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family and consumer series

Evaluating Your Agency and Its Services:

A Checklist for Job Seekers with Disabilities

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Introduction

You may be getting services from an agency for a variety of job-related reasons. Perhaps you are looking at what you may be good at, what kind of job you would like, or what is most important to you in a job. Maybe you want some job training or assistance finding jobs, preparing for interviews, following up on job leads, or contacting employers. You may have already found a job with the help of an agency, but you need some additional support at your job site. If you are currently using an agency for help with employment, this checklist can help you make sure you are getting what you need.

We at ICI developed this checklist because we talked to people with disabilities like yourself. ICI asked these individuals about their experiences using agencies that provide employment services as they searched for their jobs. They told us that agencies need five main aspects to be helpful.

Agencies should have:

- 1. A positive agency culture**
The staff are friendly, the building and equipment are accessible, and the job seeker feels comfortable being there.
- 2. Consumer-directedness**
The job seeker participates in all areas of the job search and makes all important decisions. Services are designed for each individual person.
- 3. Access to resources**
The job seeker can use job listings, workshops, computers, and fax machines that match their particular needs.
- 4. Quality personnel**
Staff who work at the agency are available when the job seeker needs them. Staff are also encouraging and make job seekers feel good about themselves.
- 5. Coordinated Services**
When staff from more than one agency work together to try and help the job seeker. The job seeker can use different services to meet different needs.

From these five components, ICI developed the checklist on pages 3 & 4 



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What do we mean by an “agency”?

There are many different types of agencies that help people with disabilities with employment. These include both public (government) and private organizations that provide direct employment support.

Public Government Agencies: There are government agencies specifically for people with disabilities. These include Departments of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD), Mental Health (MH), and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and Agencies for the Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI). Every state has an MR/DD, MH, VR, and BVI agency, although how these services are organized and the types of services they deliver can be very different from state to state. Other agencies provide employment-related services to a variety of people that include people with disabilities, but also other individuals as well. An example is each state’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) agency.

Private Agencies: In addition to government agencies, there are also private agencies that provide services. These agencies are also called community rehabilitation providers, supported employment agencies, and private providers. These agencies usually receive much of their funding from government sources, including the agencies listed above.

In addition to **public government agencies** and **private agencies**, there are also One-Stop Career Centers.

One-Stop Career Centers: One-Stop Career Centers are not actually agencies, but instead consist of a variety of agencies and programs that deliver services at one location. There is a One-Stop Career Center in every major population area of the United States. One-Stops have basic services that are available to anyone, and other services that you may be eligible for as well. One-Stops are operated by both government and private agencies.

(See the resource section at the end of this article on how to find the agencies listed above in your local area.)

What do we mean by “services”?

Each of the agencies listed above provides services that help people with disabilities with employment. These services will be different depending on which agency you are using. In some instances, services may focus on finding a job, while other services may provide help once you already have a job. Others may offer career planning services. In some cases, staff will provide you with extensive help. In other cases, you will be expected to do much on your own, with only some assistance provided. Sometimes services may last only a short time, while other services may last longer. Regardless of what kind of services you are receiving, the most important thing is that these services be useful to you!

What do we mean by the word “counselor”?

In the following checklist, we use the term “counselor”. When we use this word, it means the main person who is providing services to you at your agency. This could be your job developer, employment specialist, job coach, case manager, or caseworker. All of these titles mean the same thing as “counselor” when you are using this checklist.

Evaluating your agency and the employment services being provided

You should have high expectations concerning the services you are receiving from your agency! You should be able to evaluate these services and decide if you are getting the results that you are looking for. It is important to look at such factors as how long it has taken you to find a job or how involved you are in your services. How can you make sure you are getting what you should from your agency? How do you know that the services you are receiving are satisfactory? Maybe you have been thinking you might want to change agencies and you need help deciding. The following checklist can help you examine your current services as you sort through your specific situation.



Checklist: Evaluating Your Agency and Its Services

Instructions: Read each line. Put a check under the “yes” column if you think that line is true in your situation. Put a check under the “no” column if you think that line is not true. The column “NA” means not applicable. Put a check under this column when that line does not apply in your situation.

