

DIVERSIFYING VOCATIONAL EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT OPTIONS:

A PROPOSED SYSTEMS CHANGE FOR MARYLAND

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Abstract

Vocational Evaluation service models in the State of Maryland have all too frequently been characterized by completion of a somewhat routine and similar battery of assessments, and purchased on a by the week basis rather than on a need basis. Working in partnership, state agencies, private facilities and professional associations are collaborating to identify needs and to recommend changes in the structure of service provision throughout the state, with particular emphasis on considering how such changes might impact positively on outcome for all parties. This article attempts to look at the issues under consideration, the findings to date, and the areas yet to be explored and discussed before any final systems changes can be adopted.

The Scenario

It was one of those warm lazy Saturday afternoons in Anytown, USA. Folks were leisurely strolling down Main Street, stopping to catch up on the news of the week with friends and neighbors they hadn't seen since last Saturday. Pop's Ice Cream Parlour stood at the end of the street, the spot most of the town frequented on days like this. A cool sundae on a warm Saturday afternoon, made as only Pop could make one, had been a tradition for as many years as most folks could remember.

Pop's job was not just to make each sundae mind you, but to make it so painstakingly that each one delivered to a patron was exactly the same size with the ice cream in each contoured almost identically, and with the toppings sliding down the ice cream in almost the exact pattern from one sundae to the next. He had indeed become a master at his craft over the years.

Martha, who had been with Pop for some thirty years, took and delivered the orders to patrons, along with a little neighborhood gossip of course. She was about as efficient a waitress as one could hope to find. On this morning two new faces entered the shop. Martha surmised that they must be just passing through Anytown on their way to somewhere else. As she approached their table she greeted them with her usual to the point but pleasant, "Mornin'. What'll you have?" She didn't ever seem to have much time for a smile, but then locals had become accustomed to her slightly abrupt manner after all these years and understood that that was just Martha. She stood there while they studied their menus, shifting her weight from foot to foot, obviously implying that she was somewhat impatient with the time they were taking to make up their minds. Once decided, she jotted down their orders, and as she did so she shifted her glance to Pop a couple times, making that

DIVERSE CAREER ASSESSMENT SERVICE OPTIONS PROVIDED BY TRAINED CAREER ASSESSMENT PROFESSIONALS. ”

Two premises underlined this vision statement, namely:

1. The DORS/CRP Vocational Services Committee and MDVEWAA, acting as consultants, wanted to encourage a greater number of service options from which consumers could choose, thereby allowing them to more effectively utilize the financial resources available to them. In addition, although accepting of many of the terms and definitions commonly utilized within the field, we hoped to expand beyond those to blaze new trails in terminology.

2. Service should be the driving force in the assessment process, not time frames. The amount of time spent in an assessment process does not necessarily connote quality or effectiveness. Individuals served vary greatly, and set time frames ignore those individual needs.

The Process

PHASE 1 - IDENTIFYING CRP CONCERNS AND NEEDS: Our first step was to survey the 54 CRPs within Maryland who were currently accredited by DORS to provide Vocational Assessment/Evaluation services in an attempt to identify what they perceived as being their most critical needs. Thirty, or 55%, of the fifty-four surveys were returned. Of those thirty, 10% had left major sections blank, which negatively impacted on any conclusions that might have been drawn from the survey. Overall however, of those who did complete the survey results indicated that:

- 76% agreed with the VEWAA definition of Vocational Evaluation that was provided in the survey. Another 16% did not relate to this definition due to the types of assessments they provided.

- Of the 80% who responded to a question regarding the use of work samples, 25% indicated that they did not use them. Of this 25%, 42% indicated that they would like to add standardized work samples to their programs and 16% were interested in adding non-standardized work samples.
- Components most frequently incorporated into the respondents Vocational Evaluation/Assessments were found to be: consumer interview, records review, career exploration, facility based situational assessment, and behavioral observations.
- Only 40% of the respondents used psychometrics, and only 56% used community based assessments.
- 50% did not respond to a question related to the types of techniques used in community based assessments.
- Areas CRPs most wanted to add to their service offerings included: learning style assessment, physical capacities assessment, academic achievement, dexterity and motor coordination, cognitive abilities assessment, community based situational assessment, and temperament/personality assessment.
- Only 17% of the CRPs employed a Certified Vocational Evaluator who either directly provided evaluation/assessment services or supervised others to do so.
- CRPs were most interested in elevating their skills and knowledges by Facility-To-Facility consultations, mentoring programs (83%), CEU Short Term Training (70%), Internships with CRPs (66%), and Masters level programs (31%).

Although the response to this survey had not been as high as had been hoped, the response that was

received clearly suggested that CRPs recognized that their services were in need of improvement, and that they wanted to improve their services by elevating their skills and knowledges.

