

IEP Development

IEP PURPOSE

- 1. The IEP gives the participant a plan for using the program successfully. Having a good plan in place is an important step in achieving a successful outcome. If you want your participants to be successful in the program then they need to have a plan for success. The IEP gives them that plan.
- 2. The IEP sets expectations toward which the participant can strive and achieve. A properly completed IEP will provide the participant with a clear series of specific action steps they are expected to undertake.
- 3. The IEP builds self-esteem in the participant. An IEP with short-term, attainable goals will give the participant things to achieve, and when they achieve them they will start realizing that they can accomplish things - thus building self-esteem

IEP PURPOSE

- 4. The IEP gives the program a guide for effectively helping the participant. An IEP with specific action steps gives the program a guide to what they need to do to help that particular participant be successful.
- 5. The IEP increases the number of unsubsidized placements and success stories. When both the participant and the program specifically know what they need to do to be successful more participants will be successful and obtain unsubsidized employment or some other measure of success.
- The IEP is not simply a document for program auditors to find. Done properly, the IEP can be the key to a very successful program.

IEP PREPARATION

A successful IEP does not just happen. It requires preparation leading up to it. Participants must first be prepared with the right message during recruitment and orientation. A lot a various information must be gathered and available when writing an IEP. And, of course, a thorough assessment of the participant is crucial to writing a good IEP.

IEP PREPARATION

- Recruit people who want to get somewhere
- **Preparing the participant for writing an effective IEP starts with recruitment methods and, more importantly, your recruitment message. If recruitment methods are used that bring applicants looking for a long-term entitlement, or are otherwise resistant to setting goals for themselves, it will be a lot harder to write effective IEPs. If recruitment messages are used that emphasize the temporary, training nature of the program, you are more likely to get applicants who want to figure out how to move through the program to something better.**
- **To do an effective IEP you need to recruit participants who want to use the program to get somewhere - such as a job. Then the idea of writing a plan for them to get there won't be as difficult. So you need to use recruitment strategies & messages that will attract job seekers that will complete steps and progress through the program.**

IEP Training Sites

- Training sites must be supportive of IEPs
- In addition to having participants who want to use the program to get somewhere you also need to have training sites that will support their plans and their efforts to get to their goal. So it is vitally important to develop training sites that will support and encourage the IEP goals of the participant(s) assigned to them.

IEP

At the very least a program should work on developing more potential training. This gives the project more options for moving participants to training sites better suited to their IEP. It also puts the program in a much stronger bargaining position when dealing with training sites. If a training site knows that they are in competition to keep the participant(s) assigned to them they will be much more inclined to provide the support the participant needs to accomplish their IEP goals. And the program can be much more selective when deciding where to place a participant, and can be placing participants in the training site best suited for achieving their IEP goals.

IEP

- The participant must be prepared for the IEP
- Does the participant understand the need for them to progress through the program? Do they understand why you are having the IEP conversation? Have the program and the IEP process been properly explained to them? Have they had time to think about what might go into their IEP?
- Be very clear about what you expect them to do in the program. Stress the IEP and job development aspects of the program and then constantly reinforce these expectations throughout their time in the program.

IEP

- Staff must be prepared for the IEP
- An effective IEP process consist of interviewing, counseling and documenting details. Staff should be trained in basic interviewing and counseling skills.
- The staff person should be prepare for each individual IEP. Review the records of the participant, especially the assessments, to see what it might tell you about that person. Review any notes or memories of that participant for clues to how they might react during the IEP discussion. The staff person needs to anticipate any questions the participant might raise or any barriers the participant might throw up. Anticipating and preparing for any such barriers will help the staff person help the participant explore ways to overcome those barriers.

IEP

- The counseling which staff needs to provide may include the need to discuss delicate or embarrassing subjects such as personal hygiene, health conditions, living situations, substance abuse problems, etc. Whenever such a situation arises it is helpful to think through how such a discussion might go in advance, or to otherwise prepare yourself in advance. Such preparation won't make the discussion easy, but it will make it easier.

A thorough Assessment is crucial

The IEP is a plan to get the participant from where they are to where they want to be (their goal). It is very difficult, if not impossible, to tell someone how to get to where they want to be if you do not know where they are in the first place. A good assessment tells you where the participant is - their starting point. If you know their starting point and their goal you can start to figure out the necessary steps to get them from their starting point to their goal. These steps is what constitutes their IEP. So the importance of a thorough assessment cannot be under-stated.

