

Module 5

Insuring the Provision of High Quality WIPA Services

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Module 5

Insuring the Provision of High Quality WIPA Services

INTRODUCTION

CWICs deliver planning, advisement and support services in highly sensitive areas related to beneficiary finances and healthcare coverage on a daily basis. Since the potential risks to beneficiaries are high if inadequate or poor quality services are provided, it is imperative that WIPA projects implement rigorous quality assurance procedures.

Content in this area will focus on determining quality indicators and standards for all WIPA core services; developing and implementing procedures to ensure that all information provided to beneficiaries is accurate, complete, and verified; obtaining satisfaction feedback from beneficiaries and partner agencies; developing and implementing procedures to ensure that all beneficiaries are served regardless of age, primary disability, primary language, or geographic location of residence; collecting and maintaining participant demographic and service data based upon quality indicators and quality standards; identifying areas in need of improvement; and planning for and implementing changes to improve service quality.

This module is divided into 3 units to address these core competencies. Unit 1 describes SSA's commitment to quality and how WIPA programs' efforts to assure quality are in support of this commitment. Unit 2 describes the first part of quality assurance, compliance. In this unit, the minimum standards required of WIPA agencies by SSA and other laws such as the privacy act are described, as these should certainly be part of a quality assurance process and monitored regularly. Unit 3 describes continuous quality improvement; the part of quality assurance that is designed to push beyond minimum standards and to aspire to best practices. Finally, Unit 4 describes the importance of developing a written quality assurance plan that includes measurable processes and outcomes and the strategies, timeframes and people who are responsible for measuring these processes and outcomes.

CWIC CORE COMPETENCIES ADDRESSED

1. Determines quality indicators and establishes quality standards for all core services inherent in the provision of WIPA services based upon best practices in the work incentives planning and assistance field.
2. Develops and implements procedures to ensure that all information provided to beneficiaries is accurate, complete, and verified.

3. Develops and implements procedures to ensure all beneficiaries in their catchment areas are represented in their service population, regardless of age, primary disability, primary language, or geographic location of residence.
4. Identifies areas in need of improvement, and plans and implements changes to improve service quality based on feedback from beneficiaries and partner agencies.



Competency Unit 1

Understanding SSA's Commitment to Quality

INTRODUCTION

The Social Security Administration is committed to quality. As former Social Security Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart once said, "We understand that every check, every application, every number represents a person, someone whose life will be affected by the work we do, and how well we do it."

"Social Security is committed to providing the type of service that the American people expect, and more importantly, deserve. As a federal agency that touches nearly every person in this country at some point in their lives, Social Security takes seriously the quality of its service to the public. Social Security's hard work and efforts to provide not only timely service, but also well managed projects and accurate payments, safeguard the trust the American people have in the Agency. (Results at Social Security: Getting It Done)

Social Security has made it clear in the development of the WIPA program that a focus on quality is imperative. This focus requires that WIPA programs have strategies in place to assure:

- ▶ A staff that is well qualified
- ▶ A staff that is well trained in Social Security benefits and work incentives
- ▶ A staff that has received comprehensive training in other federal transfer programs and state-specific programs
- ▶ A data collection system that serves the needs of the project and of SSA
- ▶ A commitment from management to use the data collected to improve project outcomes
- ▶ A commitment to case management, monitoring and on-going support of beneficiaries as they move through the continuum of WIPA services
- ▶ A quality assurance program is in place to track performance and ensure that all reports and information concerning the beneficiary are accurate and timely.

The WIPA projects are partners in the SSA quality efforts. The expectations are clear – beneficiaries will be provided with quality service, will receive accu-

rate information and advisement and will be provided these services in a courteous and timely manner. The second set of expectations focuses on management’s role in the area of quality. Again, the expectations are clear - projects will be well–managed, have clear goals that are understood by their staffs and will collect data that documents the performance of staff and provides information to the manager to use in improving the projects and services to beneficiaries.

This module will highlight SSA’s commitment to quality and will provide knowledge and information to WIPA projects and CWICs that will allow them to create a quality work environment and a process that assures quality performance at all levels. Tools and resources to assist the WIPAs and CWICs in meeting these goals will be presented and discussed.