PHASE 2 - IDENTIFYING DORS CONCERNS AND NEEDS: Our second step was to review the issues that had been expressed to Evaluators by numerous DORS counselors across the state over an extended period. Consistently they fell into three general categories:

- Need to have specific referral questions answered, to minimize number of assessments administered if they were not considered necessary by the counselor or the evaluatee.
- Need to reduce the number of days or weeks used to complete assessments
- Quicker turn around time from date of referral to date of completion of evaluation/assessment.

With increasing frequency referring counselors and consumers were asking for very specific assessments, that might require only a few hours, or a day or two. They were not interested in a full battery of assessments that would require one, two or three weeks to complete, yet the existing model dictated the purchase of services by the week, which seemed to many to suggest an inefficient use of both time and money.

PHASE 3 - DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPTIONS CONCEPT: As the Committee began to review and discuss the kinds of concerns and needs expressed by DORS and CRPs as they related to consumer preferences and positive outcomes, the phrase "OPTIONS" began to surface over and over again. Certainly Rehabilitation across the country had moved steadily toward recognizing the importance and right of consumer choice, but perhaps there was more, there was the need to have more options from which all parties might choose. Perhaps the time was right to listen differently

and to provide differently.

First, the Committee agreed that regardless of which Option might be designed or chosen, each must contain five essential components, namely:

1. Regardless of which assessment or evaluation option chosen, the participation and input of the consumer is essential and will be included throughout the process, particularly during each of the following activities:

- determining the purpose of the assessment
- developing the individual assessment plan
- reviewing and discussing results
- making recommendations

2. Any assessment process will be sensitive to cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and other environmental considerations.

3. Any assessment process will include vocationally relevant behavioral observations and temperament factors.

4. Assistive technology needs will be considered in the delivery of each of the service options.

5. Regardless of which service option selected, results will be summarized, synthesized, and interpreted in written form which is understandable to the consumer.

The Committee's next step was to develop six Options that were believed to respond to the types of assessments requested by counselors and consumers. The initial proposal, titled Career Assessment Service (CAS) Options, identified six Options:

1. ITEMIZED: an individual assessment technique or method used to answer a very specific

referral question.

Examples: - Is this person computer literate?

- What is this person's typing speed?
- What are this person/s vocational interests?
- What are this person's academic achievement levels?

2. SCREENING: a process utilizing several assessment tools in a number of areas designed to provide information in response to general referral questions in order to determine the next step in planning.

Examples: - What can this person do?

- What does this person want to do?
- What are this person's strengths, needs and vocational options?
- To assess appropriate vocations.
- Are interests aligned with projected labor market needs?

3. EXPLORATORY: investigation and education in jobs and job clusters (including the nature of the work, working conditions, current employment rates and trends, training and other qualifications employment outlook and earnings) taking into account the interests, needs and abilities of the person.

Examples: - What are this person's transferable skills?

- What interests are verified through job shadowing?
- Can interests and career information be identified by visits to the career center?

- Can this person clarify interests and career requirements by conducting informational interviews?
 - Is information gained from career information activities sufficient for career decision making?
4. **FOCUSED:** assessment to determine the feasibility of a specific chosen career area as a career goal.
- Examples:
- Can this person be a secretary?
 - Can this person be a welder?
 - Can this person be an auto mechanic?
 - Does this person possess the skills temperaments, and behaviors to work in a management position?
5. **COMMUNITY BASED:** assessment of an individual's interests, needs, and abilities in a job/worksite in the community. Community based assessment is an umbrella term depicting a category of methods which may include:
- Situational assessments
 - On-the-job evaluations
 - Job try-outs or trials
 - What are this person's work-related behaviors in the community?
6. **COMPREHENSIVE:** A broad-based and in-depth process which is grounded in the use of real or simulated work. The process identifies an individual's interests, needs and abilities, focuses career choice and yields viable employment outcomes and long-term career goals.

This “matching process” matches these with training, situational, and employment demands and characteristics.

This option must include real or simulated work. The majority of the following areas should be included in the comprehensive evaluation: academics, learning styles, transferable skills, worker traits, social skills, work behaviors, physical capacities, dexterity/motor skills, direction-following skills, background information, job readiness and job seeking skills, career exploration needs, aptitudes, interests, transportation and community supports, temperament factors, and pertinent information from significant others, as well as job and task analysis, computerized career exploration, community resource surveys, labor market review, etc.

PHASE 4 - ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL CONSIDERATIONS: Two additional considerations appeared critical in assessing whether or not such a systems change proposal would or could meet the Advisory Committee’s objectives, namely a Pilot Study and pre-training for those participating in such a Pilot Study.