Positive agency culture—Is my agency a comfortable place?	Yes	No	NA
It is easy to ask for help from staff (other than my counselor)			
People who work in the greeting area are helpful and friendly			
People who work at this agency (other than my counselor) treat me with respect and like an adult			
I feel like I belong at this agency			
The agency’s building is physically accessible			
Consumer-directedness—How much control and “say” do I have about my services?	Yes	No	NA
I have a choice of what kind of services I want to receive			
I have a choice of which staff I work with			
I have a choice of how I want to search for a job (calling employers that I find in the phone book or want ads, going to job clubs, looking at newspapers)			
I can easily say yes or no to anything related to my job search			
I am asked if services have been helpful to me			
I make all important decisions in my job search			
I get job leads that match my interests			
I am able to do more on my own because I have learned a lot from the services I have received			
Access to resources—What services are available to me and are they useful?	Yes	No	NA
All of the services this agency provides were described to me when I first went there			
I am able to find assistance with other things that may affect my being able to work like Social Security benefits, transportation, health benefits, or day care			
This agency provides assistance with basic job search techniques such as developing job leads, resume writing, interviewing, and others			
I am able to access information about specific jobs through a variety of methods such as networking, job postings, job clubs, newspapers, or the internet			
I am able to access training that teaches me new skills			
I get chances to meet with employers to learn about possible jobs			



Checklist: Evaluating Your Agency and Its Services

Quality personnel—How happy am I with my counselor?	Yes	No	NA
My counselor gives me the chance to learn about different kinds of jobs			
My counselor thinks it is okay if I change my mind			
My counselor takes the time to get to know me			
My counselor helps me decide what the best job for me would be			
My counselor helps me develop a plan for getting the best job for me			
My counselor meets me whenever I want, even if it is at night or early			
My counselor meets me at locations that are convenient for me (home, coffee shops, etc.)			
My counselor helps me look for jobs that match my interests and goals			
My counselor calls me regularly just to check in			
My counselor tries to make me feel good about myself			
My counselor and I work well together in making decisions and plans			
My counselor and I are on the same level, and s/he does not look down on me			
Coordinated services—Is my agency working with other agencies that can assist me?	Yes	No	NA
Staff <i>know</i> about other agencies (support groups, advocacy, and self-help groups) that can assist me outside of this agency			
Staff <i>help me find</i> other assistance, outside of my agency, if I need it			
Staff at this agency have asked about people from other agencies who are currently assisting me			
Staff at this agency <i>talk on the phone</i> with people from other agencies to best help me find a job			
Staff at this agency <i>meet with</i> people from other agencies to best help me find a job			
Staff only contact people from other agencies when I say it is okay			

How did your agency and its services measure up?

Now that you have completed the checklist, look over the results. If you found yourself making quite a few checks under the “no” column, you might want to look at your situation a little further. Is the quality of your services acceptable to you? Has the agency helped you make satisfactory progress in reaching your employment goal? If after answering this checklist you feel that the services you are receiving have not helped you find the type of employment you want, or you are

First, determine exactly what you are not happy with

If the checklist helps you to realize that you are not happy with your services, you should determine specifically what you are not happy about. Take a closer look at the checklist, and identify your main area(s) of concern.

not getting enough or the right kind of assistance, there are some strategies to consider...

Strategy number one: Try and work it out

Once you have determined what

aspects of the services you are not happy with, talk with your counselor about it. You need to be clear about what you want, and ensure that your choices and rights are respected. Get involved, take responsibility, and don't automatically assume that it is all the counselor's fault. However, while you must advocate for your needs, talk to your counselor in a way that is mature and respectful. Consider Ted's story (*on the right*).

