Changes to W-2 Manual Regarding Career Assessment

Note: Additions to policy are underlined. Strikethrough text indicates the removed language. Terms that will have new expanding definitions are highlighted.

The following definitions will be added to the W-2 Manual Glossary. In addition, the manual will be updated to include expanding text definitions whenever these assessment types are referenced.

Career Assessment

Career assessments are a broad spectrum of assessment tools that W-2 agencies and job seekers use to obtain greater awareness about how a participant's *work styles*, *skills*, and *interests* can be used to define a career path, assign meaningful activities, highlight strengths, identify training needs, and match the participant to employment opportunities.

Educational Needs Assessment

Educational needs assessments are tools used to measure and determine a participant's educational levels. Educational needs assessment tools, like the TABE or WRAT, test skills and aptitudes in reading, language, math computation, and applied math in order to identify current math and reading comprehension levels and any literacy or numeracy deficiencies.

Vocation Evaluation or Vocational Assessment

Vocational evaluations/assessments are conducted to help individuals living with a disability establish realistic vocational goals and a plan to achieve them. The vocational evaluation process is designed to assess the unique strengths, resources, and experiences of an individual in order to match that person's abilities and preferences to appropriate work placements, jobs, or training programs. The process is interactive; the intent is for staff to learn about the participant and the participant to learn about themselves.

1.2.3 Financial and Employment Planner (FEP)

State statute requires that each W-2 agency have at least one FEP.

The FEP must provide individualized case management services and supportive services for participants in W-2 employment positions. Although a FEP may have other staff assistance, the FEP is the primary case manager and has the ultimate responsibility for the case, including correct eligibility determination for W-2. The FEP must also coordinate with other agencies to facilitate needed services such as treatment, education, training, vocational evaluations, and other formal assessments.

The FEP must meet with the applicant within five working days after the date the W-2 agency receives a signed Application Registration form. (See 1.4.2.1) The FEP has up to seven working days after this first meeting to make a placement determination. The FEP uses the information gathered to determine eligibility and placement.

The main functions of the FEP are:

- Eligibility determination;
- Assessment;
- Employability planning;
- Service referral; and

- Ongoing case management.

Responsibilities that are part of these functions include:

1. Determining eligibility for W-2 and JALs, including verifying information necessary to process the W-2 application, scanning verification timely into ECF, ensuring that all data is entered into CWW and CARES accurately and timely, and ensuring that correct payments are issued in a timely manner.
2. Providing information on basic money management, personal work habits, and life skills needed to succeed in the working world.
3. Completing an informal assessment (see 5.2.1), assessing for both strengths and barriers, including reviewing and updating information gathered by the RSusing the CARES Work Program Assessment Driver Flow.
4. Using the BST, educational needs assessment, and other information provided by the participant to determine whether a formal assessment by a qualified assessing agency is needed. (See 5.5.2) Considering barriers to employment in determining the level of employability, making placement decisions, and referrals to other services. Providing accommodations and modifications as needed. (See 1.3.1)
5. When appropriate, assigning reasonable job search activities prior to and after the determination of W-2 eligibility.
6. Determining placement in a W-2 employment position and the need for an Emergency Payment. (See 19.1)
7. Working with participants to develop a W-2 EP based on participants' goals and assessment results, including an educational needs assessment and career assessments. Designing a plan to move the participant to unsubsidized employment as quickly as possible. Documenting requirements for assigned W-2 activities and incorporating Learnfare activity requirements as necessary. (See Chapter 6)
8. Ensuring that applicants and participants have the necessary supportive services, accommodations, auxiliary aids and communication assistance required to participate to the fullest extent possible.
9. Assessing participants' progress in their assigned activities and determining whether participants are developing the hard and soft skills they need to obtain and retain unsubsidized employment. Working with the participants to update the EP as needed based on the assessment progress.
10. Identifying noncompliance, determining good cause, applying payment reductions, and recording participant progress in CARES.
11. Interpreting and explaining policies governing eligibility, including explaining the responsibilities and requirements outlined in the PA and securing the applicant's signature on the PA prior to beginning a W-2 employment position. These policies include, but are not limited to: a) explaining that failure to cooperate during the application phase may result in ineligibility; b) providing information on the Fact Finding Process; and c) explaining the W-2 agency's discrimination complaint process. (See 1.4.6)
12. Referring applicants who supply questionable information for front-end verification. (See 13.2.3)
13. Referring participants suspected of fraudulent activity for fraud investigation. (See 13.3.2)