The tentative design of the Pilot Study focuses on several things, including an attempt to identify the types and frequency of contacts typically inherent in and needed to complete an assessment. These might include phone contacts with the referring counselor, evaluatee, and other involved in the referral; direct contact with the evaluatee including such contacts as interviewing, testing, observing, and vocational counseling; assessment scoring and data recording; research, including job analysis, investigating assistive technology and/or accommodations needed, labor market information, surveying community resources and services, et cetera; report writing, including analyzing,

synthesizing, interpreting and report writing; administrative/clerical, including typing, billing, mailing and filing; travel, if required to complete an assessment outside the evaluation lab; staffing, including scheduling, coordinating, interpreting information, advocacy and developing recommendations; and post vocational evaluation planning such as assisting in development of IWRP's, IEP's, ITP's, et cetera. The Committee sensed that until data could be collected as to the ranges of time required to successfully complete each option, realistic fee for services schedules could not be determined. In addition, it was felt that such data collection would facilitate a better understanding of all the elements that are typically required to complete the evaluation/assessment process, an understanding that has not been generally held by many within as well as outside of the field of vocational evaluation.

The Pilot Study design under consideration is designed to be conducted over a three month period statewide. CRP eligibility for participation would be based on a CRP being approved by DORS and currently providing Vocational Evaluation services. Vocational Evaluators participating would be classified by one of the following three categories:

CATEGORY I - Certified Vocational Evaluator (CVE)

CATEGORY II - Non-CVE with five years or more of experience in the field

CATEGORY III - Non-CVE with less than five years experience in the field

The Committee's intent is that such a Pilot Study would accomplish the following:

- develop uniform assessment definitions based on national standards and state practices
- recommend how services could be improved, expanded, and to explore new types of assessment services

- identify tasks and activities that comprise a vocational assessment
- determine what CAS options are presently offered by CRPs and what is included in each of these options
- determine level of consumer and referral source satisfaction with vocational assessment services throughout the state
- demonstrate the extent of Vocational Evaluator duties and responsibilities
- determine most cost effective means by which to meet referral source and consumer needs and preferences
- develop a common language

Essential not only to participation in the Pilot Study, but also to the long range success or failure of the model to be proposed, is training both prior to the Pilot Study and on-going for both DORS and CRPs personnel. The proposals that the Committee is suggesting are not intended to be an end in themselves, but merely to be a starting point for continued change and growth to meet ever changing needs.

Next Steps: The Continuing Partnership and Dialogue

Throughout the process, the Committee has enjoyed the support, encouragement and leadership from the DORS/CRP Advisory Committee members, from Ms. Jean Jackson who chairs the Advisory Committee, and particularly from Mr. Robert Burns, Assistant State Superintendent in Rehabilitation Services for the Division of Rehabilitation Services. It has been and continues to be a cooperative effort in which a variety of perspectives have been welcomed, and in which we each have learned greatly from each other as we work to build for improvements

in service offerings throughout the state. Whether or not the Options proposal will ultimately be accepted and implemented in Maryland cannot at this time be determined. We have much work yet to do before that decision can be made. But in the process we are growing in understanding and in communicating and in demonstrating that if warranted, we are ready to work together to make whatever changes might be needed to meet consumer, agency and facility needs. And as we look ahead to the work we have yet to do, our dialogue will focus on:

- Possible revision of draft Pilot Study forms to be more user friendly
- Looking at alternative model names
- Combining/collapsing the number of Options offered while maintaining integrity of the concept
- Finding common language acceptable to all parties
- Finalizing a Pilot Study design
- Pre-training design of a Pilot Study participants
- Implementation of a Pilot Study throughout the state
- Analyzing Pilot Study results and making proposals changes accordingly
- Presentation to State of Pilot Study findings with recommendations
- Investigation of other state VR definitions and agency practices
- Determining fiscal implications and cost effectiveness of adopting Options proposal
- Investigate compatibility of Options concept with CARF or other accrediting bodies' standards/requirements
- Request that state consider whether or not final proposal will meet consumer, DORS and

CRP needs, and if so, request that proposal be implemented statewide

- Request annual training for DORS and CRP staffs to maintain dialogue and to focus on using the Options model as a starting point for continuing to change and improve services
- Work toward assuring that all CRP providers meet a basic level of competency, skills and knowledge in Vocational Evaluation/Assessment
- Determine method of measuring outcome: benefits of Options model over more traditional models
- Measuring degree of DORS, CRP and consumer satisfaction

OUT OF BUSINESS!

Pop's Ice Cream Parlour may soon be going out of business, at least in Maryland. Shops where a customer can order what he/she wants may soon open and flourish in this state because we've listened to each other and begun to build together! Besides, it's about time anyway for Pop and Martha to retire.