Strategy number two: Ask for a different counselor

You may want to think about this strategy especially if you checked “no” quite a bit in the quality personnel section, but you checked “yes” a lot in all the other sections. This might mean you like the agency that you are using, but you are less satisfied with your counselor. You may need to speak to a manager in order to switch counselors. Requests for staff changes are not unusual. Sometimes a fresh start with someone new is a good idea. In discussing your situation, try to be specific about what you are unhappy with, and suggest ways to improve things and make you happier with the services you are receiving. In many cases the situation can be resolved simply by making the agency aware, and this is often the easiest and quickest solution for all involved.

Ted's Story

Ted is interested in the recreation field and yet his counselor kept giving him job leads not related to recreation. Ted wanted to communicate his feelings of frustration. He took some time and thought about his situation. He calmly said to his counselor, “Thanks for getting me job leads and for working hard. However, I really want a job in the recreation field. Is there a reason why you keep finding jobs in other fields?” Ted's comments are productive. He clarifies his interest in the recreation field. From there, he tries to understand why the counselor may be suggesting other options. Ted's approach is firm and direct, but still positive. This helps to create a better understanding between Ted and his counselor.

Helpful hint: If you need to talk to your counselor about something that is bothering you, practice role-playing with a friend or family member whom you can trust. Ask this trusted person for advice and suggestions to make your point in the most useful way possible!

Strategy number three: Consider switching agencies

You may want to think about this strategy if you checked “no” a lot in all the sections. This may mean that the agency, its services, and your counselor are not satisfying to you. Whether or not switching agencies is an option, and how simple or complicated this would be, depends on how services are being funded, what other services you may be eligible for, and what service alternatives are available. However, you may be pleasantly surprised to find that you can take the funding connected with your services and move it elsewhere, or that you are eligible for services from another agency. It is worth speaking to funding agencies and advocacy groups to find out what service alternatives may be available. See the attached insert for more information.

Strategy number four: Use multiple agencies

You may want to think about this strategy if you checked “no” in the coordinated services section. This may mean that you are not using all the services that are available to you. *(A wide variety of service combinations are available. See the box on right.)* You may not realize that more than one agency can assist you in finding employment. Receiving services from more than one agency can be helpful because one agency may not have all the services you are looking for. Some agencies have more expertise in one area than another, and you will not be “putting all your eggs in one basket.” In addition, one agency may have a waiting list for services while another may not. If an agency states that services are not currently available, it’s important to check alternatives. The more you reach out to different agencies, the more resources you will have available to help in your job search. *(See page 7 for more information about what agencies are available to you.)*

Strategy number five: If all else fails, use a grievance or complaint procedure

If all else fails and you still feel unsatisfied, or worse, that your rights have been violated, you can use a formal grievance procedure. The availability of these procedures should be discussed with you during one of your first meetings with the staff, and information about complaint procedures should be posted in the agency. If this information is not provided, feel free to ask for it.

Examples of grievance or complaint procedures include the Client Assistance Program (CAP) for the public Vocational Rehabilitation program *(see page 7)* and the Equal Opportunity Office and U.S. Department of Labor Office of Civil Rights in the One-Stop system. Typically such procedures involve an organization outside the agency that helps to resolve the situation. A private agency, they may have similar procedures, but you may have to contact the state agency that pays for the private agency’s services.

Conclusion

It is important to think about the services you are receiving and whether or not they are useful to you. You can hold on to this checklist and refer to it at any point while you are receiving employment services from any agency. Remember, all agencies are there to help you, but you are responsible for your part. If you are unhappy with your services, let someone know. You have the right to set up and receive services in the way that is most beneficial to you. Good luck in your job search!

A wide variety of service combinations are available. The following are some ideas and examples:

- Anyone can get basic job seeking assistance from a One-Stop Center. These Centers must have “core” services that are “universally accessible,” meaning that anyone can use them. Although these services often are provided with a low level of staff assistance, they can be helpful to individuals who are good at locating resources and making choices on their own. One-Stop Centers also have more “intensive” services that you may be eligible for. You can use a One-Stop in combination with other services you are receiving.
- Some agencies may be better at helping to figure out the best type of job for you, while others may be better at helping to find a job or helping on-the-job. Some agencies provide other services besides employment, such as housing assistance. Many states have flexible funding arrangements that allow consumers to switch agencies for different services.
- Social Security Work Incentives (such as PASS & IRWE) can fund services for employment and career development, and can be used to fund specific aspects of services (such as assessment, training, or job support). These can be used in conjunction with all other types of services.
- The Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work Program is currently available in 13 states, and will be available across the country by 2004. Anyone receiving SSI and SSDI benefits can participate in this program and receive services from any other agency.
- You may want help understanding the effects of work on your SSI or SSDI benefits. Most areas have special benefits counselors available who can help you. You can receive this help no matter where else you receive services.