QUALITY AT WORK AT SSA

Social Security is working to continuously improve quality throughout the Agency. In the paper “Results at Social Security: Getting It Done”, there is a discussion of the “results” that are being sought:

“The primary and most significant results for Americans are Social Security’s superior service, accountability and accessibility. Social Security’s vital mission demands it. The strategic plan ensures it.”

WIPA projects are partners in this important process. Social Security has provided a clear mission and set of strategic goals and the WIPA projects’ activities clearly support the mission and three of the four goals.

WIPA SUPPORT OF SSA MISSION AND GOALS

Mission: To advance the economic security of the nation’s people through compassionate and vigilant leadership in shaping and managing Social Security programs.

SSA’s Goal	WIPA’s Role
To deliver high-quality, citizen service	To deliver high-quality citizen-based services to beneficiaries with disabilities who want to work
To ensure superior stewardship of Social Security programs and resources	To ensure that WIPA projects are well managed and use project resources efficiently and effectively
To achieve sustainable solvency and ensure Social Security programs meet the needs of current and future generations	No role
To strategically manage and align staff to support our mission	To provide management and support to WIPA staff that allows them to meet the objectives

Source: SSA’s Strategic Goals as outlined in Results at Social Security: Getting It Done

Social Security’s quality program includes thorough reviews of its programs by both internal and external reviewers. Disability Determination Services (DDS) is one area that is of prime importance to the Agency. The disability determination function is achieved through a partnership with the states and this increases the complexity of the assurance of quality in the program. Critical areas of concern are: timeliness, efficiency, accuracy and good customer service.

In working with outside reviewers Social Security has identified a new way to look at systems and processes in a quality way... to carefully review the plan, act and implement the plan, check the plan by using reliable data to see how the plan is doing and then incorporate that new information into a revised plan. This approach supports the quality assurance activities that check for accuracy, timeliness and customer satisfaction (Disability.doc, 2005) or what some would call a culture of quality.

CONDUCTING INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

- ▶ Disability.doc: SSA's Disability Quality Assurance Process
<http://www.disabilitydoc.com/ssa-disability-quality-assurance/>
- ▶ SSA OIG Strategic Plan Goals 2006 -- www.ssa.gov/oig/ADOBEPDF/splan2006txt.htm
- ▶ Federal Register, Vol.71, No.94/Tuesday May 16, 2006/Notices
- ▶ Cooperative Agreements for Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Projects; Program Announcement No. SSA-OESP-06-1, Federal Register/Vol.71, No.94/Tuesday May 16, 2006/Notice



Competency Unit 2

Basic Elements of Quality Assurance: Compliance with Minimum Requirements

COMPLIANCE: SSA'S EXPECTATIONS OF QUALITY IN ITS SUBCONTRACTED PROGRAMS

SSA expects its partners to operate in a quality way and to have a strong quality assurance plan. The agency articulated these expectations in the Request for Proposal that outlined the WIPA program on May 16, 2006 (Federal Register/Vol.71/No.94/Tuesday May 16, 2006/Notices).

The request for proposal required applicants to develop quality assurance plans in five areas.

- 1. Training**
 - ▶ On-going training needs (refresher and updated training) of CWICs and other personnel will be addressed to ensure personnel maintain knowledge, skills, and abilities as required to perform their job duties.

- 2. Use of Management Information Data to Improve Processes**
 - ▶ Management information data and caseload reviews will take place to improve processes such as beneficiaries' case management and follow-up services. Program will ensure that all work incentives information given to beneficiaries is accurate and applicable.

- 3. Beneficiary Tracking**
 - ▶ Beneficiary progress and outcomes based on services provided by the WIPA program are to be tracked. This tracking is designed as a management tool for beneficiary outcomes under the WIPA program, in an effort to determine the extent to which beneficiaries achieve their employment, financial, and health care goals.

 - ▶ Information collected will include: employment status, benefit status, and income of beneficiaries before and after providing services under the WIPA program.

- 4. Case Management**
 - ▶ Programs are required to have case management and monitoring systems in place, including a management information system.

- 5. Quality Assurance Plan** ▶ Quality Assurance plans are required, which include the use of data and reports and ensures the accuracy of information given to beneficiaries.

While these elements were required as a portion of the plan outlined by applicants in response to the Request for Proposals, they will also be the key elements of reviews done by OESP Project Officers throughout the life of the cooperative agreement.