Writing The IEP

Effective Content

Tip #1: Envision the IEP as directions on a road map

The IEP is, essentially, directions on how to get from one place to another. In this case it is directions for the participant to get from where they are at – their assessment, to where they want to be – their goal. So it is helpful to envision the IEP as directions on a road map.

Writing The IEP



SMART

- Tip #2: Remember and use the SMART principle
- An effective IEP utilizes the SMART principle. It sets out goals and action steps which are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time driven.

SPECIFIC

Our final analogy with directions on a map has to do with being specific. Imagine that the driver to whom you are giving directions has absolutely no sense of direction, and is not intuitive in any way. For them, you need to give directions in very specific detail. An effective IEP is the same way. It will spell out, in very specific detail, exactly what the participant needs to do.

SPECIFIC

The participant must have a specific goal so that they are very clear about what it is they are trying to achieve. The steps must be very specific so that they know exactly what it is they need to do to achieve their goal. For instance – an action step that simply says the participant will do job search is very vague, and can mean many different things to different people. To you it may mean that they will be contacting employers, but to them it may mean reading the want ads in the paper once a week. If you want them to contact employers then say “contact employers.” If you want them to contact employers and submit an application then say you want them to “contact employers and submit an application.” If you want them to contact employers and submit applications for clerical jobs then the IEP should say they will “to contact employers and submit applications for clerical jobs.” (IEPs which state a goal of “getting a job” without even specifying an occupation are probably the most common error made when writing IEPs.) Remember. the more specific you can be the more effective the IEP will be.

SPECIFIC

Each Specific Action Plan needs to be extremely specific about what the participant is expected to do. Being extremely specific gives them very clear direction as to what they need to do, and also gives them very little "wiggle room" for not doing it. Break down each plan into as many specific steps as possible – the more specific the better. For instance, a Specific Action Plan about getting a GED could have the following action steps: Step 1 would specify which school to go to, which class or program to en-roll in, and when to enroll in the class/program; Step 2 could specify when to attend classes, and how many classes need to be attended by a certain date; Step 3 could specify how much home-work should be done, and by when. (This is just an example of one possible way to approach the Specific Action Plan.)

MEASURABLE

The participant cannot know if they have achieved a goal or completed a step unless it is somehow measurable. The measuring can be as simple a yes/no answer to the question of completing a step (i.e.: did they learn a specific skill, or did they enroll in a class).

ATTAINABLE

The goal and the specific steps should be realistically attainable within the time frame. The participant should reach to get beyond where they are now. (Remember, self growth is the whole point of the program.) However, if they try to reach unrealistically too high they could be setting themselves up for failure. If there are only five employers for the type of job they want within a reasonable distance of where they live an IEP which requires them to contact ten employers is setting up an unattainable goal. The more common mistake here, however, would be an IEP focusing on getting a job for which they are not yet qualified, because they have not yet been trained in the skills they need. An effective IEP would focus on the training first, and on getting the job later.

ATTAINABLE

Begin from the point where they are currently at. Do not write an IEP that is too far off into the future. Write an IEP that deals with where they are now, and what the next step is that they need to take to start them on their journey. Focus on that first step, or first few steps. Do not focus on that long range goal they can-not even see from where they are at. Rather, focus on taking them through the steps – the roads - that will lead them to where they can see that long range goal.

Set attainable benchmarks for the participant to achieve, and then congratulate them when they achieve that benchmark. For instance, if they want to work in an office, but never graduated high school, they should probably get their GED first. So set that as the first benchmark. Just as one might measure miles on a map, setting

Relevant

The steps to be undertaken must be relevant to the goal stated. While the participant may be doing lots of things the action steps should focus on what they will do to achieve their goal. And their goal should be relevant to the reason(s) they are on the program. For example, an IEP with a goal of getting a clerical job, should not contain an action step about taking an art class. While such a class may be desirable for its own reasons it is not relevant to the goal, and will distract the participant from the goal. The purpose of an effective IEP is to get the participant to focus on what they need to do to reach their goal.

REALISTIC

The goal and the specific steps should be realistically attainable within the time frame. The participant should reach to get beyond where they are now. (Remember, self growth is the whole point of the program.) However, if they try to reach unrealistically too high they could be setting themselves up for failure. The more common mistake would be an IEP focusing on getting a job for which they are not yet qualified, because they have not yet been trained in the skills they need. An effective IEP would focus on the training first, and on getting the job later.

