



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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January 31, 2008

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From:  **John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations**

Re: New Initiative: TAFDC – Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase One)

Overview

To help applicants and recipients who have identified a medical disability or a learning disability overcome these barriers to employment, DTA will bring vocational specialists to all TAOs on an incremental basis. The vocational specialist will meet with work program required applicants and clients to assess their service needs, barriers to employment and provide coordination to community support services.

The following TAOs will be the first group to receive the vocational specialist: Brockton, Dudley Square, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, New Bedford, North Shore, Revere and Springfield State.

TAO Staff will be notified as each phase of this new initiative begins.

Purpose of Memo

The purpose of this New Initiative memo is to:

- identify clients eligible for a referral to the vocational specialist;
 - inform AU Managers about the vocational specialist's responsibilities; and
 - provide follow up instructions.
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**Vocational
Specialist
Referral Criteria**

The following are the groups of work program required TAFDC applicants and clients who should be referred to the vocational specialist using the Vocational Assessment Referral (Attachment A):

- current clients who are not meeting their work program requirements and who:
 - ✓ have been actively participating in Job Search/Job Readiness for more than 12 weeks without job placement; or
 - ✓ are requesting or have received an extension; or
 - ✓ have multiple barriers to employment including: language barriers, educational barriers, and health/mental health problems; and
- applicants and clients who have documentation of a learning disability or whose learning disability screening score is 12 points or greater as identified on the LD screen on BEACON, indicating that they may have a learning disability.

Note: Each TAO in conjunction with its vocational specialist will evaluate the volume of referrals to the vocational specialist and may expand the targeted referral group to clients who are having difficulty meeting the Work Program requirements because of unidentified barriers.

Referrals to the vocational specialist may be made for applicants or clients who are at the TAO for case maintenance or redeterminations. AU Managers (after determining the vocational specialist's availability) may also schedule an appointment with the vocational specialist for applicants or clients who may benefit from this referral.

For the applicant or client who is at the TAO for case maintenance or a redetermination, once he or she is identified by his or her AU Manager as a candidate for referral, the client should be brought by the AU Manager to the vocational specialist for an assessment. If the vocational specialist is busy at that time, an appointment must be scheduled by the vocational specialist for the client.

**Vocational
Specialist
Responsibilities**

The responsibilities of the vocational specialist include:

- evaluating the skills and interests of applicants and clients and developing (with input from the AU Manager) individualized service plans;
- identifying applicant's and client's barriers to employment (with input from the AU Manager, as needed), and coordinating services to break down those barriers;
- serving as a liaison between the AU Manager and the ESP provider;
- coordinating appropriate ESP referrals with AU Managers for applicants and clients;
- networking with community support and employment programs to facilitate rapid access to services;
- making a referral to appropriate community supports/services following TAO procedures;
- returning the Vocational Assessment Referral (Attachment A) with the referral outcome noted in Part 2 of the form; and

Note: If during the course of the appointment with the vocational specialist, the applicant or client self-identifies an ADA accommodation need or the vocational specialist determines an ADA accommodation need, this will be noted on the Vocational Assessment Referral. The AU Manager must take immediate steps to process the ADA accommodation following procedures in Field Operations Memo 2007-8.

- further screening and assessing applicants and clients who have been referred by the AU Manager because he or she received a score of 12 points or greater on his or her Learning Disability screening in BEACON, or who have verified for DTA that they have been diagnosed with a learning disability (see Field Operations Memo 2005-58).
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**Follow Up
Procedures**

If the applicant or client leaves the TAO prior to scheduling an appointment or meeting with a vocational specialist or does not keep the scheduled appointment made by the AU Manager, the vocational specialist will make two attempts (by telephone) within 5 business days to reach the applicant/client and schedule an appointment.

If the vocational specialist is unable to contact the applicant or client, the vocational specialist will e-mail the AU Manager and his or her supervisor and advise them of this. The AU Manager must schedule an appointment with the client to discuss the reasons for not meeting with the vocational specialist. If the client fails to keep this appointment, he or she must continue to meet his or her work program requirements or be sanctioned for failure to meet the work program requirements.

IMPORTANT: If the client was being referred to the vocational specialist for a Learning Disability assessment, the AU Manager must follow the established Learning Disability process (i.e., await the return of the Learning Disability assessment) and process the request following established procedures, if the applicant or client screened positive for a learning disability. See Field Operations Memo 2005-58 for Learning Disability procedures.

If the applicant or client keeps the appointment or meeting with the vocational specialist, the AU Manager will:

- receive an e-mail status update from the vocational specialist when the applicant/client has agreed to work on a service plan. The AU Manager's supervisor will also receive a copy of the e-mail update. While the vocational specialist is working with the applicant or client, the applicant or client must be given good cause for failure to meet the work program requirement or given the "Meets Compliance" reason of "Site orientation > 15 days" with an end date of one month from the referral date, as appropriate. This reason is being used because there is currently no other reason which applies. On the BEACON Narratives tab, the AU Manager must enter the following: "Meets Compliance see New Initiative Memo dated 1/31/08." Once a service plan is developed, the vocational specialist will schedule a meeting with the AU Manager to review the plan.
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**Follow Up
Procedures
(continued)**

- receive a copy of the current completed Learning Disability Evaluation Referral Form from the vocational specialist explaining the outcome of the assessment, including whether the applicant or client wishes to proceed with the assessment or not. The learning disability referral process will be completed at this point by the AU Manager following established procedures (see Field Operations Memo 2005-58).

Note: If the applicant or client is referred for a full DES learning disability assessment, the AU Manager will receive the status update from DES.

In all of these follow-up situations once contacted with the results of the referral, the AU Manager must process the AU following established procedures.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.

Vocational Assessment Referral

Part 1: To be completed by AU Manager

Name of AU Manager: _____

AU Manager Phone: _____

Client Name: _____

Client Phone Number: _____

This applicant/client is being referred to the Vocational Specialist for:

____ The applicant/client self identified a disability or has requested a medical Good Cause.

____ The applicant/client has been given a disability screening using the BEACON Learning Disability Screening tool, has scored 12 or higher and is interested in receiving a further learning disability assessment. (Attach the Learning Disability Evaluation Form (pages 1-3) or the MRC Referral Form)

____ TAFDC client is having difficulty meeting Work Program requirements.

Applicant/client is: Work hours required _____

 Months left _____

***** Please attach a copy of the most recent application or reevaluation form.**

Part 2: To be completed by Vocational Specialist

This applicant/client should be referred to the following community support/services program:

This applicant/client should be referred to the following ESP activity:

This applicant/client has self-identified an ADA accommodation or I have observed the need for an ADA accommodation. The ADA accommodation is _____

_____.

The Vocational Specialist appreciates your referral. We will get back to you via e-mail with a status update very soon. Please feel free to call us or come by anytime.