The following table lists state agencies that provide employment support. Remember, many of these state agencies will refer you to a community rehabilitation provider for services. In addition, there are legal resources that may be helpful. Each of the state agencies listed has local offices. You can also find these offices using the “Government” section of your phone book, or through your state’s web site at www.state.____.us (replace the underline with the state’s postal abbreviation).

STATE AGENCIES THAT PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT		
Agency	Type of Services	Contact information
State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VR)	Employment counseling for people with disabilities. Services are designed for each individual person. Often, VR can help by purchasing more intensive services.	www.nchrtm.okstate.edu/pages/state_VR.html
State Mental Retardation/ Developmental Disabilities Agency	Services may include help with finding jobs, transportation, and personal and living supports for people with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities. Mostly these services take place at a local service provider level.	National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) (703) 683-4202 (v) www.nasddd.org/MemberAgencies/index.shtml
State Mental Health Agency	Services may include help with finding jobs, transportation, and personal and living supports for people with mental illness and addictions.	National Association of State Mental Health Project Directors (NASMHPD) (703) 739-9333 (v) www.nasmhpd.org/members.htm
One-Stop Centers and America’s Workforce Network	Employment resources such as job listings, job-finding workshops, and access to computers, copiers, and faxes that can help in the job search for all job seekers.	America’s Service Locator 1-877-US2-JOBS (1-877-872-5627) www.servicelocator.org
Social Security Administration (SSA)	Provides health insurance and cash benefits to people with disabilities who meet certain qualifications. Current policy allows recipients to maintain some benefits while working. SSA can refer you to counselors who can help you understand your benefits.	Office of Employment Support Programs (410) 965-5381 (v), (410) 325-0778 (TTY) Office of Disability www.ssa.gov/work (800) 772-1213 (v); (800) 325-0778 (TTY)
Agency for the Blind and Visually Impaired	Services may include help with finding jobs, transportation, and personal and living supports for people who are visually impaired.	www.nchrtm.okstate.edu/pages/state_VR.html
Department of Veteran’s Affairs	Services assist veterans with disabilities with employment.	Department of Veteran’s Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (800) 827-1000 (v) www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/index.htm
LEGAL RESOURCES		
State Protection & Advocacy Programs	Provides protection of the rights of people with disabilities through legal advocacy. Helpful for when questions arise about disability rights and legal issues.	Natl. Assoc. of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS) (202) 408-9514(v); (202) 408-9521(TTY) www.protectionandadvocacy.com
Client Assistance Programs	Provides advocacy to people who are not satisfied with services from their public Vocational Rehabilitation agency.	Go to your state’s web site at www.state.____.us (insert your state’s postal code) www.nchrtm.okstate.edu/pages/state_VR.html
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund	Provides general information and resources on the legal rights of people with disabilities.	(510) 644-2555 (v/TTY) ADA Hotline: (800) 466-4232 (v/TTY) E-mail: dredf@dredf.org www.dredf.org

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can be found on the web at:
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Understanding the SSI Work Incentives.
Fact Sheet (November 2001)

Quality Employment Services: Will You Know
It When You See It?
Institute Brief (January 2001)

One-Stop Centers: A Guide for Job Seekers
with Disabilities.
Tools for Inclusion (November 2000)

Networking: A Consumer Guide to an
Effective Job Search.
Tools for Inclusion (January 1999)

Helpful Hints: How to Fill Out a Winning
PASS Application.
Tools for Inclusion (July 1999)

**This publication will be made available
in alternate formats upon request.**

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