TIME DRIVEN

An effective IEP has timelines. The expectation must be set that a particular action step will be accomplished by a particular date. And, in an effective IEP timelines are set out as specific deadline dates. So set deadlines in the IEP so that the participant knows by when they need to do something. This will make it much more concrete and real to them.

Unless specific dates are set for when each step will be completed then the IEP and Specific Action Plan is meaningless. Remember, this is a commitment for the participant to do certain things by certain dates. As we all know, it is simple human nature to do those things which have concrete deadlines before we do those things without deadlines. And the more concrete the deadline is the better. (Tomorrow never comes, and next week or next month are always sometime in the future.) A concrete date, which can be found on a calendar, is the most effective way to state the deadline.

Cover relevant areas in logical order

The IEP is designed to promote a discussion of various areas where the participant may need to work. It is best if these areas can be covered in a logical order. Some of these areas, in a logical order, could be as follows:

- Training prior to reporting to training site
- Supportive services
- Occupational assessment / establishing a job goal
- Reassignment to new training site
- On-the-job training
- In-service training
- Adult basic education
- Job skills training
- Job search training
- Job search activities

Get the participant's "buy-in" to their IEP

The IEP is a negotiated agreement between the participant and the program detailing what the participant will do for their development, and what the program will do to assist them in that effort. It is therefore imperative that the IEP be written with the full participation of the participant. If for no other reason, the participant has to be part of developing their IEP so that they will "buy into it" and give it their full effort.

Follow-up

The IEP is meaningless unless there is effective follow-up to it. The IEP is not meant to be a document to be filled out and filed away. It is a living, working plan for how each individual participant will get the most out of the program. As such, the IEP should be incorporated into most everything that project staff do with the participant,

Follow-up is ongoing & positive - Don't wait for failure

- Keep track of all important dates in the IEP, and check prior to deadlines to make sure the participant is doing what they should be doing, and committed to doing. An effective IEP process requires extensive follow-up to make sure things are happening as they need to be happening. An effective IEP is not about playing “gotch ya” after the participant failed to do something – it is about making sure they do it to begin with. IEP follow-up should be part of every visit, especially quarterly monitoring visits, to the training site. It should also be part of most discussions held.

IEP

It is important to remember that the IEP is about being successful in the program. It is important not only to stay on top of the participant to make sure they are doing what they need to do, but also so you can intervene to help them be successful when it becomes necessary to do so. Helping them achieve their goals is what the program is there for. And, if it becomes apparent that the goals and action steps are not attainable by the participant it is important to reevaluate those goals and action steps, and rewrite the IEP with goal and action steps which are attainable.

Some points to remember for writing effective IEPs are:

1. Participants need to be prepared to do an IEP. This starts with a recruitment message and orientation that stresses that this is a dynamic program about helping them reach goals. It continues with giving them a chance to think about their goals before doing an IEP. And it involves a thorough assessment of the participant having to know where they are starting.
2. The staff must be prepared to do the IEP. This includes knowing IEP procedures and forms. It also means getting to know the participant they are helping develop an IEP, and preparing to address any barriers they may have, and/or preparing to discuss any delicate subjects that may need to be addressed. Most importantly, they must know all the local resources that can be used to help the participant complete their action steps and achieve their goals.

Some points to remember for writing effective IEPs are:

3. The staff must engage the participant in a conversation and make use of various counseling skills. Such skills include: Attending, Active Listening, Asking Questions and Avoiding Roadblocks. They must have the participant's confidence and trust to be successful.
4. Each IEP should be written as specifically as possible. The SMART acronym should be used to make sure the goals and action steps are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time Driven.

Some points to remember for writing effective IEPs are:

5. There should be a succession of specific short-term IEP goals with each one moving the participant one step closer to their ultimate goal (hopefully a job). The timing of each IEP should be determined by the action steps involved, not by an arbitrary limit.
6. If a participant has trouble articulating a goal staff should explore to determine the reason why, and then apply the response appropriate to that reason.
7. The participant must “buy-in” to their IEP. They must be committed to achieving it.

Some points to remember for writing effective IEPs are:

- The IEP should determine most everything the participant does while they are in the program, especially their host agency/training site assignment.
- 9. There can be no follow-up unless a specific, measurable, time driven IEP was written to begin with.
- 10. Follow-up should be ongoing, not waiting for a three-month monitoring visit, and should occur in time for the participant to successfully complete their action step by the deadline.

Questions