



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street • Boston, MA 02111

DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
Secretary

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
Lieutenant Governor

JULIA E. KEHOE
Commissioner

Field Operations Memo 2008-12
March 24, 2008

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From: John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: TAFDC – Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase Two)

Overview

In an effort to achieve our goal of increasing economic opportunities for our clients, the Department has developed a Vocational Specialist Program in our TAOs. The vocational specialists will help applicants and clients overcome barriers to employment by meeting with work program required applicants and clients to assess their service needs, barriers to employment and to provide coordination with community support services.

The New Initiatives Memo entitled “TAFDC – Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase One)” dated January 31, 2008, introduced TAO Staff to the vocational specialist initiative. This memo informed TAO Staff about vocational specialists being placed in the Brockton, Dudley Square, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, New Bedford, North Shore, Revere and Springfield State TAOs. Beginning March 31, 2008 (on an incremental basis), the following TAOs will next receive their vocational specialist: Fitchburg and Framingham will each receive a full-time worker, while Greenfield, Milford, Southbridge, Taunton, Plymouth, North Adams, Pittsfield, Falmouth and Hyannis will each receive a part-time worker. TAO Staff will be notified of the specific arrival dates of the vocational specialists.

This will complete the state-wide roll-out of vocational specialists in TAOs.

Purpose of Memo

The purpose of this Field Operations 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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Obsolete Memo

This Field Operations Memo obsoletes the New Initiative Memo entitled "New Initiative: TAFDC – Vocational Specialists in TAOs (Phase One)" dated January 31, 2008.

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.

**Vocational
Specialist
Referral Criteria
(continued)**

Referrals to the vocational specialist may be made for applicants or clients who are at the TAO for case maintenance or re-evaluations of eligibility. 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.

An applicant or client who is at the TAO for case maintenance or an eligibility re-evaluation, once identified by his or her AU Manager as a candidate for referral, 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.

Note: While the vocational specialists will help work program required applicants and clients overcome barriers to employment, any TAFDC applicant or client facing barriers to employment may be referred to the vocational specialist.

**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;
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**Vocational
Specialist
Responsibilities
(continued)**

- 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 a score of 12 points or greater was achieved on the 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 specialist, the 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, he or she will e-mail the AU Manager and supervisor to advise. The AU Manager must schedule an appointment with the client to discuss the reasons for not meeting with the vocational specialist. If the work program required client fails to keep this appointment, he or she must meet his or her work program requirements or be subject to sanctions for failure to meet the requirements.

IMPORTANT: If the applicant or 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.

**Follow Up
Procedures
(continued)**

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

- receive an e-mail status update from the vocational specialist when the applicant or 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, a work program required 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 as an interim process until a BEACON reason is added. On the BEACON Narratives tab, the AU Manager must enter the following: "Meets Compliance - FO Memo 2008-12." Once a service plan is developed, the vocational specialist will schedule a meeting with the AU Manager to review the plan.
- 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 Number: _____

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.