SSA POLICY ON CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

Confidentiality and privacy are two key requirements in working with beneficiaries and handling information that is provided by SSA and other human service providers. The Cooperative Agreements for Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Projects; Program Announcement No. SSA-OESP-06-1 stated the policy and priority clearly: All projects must adhere to SSA's Privacy and Confidentiality Regulations (20 CFR part 401) for maintaining records of individuals, as well as provide specific safeguards surrounding beneficiary information sharing, paper/ computer records/data, and other issues potentially arising from providing work incentives planning and assistance services to SSDI and SSI beneficiaries with disabilities. Beneficiary data should be accessible only to project personnel via locked file cabinets, computer password protections, etc.

This means that all information provided to a CWIC by a beneficiary is confidential. It is not to be shared with anyone without the explicit consent of the beneficiary. The beneficiary must give the CWIC a specific release of information that identifies the individual or organization the information can be released to and the nature of the information that can be released. CWICs are required to use the SSA standard information release forms. These forms can be found at the links provided here:

- ▶ Authorization to Disclose Information to the SSA - Form SSA-827 (6-2007) Effective (6-2007) <http://www.ssa.gov/online/ssa-827.pdf>
- ▶ Consent for Release of Information - Form SSA-3288 (5-2007) Effective (5-2007) <http://www.ssa.gov/online/ssa-3288.pdf>

It is important to remember this policy applies to reports that are produced by the CWIC or the WIPA projects that are public and are utilized by individuals outside the WIPA projects. Firstly, reports should only be shared with entities for whom the beneficiary has given specific, written authorization for release of information. If the CWIC is sending information to the WIPA NTC Technical Assistance Liaison or to the SSA Project Officer for input or review, the information should be "sanitized" by removing identifying information before sending. The CWIC should never release information that was not generated by the WIPA (i.e., the BPQY) to other entities unless the request for information that was used specifically included the other entity. Reports should not include any more identifying information, particularly the Social Security numbers of the beneficiaries being served by the project, than absolutely necessary.

For all WIPA personnel who will be providing WIPA services to beneficiaries, SSA requires successful completion of a background check. Until this process has been completed, new staff should not have access to beneficiary information. If there are questions about the specific strategies that need to be used to protect information, you should contact your Project Officer.

Because many CWICs work from home offices or travel from one location to another, maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of the beneficiary is of prime importance. All information must be kept under lock and key unless it is being used by the CWIC and the documents are in the CWICs physical control. If working from home, CWIC's must be careful that beneficiary information is not visible to others in the household when out of the locked file cabinet. For those traveling with laptop computers, care must be taken that the computer has the best of security features and that the CWIC is making use of these procedures at all times.

Many WIPA projects are located in agencies that also provide other services. In this case, it is important to remember that staff from other departments do not have clearance and must not be allowed to have access to WIPA beneficiary information. Once again, information must be kept under lock and key. If at all possible, offices of CWIC's

should be kept locked when the CWIC is absent. In addition, a separate fax machine is highly recommended if received documents would be viewed by other agency personnel upon receipt.

CONDUCTING INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

- ▶ Authorization to Disclose Information to the SSA - Form SSA-827 (6-2007) Effective (06-2007)
<http://www.ssa.gov/online/ssa-827.pdf>

- ▶ Consent for Release of Information - Form SSA-3288 (5-2007) Effective (5-2007)
<http://www.ssa.gov/online/ssa-3288.pdf>



Competency Unit 3

Basic Elements of Quality Assurance: Continuous Quality Improvement

INTRODUCTION

In order to engage in continuous quality improvement, WIPA programs must begin with the belief that there is always room for improvement, in every service and in the process used to provide services. If we define quality as meeting or exceeding the expectations of customers, the first step is to determine those expectations. The second step is to measure the extent to which customers are getting what they need, identify areas of program weakness, and develop a strategic plan for improving those weak areas.

Continuous quality improvement should focus on processes, not on blaming individuals for the weakness of the program. Changes do not have to be large to have a positive impact. Small, incremental changes that are implemented in a thoughtful manner are not only smart, but are easier on program staff.

Quality improvement involves both internal and external stakeholders. Input can be gathered in a variety of ways: through program evaluation and satisfaction surveys, by analyzing service data collected on a regular basis, and by staying objective as the results are compiled and used to develop a plan for improvement. If WIPA programs keep the focus of quality assurance and quality improvement on the process of providing WIPA services, and if all key staff are engaged in the organizational assessment and quality improvement plan, then staff will be more likely to buy into the plan.

