Supporting entrepreneurship among participants of color | 23% | 33% | 30% | 10% | 4% |
| Providing wage negotiation training to clients | 34% | 34% | 19% | 6% | 7% |
| Engaging employers on behalf of specific clients | 61% | 28% | 7% | 1% | 4% |
| Engaging minority-owned businesses on behalf of specific clients | 17% | 28% | 31% | 8% | 15% |
| Engaging employers on topics of racial wage disparities | 21% | 23% | 28% | 9% | 18% |
| Engaging employers on topics of gender wage disparities | 23% | 30% | 28% | 8% | 10% |
| Organizing peer networking groups for clients with barriers to employment | 45% | 32% | 15% | 4% | 4% |
| Organizing peer networking groups for specific racial or cultural groups | 15% | 31% | 34% | 12% | 7% |
| Organizing peer networking groups for women | 19% | 33% | 27% | 14% | 7% |

*Number of respondents: 137*

The strategies of highest priority were reaching out to underserved communities, enrolling a diverse group of applicants, enrolling a diverse group of clients into training, engaging employers on behalf of clients, and organizing peer networking groups for clients with barriers to employment. The strategies of least priority were engaging minority-owned businesses on behalf of employers, supporting entrepreneurship among participants of color, organizing peer networking groups for women, and organizing peer networking groups for specific racial or cultural groups.