14. When necessary, referring applicants and participants to other community services such as food pantries, domestic abuse services, literacy councils, child welfare agencies, DVR, and AODA/mental health services.
15. Assuring that final eligibility information for W-2 is transmitted to the child support agency, and assuring that participants cooperate with their child support agency. During eligibility reviews, the FEP must also review with the participant his or her child support assignment.
16. Explaining Learnfare, assessing Learnfare status for dependent children in a W-2 Group, and providing or arranging for Learnfare case management. Ensuring enrollment and attendance for dependent child(ren) subject to Learnfare is promoted, verified, monitored, and appropriately entered in CARES. (See Chapter 16)
17. Providing follow-up case management services for at least 12 months to participants who progress from a W-2 employment position to an unsubsidized position to encourage and support job retention and advancement. At local agency discretion, the participant may continue to receive the follow-up case management services of the FEP beyond the mandatory 12-month follow-up period as necessary. (See 7.2.3)
18. Maintaining an effective working relationship with the Job Center partners and other agencies that provide workforce development programs.

All FEPs must be trained in accordance with state law and administrative rule. (See Wisconsin Administrative Rules, Chapter DCF 103). Basic skill sets required of a FEP include:

- Verbal and written communication;
- Active listening;
- Conflict resolution;
- Ability to be non-judgmental;
- Time management;
- Adaptability;
- Sensitivity;
- Problem solving;
- Crises response;
- Interviewing skills;
- Discussion facilitation;
- Customer service;
- Job matching;
- Safe confrontation;
- Assertive communication;
- Networking;
- Problem identification;
- Solution recognition;
- Service coordination;
- Appropriate feedback;
- Coaching and mentoring;
- Budget preparation;
- Cultural competency;
- Interpreting educational needs assessment, career assessments, and formal assessment results;
- Ability to put into place needed modifications and accommodations;
- Goal setting;
- Career development; and
- Job retention strategies.

---No change to remainder of Manual Section 1.2.3---

1.4.4 Determining Eligibility and Making a W-2 Placement

No later than seven working days after the first meeting with the applicant, the FEP must determine W-2 eligibility using all financial and nonfinancial eligibility criteria. (See Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) In extenuating circumstances, when the applicant needs additional time to gather verification, the agency can extend the eligibility process for up to 30 days from the date the agency receives the signed Application Registration form. (See 4.1.3)

Included in the nonfinancial eligibility criteria are two activities that the RS or the FEP may assign:

- Upfront job search activities, (See 2.9.2) and
- Requirement to apply for other appropriate public assistance programs. (See 2.6.1)

During this same seven-day time frame, the FEP must also work with the applicant to determine the most appropriate W-2 placement.

To make the most appropriate placement decision, the FEP discusses and reviews with the applicant the:

- Results of the informal assessment; (See 5.2)
- Results of the educational needs assessment; (See 5.3)
- Results of any career assessments;
- Results of the BST, if completed; (See 5.4.1.1)
- Progress made in up-front job search, if assigned; (See 2.9.2) and
- Results of any other vocational evaluations or formal assessment obtained during the application process. (See 5.1.1)

---No change to remainder of Manual Section 1.4.4---

2.9.2 Up-front Job Search Activities as a Condition of Eligibility

The goal of up-front job search activities is to rapidly connect the applicant to sustainable employment.

Not all applicants are appropriate for up-front job search. When deciding whether to assign up-front job search activities as a condition of eligibility, the RS and the FEPmust use the best information available. This includes information gathered through the informal assessment process, the educational needs assessment, career assessment, BST results when available, and any additional vocational evaluations or formal assessments obtained to date (See Chapter 5).

