

June 23, 2010

Notes from Brownfields Professional Learning Community (PLC) Session #23

Session leader: Mike Senew

Topic: Student Recruitment and Assessment – marketing, awareness, participant recruitment strategies, application process, student assessment, physical and academic requirements, student retention, and evaluation

NOTES FROM SESSION 23

Assessment tests for participant candidates are essential for the following reasons:

- They help determine if program participants are at a sufficient academic level to successfully complete the course of study. If not, retention and program completion rates often trend lower.
- Assessment tests assist in determining the scope and nature of remedial and life skills training that may be required as part of an overall individualized job training learning plan.
- Assessment tests aid the organization of classes such that students are at the same or near the same level of knowledge and learning ability. It is important not to slow the learning pace of the entire class to the speed of the slowest participant.
- Assessment tests assist in determining the types of jobs participants will be best qualified for upon graduation. Placement activities can begin early with a solid profile of participant backgrounds, skills, and abilities.

Minimum entrance requirements vary from program to program. Some require high school diplomas, others a General Educational Development (GED) diploma. Employers may require a high school diploma or GED as a condition of employment. If this is the case, students may need developmental education as a supplement to the Brownfields Job Development and Training program. It is not unusual for a participant to also be involved in additional education or life skills training as part of an overall job development/training package. It should be noted that life skills training costs are not chargeable to EPA Brownfields Job Training grants and must be leveraged with partnerships from other programs.

Student Assessment Instruments

Many Brownfields Job Development and Training programs use the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) as a guide in establishing minimum requirements for entry into the program. However, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has removed the TABE from the approved list of tests that can be used to determine benefit eligibility. If this is of concern, you may wish to consider one of the seven approved instruments.

American College Testing or ACT's COMPASS test, for example, is on the list. But it may not apply to all Brownfields training programs since each program sets its own entry prerequisites. Programs are free to target special groups, such as disabled, chronically unemployed, or underemployed. Entrance requirements should be determined on a program-by-program basis, depending upon the curriculum and type of jobs targeted.

King County Jobs Initiative, for example, targets a low-income, disadvantaged population. They require minimally that candidates can pass a Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System

(CASAS) (test which typically requires a ninth grade education) and a drug test. They also have requirements that clients reside in the county.

Groundwork Providence requires that candidates are TABE tested. They must perform at grade seven to be eligible for the program. This is required even if the participant has a college degree. This assures that all who are participating have the ability to read and understand the required materials.

Others have similar requirements to King County or Groundwork Providence but also include current driver's license or ability to get one (for heavy equipment operators' certification). If they do not have a GED or diploma, they must be enrolled in a GED program to participate in the training. Trainees must also agree to random substance testing.

Not all programs require participants to be drug-free prior to entry. All, however, require participants to become drug-free as a condition of graduation.

To find out more about assessment tests, see the following Web sites:

- GED (American Council on Education): <http://www.acenet.edu/clll/ged/index.cfm>
- CASAS: <https://www.casas.org>
- COMPASS (COMputer-adapted Placement Assessment and Support Services): <http://www.act.org/compass/index.html>

Physical Assessment

Depending upon the curriculum, program participants may need to employ respirators, particularly in the case of Hazardous Wastesite Worker (HAZWOPER) training. Spill response and environmental cleanup require special protective gear. If you wear an SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus), you must complete a physical examination as breathing can be difficult in this protective gear.

Environmental workers must enter confined spaces. Small, and sometimes, underground or dark places including tanks must be inspected and cleaned. Confined space entry is a key component of many Brownfield Job Development and Training programs. Asbestos and lead workers perform activities with their arms elevated for long periods of time wearing protective clothing. Strong physical attributes and the ability to work in closed and sometimes hot or humid space are physical requirements for this occupation. Additional protective gear is required in other remediation activities. Trainees need to be screened to ensure their safety when wearing protective clothing and undertaking strenuous activity.

Prior to respirator fit tests – Programs need to have physical assessments, approving students for respirator safety.

Special populations including pregnant women, and those with disabilities or heart issues can still participate in training programs, but must receive an individualized learning plan excluding training requiring unapproved physical activity.

As previously discussed, employers will not hire graduates who cannot pass a drug test. It should be made clear as a program expectation that your students must be drug-free. Positive tests can be an option for program entry, but are not an option for graduation. If students are not

required to take a drug test as a condition of acceptance, make it perfectly clear that they will not graduate if they test positive for drugs. Graduates with drug issues are "Brownfields job training program killers." Employers will not hire your future graduates if they feel the program has a lax drug policy.

Candidate Interviews and Expectations

Always include a personal interview before accepting a student into the program. Staff active in recruitment and assessment activities will quickly develop an initial impression about candidates, their capabilities, and their attitudes. One-on-one interviews give the candidate a chance to ask questions that have arisen during the application process. It also allows staff the opportunity to learn about special issues, circumstances, or problems that might develop during training and placement. In addition to addressing specific questions, expectations should be discussed at this time. By the end of the interview process, there should be an impression regarding the candidate's attitude, determination, and ability to complete the Brownfields Job Development and Training program.

Acceptance and Student Contracts

Your Brownfields Job Development and Training program staff needs to select a class with the greatest potential for success based on available openings and the results of student applications and assessments. After acceptance, candidates should sign a training agreement, a commitment between the student and trainer itemizing important covenants of the program. Student contracts or training agreements should not be dismissed as unimportant. Contracts may become a basis for dropping a student from the program who has failed to meet expectations or requirements. The student contract needs to address issues regarding attendance, attitude, and responsibilities of students as well as trainers.

Inform unsuccessful candidates why their selection at this time may not be the best fit. In some cases, you may urge students to wait for an opening, reapply, or pursue another program better suited to their interests and abilities.

Additional discussion related to student recruitment can be found at www.ATEEC.org and www.brownfields-toolbox.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next PLC session: Wednesday, July 7, 2010
 2:00 p.m. EDT
Topic: Overview of Brownfields Job Training certifications – Advantages and
 issues associated with participant certification

Feel free to invite a guest! Those who have not previously signed up, please paste <http://tiny.cc/w41fh> in your browser and complete the online form with your contact information.

OR

Send your contact information to Mike Senew at msenew@aol.com.