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER REVIEWS

Peer Reviews

Peer reviews are a useful tool in situations where there are multiple CWICs in an office. This strategy asks one CWIC to review and comment on the work of a fellow CWIC. In some situations this can be a very supportive and helpful strategy for ensuring quality and completeness. An informal staffing is another strategy that can be particularly helpful in plan development and review. Other co-workers may have insight into resources that you are unaware of and it is helpful to get the thoughts of others who are familiar with the resources and individuals involved.

In some situations, this strategy may not be helpful due to distance or the sensitivities of individual staff members. This is only one strategy that may be considered.

First Level Supervisor or Team Leader Reviews

This strategy engages the team leader or first level supervisor in a review of completed work. The review can be either scheduled or unscheduled. Again, the reviewer is looking at the following aspects of the work: timeliness, completeness, accuracy and evidence of good working relationships with partnering agencies and with beneficiaries.

It is suggested that the results of these reviews be aggregated and reviewed in terms of trends and identification of areas that appear to be challenging to staff. This identification could be used to select in-service training needs or develop additional resources for specific situations.

Here is a sample of the type of review and response flow that is desirable in a review process.

Item Reviewed	Reviewer's Comment	Action Required Y/N	Due Date for Corrective Action	Response from CWIC	Final Review Comments
Waivers of confidentiality are present in folders and are signed and dated	There were forms in the file but they were not signed and dated	Y	8/28	Had mailed forms to beneficiary. Forms have been returned and are signed and dated and have replaced the unsigned forms in the file.	Verified 8/29

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER REVIEWS

Funders

Periodically, it is a good practice to have an outside reviewer work with your organization to look at the basic functions and practices to ensure compliance with the work plan, SSA procedures and basic administrative best practices. This review may consist of the following elements:

- ▶ Basic review of the Cooperative Agreement
- ▶ Determination of compliance with all SSA standards
- ▶ Determination of performance against plan
- ▶ Desk review of individual beneficiary records to determine completeness and accuracy
- ▶ Interviews and surveys with beneficiaries being served by the project, with staff, with partnering agencies and with the SSA Project Officer.

During the course of the contract agreement, SSA has the right to make scheduled or unscheduled visits to the project. The scope of their review will be determined by the Project Officer but will usually include a review of the offices, meetings with staff and a review of client folders.

Technical Assistance Liaisons

Although evaluation and monitoring are not the role of the WIPA NTC technical assistance liaisons, the WIPA program may benefit from having the TA liaison perform a "mock evaluation" occasionally, with the purpose of identifying areas that need improvements, as well as a technical assistance plan to help the project in making these improvements.

Customers

Certainly, WIPA programs should gather regular feedback from both primary customers (beneficiaries receiving services) and secondary customers (agencies making referrals/partnering with the WIPA). There is more information later in this unit regarding gathering this type of input.

BEST PRACTICES IN ASSURING QUALITY OF WIPA SERVICES

In most WIPA programs, continuous quality improvement is the responsibility of the WIPA Program Manager/Director. Occasionally, a lead CWIC will be assigned the task of ensuring quality among the entire staff. Quality in any service organization is ultimately the responsibility of the top administration, i.e. the CEO or Executive Director. Many WIPA projects are part of a larger entity and are included in agency-wide program evaluation, quality assurance and strategic planning. Because of the unique nature of WIPA services, it is usually necessary to construct a separate quality assurance plan. The remainder of this unit will cover best practices in continuous quality improvement for WIPA programs, starting with the five areas outlined in the Request For Application.

TRAINING

As mentioned in Unit 1, SSA expects that WIPA projects will provide services using qualified personnel, who have received comprehensive training in SSA benefits and employment supports as well as other federal, state and local benefits available to beneficiaries. Quality assurance begins with the initial recruitment and hiring of a CWIC. Prior to that, however, is the need for the Program Manager or WIPA Project Director to understand the role of a CWIC and the skills, knowledge and attitudes required of the position in order to be an effective supervisor. Some WIPA managers either worked as a CWIC prior to becoming the manager or they may currently carry a beneficiary case load as a part of their jobs. In both cases, the manager has completed the certification process for CWICs. If this is not the case, it is highly recommended that the manager attend CWIC training and complete the certification process if at all possible. This will increase the ability of the manager to do quality checks on the key processes of service delivery and will make the supervisory input more valuable. The manager may need to fill in to handle a caseload when a staff person is on leave or when a staff position is vacant, and being certified as a CWIC will make this possible. In addition, knowing the job functions well will enhance the manager's ability to recruit and hire the best persons for the role of CWIC. Key to hiring the right person for the job is the ability to explain the job to applicants. Given that this is a newly evolving profession, it is rare to get an application from someone that is already trained for the job.