---No change to remainder of Manual Section 2.9.2---

5.1.1 Assessment at Application

During the application process and prior to placing the individual in a W-2 placement, the W-2 agency:

- Must work with the applicant to complete an informal assessment; (See 5.2)
- Must work with the applicant to complete an educational needs assessment; (See 5.3)
- Must offer the BST; (See 5.4.1.1) and
- May require the applicant to participate in up-front job search activities as a condition of eligibility. (See 2.9.2)

To make the initial W-2 placement and to ~~the~~ develop the EP, the FEP must use the results of the informal assessment, results from the educational needs assessment, the BST results if available, and the progress made during assignment to up-front job search activities.

During the application process, the FEP may also refer the applicant for vocational evaluation or formal assessment of employment barriers. (See 5.5.1) However, completing referrals for vocational evaluations or formal assessments are not eligibility requirements.

When an applicant needs extra time to gather verification for eligibility, the FEP can extend the application time frame up to 30 days. Because career assessments, additional vocational evaluations, and formal assessments are not eligibility requirements, the FEP must never delay eligibility determination and placement because a formal assessment is pending. The placement decision must be made using the best available information during the application timeframe. (See 1.4.4) The W-2 placement may be adjusted later, if needed, when the formal assessment information is received.

To gather assessment results, W-2 agencies are encouraged to consult with other employment and training resources, and accept previous assessments done by other agencies if appropriate, including assessments completed in the past by other W-2 agencies.

5.1.2 Assessment as Part of On-Going Case Management

An informal assessment must be made prior to moving an individual to W-2 placement. The following informal assessments are considered an on-going activity and are part of general W-2 case management:

- The educational needs assessment is ~~also~~ part of the ongoing case management process. Accordingly, the participant must be reassessed for education and training needs anytime there is a change in W-2 placement. (See 5.3.1)

- Career assessments should be used to identify *work styles*, *skills*, and *interests* in order to develop EPs and assign meaningful activities that allow participants to reach their goals.
    - *Work styles* – Refers to the participant's patterns of action or conduct, such as attendance, punctuality, appropriate appearance, ability to work with others, obeying rules, following directions, and completing tasks. Work style-focused career assessments can demonstrate the participant's attitudes and job readiness.

    - *Skills* – Refers to the participant's skills or understanding of specific tasks related to employment, like cooking or computer programming. Skills-focused career assessments can include knowledge, aptitude, and ability. Skills can relate to a particular occupation, as typically listed in a job announcement to describe the tasks of a position.

- *Interests* – Refers to the participant's likes of particular objects, activities, and personalities using the theory that individuals with the same career tend to have the same interests. Interest-focused career assessments help participants identify work-related interests and find the types of careers that match. The results can be used to help participants learn which careers they are most likely to enjoy, including careers they may not have had knowledge of.

Career assessments can be administered throughout ongoing case management as participant's skill levels and work-readiness may change.

- In some circumstances the BST must also be offered to W-2 participants as part of ongoing case management. (See 5.4.1.1)

The results of each assessment must be discussed with the participant and the participant must be given the opportunity to provide input on his/her W-2 placement and the activities that are assigned as part of the EP. Do not use educational needs assessments in place of career assessments. Use educational needs assessments in tandem with career assessments to identify the participant's needs in order to improve work readiness and skills. The results of both assessments complement each other and inform the EP development and assignment of meaningful activities.

5.2.2 Informal Assessment Inventory

The following inventory must be covered as part of the informal assessment and reviewed with each W-2 applicant/participant at application and as a part of ongoing case management.

