

Program Staff Case Study Interview Guide

In-depth case studies will be conducted at up to 15 evaluation sites and will examine selected participants and their corresponding case manager to understand how program staff addressed a specific case, how the participant viewed the specific services and assistance received, and the extent to which program services addressed participant needs and circumstances. For each site, one-on-one interviews will be conducted with six participants (each 90 minutes in length), with separate one-on-one interviews with their respective case managers (60 minutes in length). These differ from staff interviews focused on program operations in contrast to these interviews which will focus on how the staff member handled a specific case. The case studies will provide examples of how the program worked for specific cases, and will enhance the overall understanding of program operations, successes, and challenges.

Introductory statement for staff: The Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) study is being conducted by MDRC/Abt/MEF Associates, under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The study aims to build evidence on the effectiveness of innovative programs designed to boost employment and earnings among low-income Americans. As part of this evaluation, evaluation staff members will visit each of the study sites. A major aim of the evaluation is to identify lessons learned from your experiences in implementing the projects evaluated under this initiative. In conducting site visits to each of the programs, we are interviewing some participants about their experiences with the program and jobs. We'd like to talk with you to learn more about the service delivery of your program model and understand how it operates, as well as to hear about your work with a specific participant [name]. Our aim is to learn from your experiences, not audit or judge your programs. The interview will take about 1 hour.

Privacy Statement: Before beginning the interview, I (we) want to thank you for agreeing to participate in the BEES study. I (we) know that you are busy and we will try to be as focused as possible. We have many questions and are going to talk to many different people, so please do not feel as though we expect you to be able to answer every question. And, we understand that your participation in this discussion is voluntary and you may choose to not answer some questions.

Information collected will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. The views you express will be kept private, and nothing we publish in this evaluation will identify you by name. Though we take notes during these interviews, information is never repeated with the name of the respondent. When we write our reports and discuss our findings, information from all interviews is compiled and presented so that no one person can be identified. We also ask that you refrain from sharing anything we discuss today with others to help us ensure your privacy and the privacy of others we are interviewing. Do you have any questions before we begin?

The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to understand programs that aim to improve employment outcomes for low-income adults. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 60 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: XXXX-XXXX, Exp: XX/XX/XXXX. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Dan Bloom (MDRC); 200 Vesey Street, 23rd Floor, New York, NY 10281-2103.

A. Background

1. What is your official job title or position?
2. What services does your agency or organization provide?
3. What are your primary responsibilities?
4. How long have you been in this position?
5. What are your responsibilities related to the program?

B. Flow of participants through services***Intake***

Can you tell me about how program participants are referred to you? At what point in the process do you first talk with them?

Probes:

1. Do you conduct any outreach or recruiting of participants? If so, describe that process. What criteria are used to target participants? What are the various entry points for participants, and in particular into the services you provide?
2. When you meet with participants at intake do you use any additional criteria to determine if a client is eligible for program? Describe the determination process.
3. [If applicable] At what point in the participant flow are participants randomly assigned to receive services? Do you and staff at this organization conduct the consent and random assignment, or is that done elsewhere? Describe the process and your role.
4. [If applicable] Have you experienced any challenges with the random assignment process?
5. [If applicable] What information or instruction is provided to the clients after random assignment? (How much information about the evaluation is discussed?)
6. Are orientation meetings offered or required before enrolling in services? Describe.

Were any steps of the process you described different for [PARTICIPANT NAME]?

Assessment

Does your organization assess participants' readiness and/or eligibility for services? If yes, please describe.

Probes:

7. Are participants assessed before receiving services?
8. How long is the assessment?
9. In what format is the assessment conducted (screening tools, tests, meetings, group discussions, and so on)? Does your organization use this assessment for other purposes?
10. Who conducts the assessment?
11. What is the result of the assessment (a treatment/employment plan, and so on)? How is that discussed with participants? How are these results used?
12. How are substance use, mental health, justice involvement, and housing instability barriers to employment assessed?

13. How are other barriers such as child care, transportation, etc. addressed?

Can you discuss the specific process for [PARTICIPANT NAME]? Did he/she differ in any way from the average process? Did he/she have all of the assessments? What types of barriers were encountered?

Employment services

Describe the services that generally are available to participants and how they are assigned to specific services. *Can you discuss how [PARTICIPANT NAME] was assigned to services and what services he/she received?*

Probes (based on specific participant, but ask if this is typical for other participants):

14. Are individual employment/treatment plans developed? If so, when are they developed and how much input do participants have in the design?
15. How are decisions about program services made? Describe the process.
16. How much guidance or advice is provided to participants about selecting employment and training programs and providers? How much input do participants have in deciding what services they receive and by which providers? If there is disagreement about the type of services or location of services a participant should receive, how is that resolved?
17. When services are assigned, how long are participants in services? Do or can participants receive multiple training services? Do services overlap or are they sequential? Describe the flow of services for participants in general. Describe the variation that can happen for certain participants.
18. What challenges are faced in participating in program services? What are the costs to their participation that might make it difficult for them to participate?

Barrier-related services (substance use, mental health, justice involvement, housing instability)

Describe the range of services that are available to assist participants in overcoming barriers to employment. *Can you discuss which supports [PARTICIPANT NAME] received?*

Probes (based on specific participant, but ask if this is typical for other participants):

19. Describe the value of each type of service? Are there caps on how much an individual participant can receive for each type of support service? For support services overall?
20. How are participants informed of the services? Do they have to apply for them or do they automatically receive them? Do they need referrals?
21. Describe the process for providing the supports? Is the distribution centralized or do clients have to obtain services from various providers?
22. To what extent do case managers follow up on the referrals?
23. Do participants receive any post-program employment retention services? If so, describe. For how long?

Case management

Describe the case management provided to [PARTICIPANT NAME].

Probes (based on specific participant, but ask if this is typical for other participants):

24. How frequently are you in contact with participants? Does this vary over time? Were you provided with guidelines for frequency of follow-up?

25. How much time, on average, do you spend with each participant during each contact?
26. How do you assess clients' service needs?
27. How is case management typically provided (in person, email, or telephone)?
28. What is the range of topics or issues discussed with participants? Which topics or issues are most frequently discussed?
29. What types of case management tools or models are used? Describe.
30. How responsive are participants to case management?
31. Describe how you track or record your activities.
32. Does case management end when program activities are complete? If not, describe the additional types of service provided and for how long. Any post-program follow-up?
33. What type of collaboration between SNAP and various service providers exists to provide participants with cross-organization services?

C. Final thoughts

1. In your opinion, how successful has [PARTICIPANT NAME] been? Do you think he/she will find employment? If so, what do you think contributes to his/her success? If not, what kinds of challenges has he/she faced that interfere with success? Do you think these can be overcome?
2. Generally, what is your assessment of the program? What aspects of the program do you think had a positive effect on participants? What aspects had a negative effect? What aspects have had a positive or negative impact on your job and your level of satisfaction?
3. What are the biggest challenges participants face in participating in the program? Are these usually easy or difficult to resolve? Explain.
4. What are the biggest challenges participants face in finding employment either during or after the program? Do you have suggestions for resolving these?

D. Wrap-up

Thank you! This conversation has been very insightful and we appreciate your assistance with our study. If you have any questions after today, please feel free to contact us: Dan Bloom (dan.bloom@mdrc.org) or Karin Martinson (Karin_Martinson@abtassoc.com). Note to interviewer: provide this contact information in writing as needed.