The manager/supervisor will need to look for prerequisite skills and knowledge such as communication skills – both written and oral – and the ability to solve problems or think analytically. During the recruitment and interview process, aspects of the job are thoroughly explained to the applicant, and certain tasks can be given to applicants to test their ability to learn or do the job. For example, the Minnesota Work Incentives Connection sends a brochure that explains the SSA work incentives to an interviewee with instructions that a brief test will be given during the interview, or questions involving technical content will be asked. Some WIPA projects will give an applicant the Red Book to review prior to the interview, and will ask them to bring a sample of their writing – explaining the Trial Work Period to a beneficiary, for example – when they come for the interview. Technical content can be learned in training sessions and on the job, but the learning curve for technical writing is very steep. The ability to write in simple, but clear language is imperative.

Given the importance of certain skills and knowledge in a CWIC, the WIPA program will ensure quality by establishing a protocol for ongoing training and the use of technical assistance beyond the initial training and certification required by SSA. WIPA managers are encouraged to collaborate with other WIPA to coordinate training in state-specific benefits and services for all CWICs. The unique aspect of Medicaid (including Home and Community Based Waivers), subsidized housing programs, Energy Assistance Programs, Worker's Compensation, Unemployment Insurance, SSI State Supplement(s), and other State disability programs make it imperative that CWICs receive comprehensive training in ALL benefits, entitlements and income-sensitive services used by people with disabilities in each individual state. In a number of states the WIPA projects have either formed or joined a statewide coalition of benefits planners and work jointly to identify and invite various speakers on topics of interest to the CWICs, i.e. personnel from the state Medicaid office to talk about Medicaid Buy-In, staff from the workforce development or State Department of Labor to explain unemployment benefits, etc. WIPA programs should consider the benefits of forming a statewide or regional coalition of organizations providing work incentives planning and advisement services, if none already exists. Sharing resources with other WIPA programs eliminates duplication of efforts and can significantly enhance the ability of one program to provide a quality service.

A WIPA manager serious about quality assurance will arrange for all CWICs to attend trainings or take online courses to the extent that their budget allows. However, outside trainings alone will not ensure that a CWIC becomes proficient in the job. This is one profession in which “on-the-job” training is a given. There are several approaches that a manager may want to consider, given time and availability, to ensure that a CWIC is learning the job effectively and efficiently:

1. *Intensive supervision* – if the WIPA manager is trained and experienced at providing direct services, he/she is in the best position to closely monitor the ongoing development of skill and knowledge in a new CWIC. A new staff person can be given the opportunity to “do-over” a benefit summary and analysis (BS&A) that was already completed by an experienced CWIC, in order to practice writing skills. The manager should arrange for the CWIC to “shadow” co-workers during initial intake interviews as well as meetings in which the BS&A is presented to the consumer. Weekly, or perhaps daily, supervisory meetings with a new CWIC may be necessary in the beginning. All BS&A written by a new CWIC should be reviewed for accuracy and style during their first 6 -12 months on the job. The manager should be able to recognize when a CWIC is ready to work independently.
2. *Mentoring* – if the WIPA is fortunate to have experienced CWICs on staff with time to mentor a new staff member, this is an excellent way to structure learning on a day-to-day basis. It is also possible, however, to promote unwanted practices through mentoring. It will be up to the manager to ensure that the mentor is engaging in high quality services at all times. A mentor is a role model and working in tandem with the new CWIC will allow that person to watch an intake interview being conducted, gradually assuming more and more of the direct work with the customer. A mentor should have the time to conduct one-on-one case reviews with the new CWIC, and, after observing the CWIC during an intake interview or a work incentives planning session, should provide the manager with recommendations on whether or not a CWIC is ready for complete independence.
3. *Effective use of technical assistance* – if the WIPA manager is not trained in the technical content and process or if co-workers have neither the time nor the experience to mentor a new CWIC, the manager should arrange for the Technical Assistance Liaison to work closely with that person until they are ready to be independent. The TA Liaison can review redacted reports prepared by the new CWIC, providing feedback on content and style. The TA Liaison can make recommendations to the manager regarding the type of additional training that may be needed by a particular staff member.