- Personal strengths, interests and goals;
- Job skills (including transferable skills), prior education and training;
- Employment history and recent job search efforts;
- ~~Recent~~ Results from career assessments that evaluate work styles, skills, and interests ~~results, if any~~;
- Emergency supportive service needs;
- Current living situation, neighborhood environment and schools;
- Household budgeting/money management strategies;
- If recent move, from where and when;
- Involvement in legal system that may impact ability to work;
- Employment support (i.e. Work Connection and Retention Services);
- Access to child care (including after-school);
- Access to transportation, including current and valid driver's license;
- Concerns related to personal and family health including mental health;
- Educational experience, including any diagnosis related to learning disabilities;
- Behavioral and other issues that a child in the W-2 Group may have that could impact W-2 participation;
- Service needs and accommodations related to domestic violence and sexual assault;

- Access to social supports (e.g., family members, church, friends);
- Other needs or barriers identified by the participant that impedes his or her ability to participate in W-2 activities or find and retain a job.

The FEP must gather information about applicants'/participants' personal strengths, work styles, interests, and skills that may help them in their search for employment or that may be further developed through activities assigned in the EP. In addition, the FEP must work with the applicant/participant to identify resources that will address any unmet needs identified during the informal assessment process.

---*No change to remainder of Manual Section 5.2.2*---

6.1.1 Parts of the Employability Plan

The EP consists of three parts:

Part 1: Program Employment Goals and Related Goals

Program Employment Goals
This section of the EP identifies shorter term employment goals that can be achieved through participation in the W-2 program. The FEP and the applicant or participant must jointly develop the employment goals. The Primary and Secondary Employment Goals should be based on:

1. The applicant's or participant's strengths, skills, work styles, and interests and needs. Consideration should be given to the individuals' prior work experience, prior education and training and assessments (e.g., educational needs assessments, career ~~inventories~~ assessments, vocational evaluations, or other formal assessments).
2. What can realistically be achieved through participation in the W-2 program. Consideration must be given to all types of activities that may enable the applicant or participant to achieve his/her goal including, but not limited to, job search/job readiness activities, work experience, educational activities, job skills training and technical college participation. (See W-2 Manual Appendix - Activity Codes)
3. Industry and employment opportunities in the local labor market. The FEP must review relevant labor market data to determine if employment goals are in line with the local labor market. Wisconsin's WORKnet is an excellent resource for labor market information.

If the applicant or participant is not ready to identify a specific occupation when the goals are initially developed, the focus of the goal may be broadened to a field of interest or an industry sector. Career assessments and career exploration tools should be used to help identify sectors, career pathways, training needs, and family-sustaining employment goals that may match the results of the assessed work styles, skills, and interests.

---*No change to remainder of Manual Section 6.1.1*---

7.1 Introduction

When determining the initial placement for W-2 applicants, FEPs must use all of the information gathered from the:

- Informal assessment; (See 5.2)
- Educational needs assessment; (See 5.3)
- Any career assessment results that identify work styles, skills, and interests;
- BST, if completed; (See 5.4.1.1)
- Progress made in up-front job search, if assigned; (See 2.9.2) and
- Results of any other vocational evaluations or formal assessments. (See 5.1.1)

---*No change to remainder of Manual Section 7.1*---

Appendix: Activity Codes

CE – Career Planning & Counseling
Valid for the following programs: W-2, LF, CF, TMJ
Report this activity for participants receiving services geared towards assessment of a participant's career interests and guidance in the career planning process. Examples of activities include:

- Career assessments, including work ~~patterns~~ styles, skills, and interests; ~~abilities~~
- Educational needs assessments (e.g. TABE Testing) to determine education and training needs for increased employability;
- Career exploration/job shadowing;
- Reviewing labor market information and training opportunities; and
- Career guidance and counseling.

UC – Up-front Career Planning
Valid for the following programs: W-2, CF
Report this activity for applicants who receive up-front services geared toward assessment of an individual's career interests and guidance in the career planning process. Examples of activities include:

- Career assessments, including workstyles, skills, and interests;
- Educational needs assessment (e.g. TABE Testing) to determine education and training needs for increased employability;
- Career exploration/job shadowing;
- Reviewing labor market information and training opportunities; and
- Career guidance and counseling

This activity must be ended at time of W-2 placement.