



TIPS FOR SUCCESS FOR EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENTS

Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs (HVRPs) help job-ready veterans secure competitive employment. Conducting employment readiness assessments is a vital part of the employment assessment process. The concept of job readiness or employment readiness has sometimes been construed in an exclusionary manner. But for programs designed to help people with disabilities or histories of homelessness find and keep integrated employment, readiness assessment is a process that helps them make truly informed employment decisions. Rather than screening out jobseekers who have limited job histories or other major employment barriers, readiness assessment helps them explore the impact a job search and employment are likely to have on their lives. This process better positions them for deciding when to pursue employment and what sort of employment to pursue.

Increasingly, HVRPs encounter veterans who are at various degrees of job readiness, and HVRPs are often in a position of locating services that help veterans enhance their preparations. Sometimes this means enrolling a veteran in HVRP; in other instances it means connecting the veteran to another program or resource such as Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) at the local Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). In other cases, HVRPs may also operate other employment services such as Supported Employment and can readily assist the veteran who may be perceived as less than ready for a competitive job.

HVRPs typically conduct pre-enrollment assessments to identify those veterans most ready for enrollment. Motivation to work and development of motivation are key aspects of employment readiness. They have even been identified as key areas for innovation in the field of supported employment (Drake & Becker, 2008). Much of the readiness assessment process centers on understanding and supporting participant motivation. The following strategies help create a readiness assessment program that is inclusive and supports participants' desire to work.

Take a Comprehensive Approach

Readiness relates to a wide range of both individual and environmental factors. A full assessment draws from as many of these factors as possible to help potential jobseekers truly understand what employment means for them. It offer a full picture of the many resources they have at their disposal. Boston University's Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation suggests the following sub-categories for general rehabilitation readiness assessment. These categories also fit the more-focused task of employment readiness assessment (Farkas, Cohen, McNamara, Nemecek & Cohen, 2000):

- Need, or degree of satisfaction with the status quo (i.e., the person's current work situation)
- Commitment to change, or sense of the importance of change and one's ability to make and sustain change
- Environmental awareness, or understanding of the environment or situation that would likely follow change (e.g., what life will be like as a person who is actively employed)
- Self-awareness, or understanding of one's own strengths, interests, and values
- Personal closeness, or connection and closeness to personal supports (e.g., family, friends)

These categories are part of the Determining Readiness for Employment – Self Assessment Form (Rio, 2009), which programs can use start a full readiness assessment.

Explore Ambivalence

Most major life decisions—even those viewed as very positive—involve some level of trade-off and can lead to mixed emotions and experiences. For people who are unemployed and experiencing homelessness, often along with a psychiatric or related disability, interest in seeking work is often accompanied by many concerns and doubts (Drake & Becker, 2008; Lloyd, 2010). Despite this, the employment assessment process

rarely offers consumers a chance to explore their ambivalence about seeking work (Homelessness Resource Center, 2010). A key step in the readiness assessment process is supporting consumers as they figure out their concerns and fears about employment, as well as aspects of returning to work that they simply aren't looking forward to. This step is not meant to discourage consumers from pursuing employment or dampening enthusiasm and confidence. This step is meant to give jobseekers the chance to fully explore what employment may mean for them and think about strategies for coping with challenging aspects of employment and the job search. As a result, they will enter employment better prepared (Homelessness Resource Center, 2010).

Foster Confidence

Many who are experiencing homelessness and unemployment struggle with less confidence and self-efficacy, particularly pertaining to the job search process.

Programs can help jobseekers gain confidence—and readiness itself—in many ways. They can help jobseekers:

- Increase awareness of the recovery and rehabilitation processes.
- Gain exposure to a range of activities in which they can experience success.
- Gather commitments from friends and family members to provide support through the job search and employment processes. (Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 2003)

Programs that maintain a focus on solutions throughout the readiness assessment process better support consumers as they work through their fears and concerns—without their losing confidence and hope (Homelessness Resource Center, 2010).

Try Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is shown to be as a helpful strategy for general goal assessment for people with psychiatric disabilities (Corrigan, McCracken & Holmes, 1998) and for supported employment practices (Larson, 2008; Secker & Margrove, 2014) and vocational assessment specifically (Drake & Becker, 2008; Lloyd, 2010). Motivational interviewing is particularly well-suited to helping participants identify potential costs of change (e.g., changes in one's daily schedule, being required to meet workplace expectations). Once such costs have been identified, motivational interviewing can help participants balance these costs against likely benefits (Corrigan et al., 1998). As such, it is an ideal approach to managing the ambivalence (discussed above) that may accompany a planned return to the workforce.

Many existing interview protocols and similar tools are aligned with the motivational interviewing framework and can be fused into employment services (see Larson, 2008). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) series offers an installment titled [*Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment*](#), with extensive guidance about motivational interviewing strategies with extensive guidance on motivational interviewing strategies.

Provide Linkage to Benefits Counseling

Much effort and time can be spent establishing eligibility for mainstream benefits and services. This step is vital, as these entitlements—in particular, Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income—are often a lifeline for those who receive them. It is not surprising then, that fear of jeopardizing benefits is a commonly cited barrier to motivation among people thinking about entering the job market.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) offers a range of resources to help beneficiaries understand the impact various employment scenarios may have on their benefits. All of these scenarios are reviewed in the SSA's [*Red Book*](#). The SSA resources can help

jobseekers explore their financial and related needs and develop a clearer picture of what life might look like with a job. This understanding is needed for the sort of informed decision-making that readiness assessment is designed to support. Some evidence suggests that

jobseekers who receive SSA benefits counseling enjoy improved employment outcomes, relative to those who do not receive these services (Tremblay, Smith, Xie & Drake, 2006).

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