All CWICs, both new and experienced, require ongoing quality assurance monitoring. Several methods that represent best practice include:

- ▶ Regular case reviews, either in a supervisory meeting with an individual CWIC or in a group staff meeting. CWICs should be encouraged to bring difficult cases to these discussions, as they can be a learning experience for all staff. During the case review, staff should be encouraged to provide input regarding other services available to the consumer.
- ▶ Every BS&A or WIP that is written is reviewed by at least one other person before it is sent out. This could be the manager, a peer, or the Technical Assistance Liaison.
- ▶ Every customer is asked for their feedback on the quality of the service they received, via a written survey given at the completion of the service or at regular (quarterly/annually) intervals through a phone survey conducted by an objective member of the staff.

Beyond the training, managers should require all CWICs to use technical assistance as a quality assurance tool, particularly for newly trained staff. Some projects engage their technical liaison in a regularly scheduled teleconference to review cases, get updates on program regulations, etc. WIPA managers should take advantage of the limited availability for on-site technical assistance, using the liaison to reinforce the work of the manager to ensure quality.

USE OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION DATA TO IMPROVE PROCESSES/CASE MANAGEMENT

WIPA program managers should use a management information system to monitor the work of the line staff. This can be as sophisticated as an electronic case management system or as simple as keeping a log or a spreadsheet to track the work incentives planning process for each customer. Using a tracking system will ensure that services are provided in a timely manner, essential to the needs of WIPA customers. CWICs should document the following dates of service: response to initial referral or request for services, date that releases are sent to customer for signatures, date that the BPQY is requested from SSA, date of initial intake meeting or contact, completion of benefit summary and analysis and either presenting it or mailing it to the customer with a follow up call to respond to questions. These can be documented in the case management notes, entered into an electronic tracking system, or written into a paper log and submitted to the manager.

Customer feedback surveys should always include questions about timeliness, and problems addressed by adjusting the expectations. For example, CWICs may be required to return initial calls within 24-48 hours and the intake meeting/contact should take place within 1 to 2 weeks following the referral (for high priority beneficiaries). Verifying the benefits is a variable that may impact on timeliness; some WIPAs are still reporting delays in getting the BPQY from the local SSA offices or getting calls back from the Medicaid agency. Once all benefits are verified, the BS&A should be written in the shortest time possible. If too much time passes, the person's benefit situation can change, the person may be forced to turn down a job offer if s/he lacks the information needed to make an informed decision, or the opportunity to use a work incentive such as PASS may be missed. Most WIPA projects report being able to complete the BS&A within 1 to 2 weeks after the benefits are verified and the analysis completed. In addition, customer feedback should include questions about satisfaction with the service, usefulness of the information given, and suggestions for improvement. Samples of customer feedback survey tools are included on the following page.

Of course, a management information system is useless if no one is reviewing the documentation on a regular basis. The manager should compile the data gathered from the tracking system and the customer/stakeholder surveys. The information should be shared with staff during a strategic planning or quality improvement meeting, or fifteen to thirty minutes should be set aside at each staff meeting to discuss the data and need for improvement. Examples of customer satisfaction surveys are presented at the end of this unit.

BENEFICIARY TRACKING

Outcomes achieved by WIPA customers can be used to determine where service improvements need to be made. Since the goal of the WIPA project is to help people make informed decisions about working, one measure of success is the number of people who actually make the decision to return to work. Unless the WIPA is pro-actively reaching out to beneficiaries after they receive WIPA services, there is no way to know if the service resulted in employment.

Since follow-along is an expectation of WIPA projects, scheduling follow-up calls on a regular basis will allow CWICs to ask about employment, wages, health care, need for other services/supports, or the need to update the work incentives plan. Documenting the employment outcomes and the work incentives used may be done in an electronic database or logged onto a paper form. Some WIPA programs schedule follow-up calls for those customers that don't require intensive follow-along services at 3 month, 6 month, and 12 month intervals after the intensive service has been provided. Some are documenting outcomes only when the customer calls the WIPA after service completion, either to get additional information or assistance from the CWIC, or to simply report that work has begun.

Based on the priority ranking of potential WIPA customers, the following questions may be asked to gather employment outcome data:

- ▶ Did working customers maintain employment, increase employment, or increase wages as a result of WIPA services? What are the current wages?
- ▶ Did customers who were considering a job offer decide to accept the offer and begin work? What was the starting wage? Current wage?

- ▶ Did those customers who were thinking about going to work connect with an employment service provider and initiate an employment plan? Did they assign their Ticket to an Employment Network?
- ▶ Did customers assign their Ticket or use any of the work incentives to achieve their employment goal?
- ▶ Are the customers eligible for employer-sponsored health insurance?
- ▶ What is the customer's status with regard to benefits?
- ▶ Did the customer require additional work incentives planning and assistance?

THE FEEDBACK LOOP

Continuous quality improvement is a circular process. Additional goals will be identified and the process will start over. Methods for improving processes and outcomes may not work to the desired extent and it will be necessary to repeat the steps.

This “circle of quality” captures the quality approach to systems and processes.

The cycle is often referred to as the PDCA cycle (Plan/Do/Check/Act). One important thing about the PDCA cycle is that it can be used by individuals as well as organizations to ensure that you are always planning what you do, doing what you planned, checking the plan and then taking what you learned from your work and incorporating what you have learned into a new plan.



A quick look at this process in greater detail:

Plan: Planning is an important activity that guides the actions of individuals and groups. Good planning requires careful analysis of the information available, the resources that can be utilized in the plan as well as the timeframes in which the work needs to be done.

While some focus on an overall written plan, each individual has a responsibility to plan his or her work each day. The plan in the WIPA's Cooperative Agreement is the primary plan document that will dictate what you do and how you do it. It is important to have specific measurable goals identified in your plan.

Do: This is the action step. You have a plan for a year or a day and then you implement the plan and “do” the work. An important part of this step in the quality cycle is the measurement of performance. This is a critical step that is important in the next phase of the cycle.

Check: In this phase of the cycle you are assessing whether the plan “worked” as you expected. The CWIC should review his or her original plan, as well as the work plan outlined in the WIPA's Cooperative Agreement with SSA. This information is then directed out to managers and decision makers. Adjustments and new planning will begin at this point.

Act: In this phase of a quality cycle you are taking the information you have gathered and assessed in the “Check” phase of the cycle and are identifying what changes are necessary to daily activities and the overall plan to produce the results you wish to achieve.

CONCLUSION

The assurance of quality WIPA services can be summarized in three categories: accuracy, thoroughness and timeliness. The following is a list of best practices to consider in each of these areas.

Accuracy

- ▶ CWICs are required to seek out and attend training beyond the initial training. Examples are identifying training in state-specific benefits such as Medicaid, HUD, Worker's Compensation, Unemployment Insurance;
- ▶ CWICs meet regularly for case review; all CWICs are required to participate by bringing challenging cases to the group;
- ▶ All BS&A reports are reviewed by at least one other person with content expertise before they are sent to the customer. The reviewer may be a WIPA manager, supervisor, lead CWIC, or TA Liaison;
- ▶ All CWICs are required to send at least one BS&A per quarter to the TA Liaison for feedback; if an internal process for reviewing reports is not in place, consider increasing the number and frequency;
- ▶ BS&As are reviewed by someone with editing ability for writing style and readability;
- ▶ CWICs are encouraged to conduct research using the POMS or the Code of Federal Regulations, state Medicaid eligibility handbook, Food stamp handbook, etc., to discuss their findings with co-workers, and to develop a special area of content expertise, such as long term disability or understanding the work CDR process; and
- ▶ The WIPA manager and staff develop cooperative relationships with local resources experts in the various benefits such as a Work Incentives Liaison, the Area Work Incentives Coordinator, a Technical Expert in the local SSA Field Office, a Medicaid analyst with the state, a manager of the local housing authority, or a trainer in a county or regional office with knowledge of all income maintenance programs.

Thoroughness

- ▶ All new cases are reviewed at CWIC staff meetings to ensure that nothing is missed;
- ▶ All BS&As are comprehensive and individualized to the customer's specific benefit profile; managers review files on a regular basis to ensure thoroughness;
- ▶ Managers do not set expectations that result in reports being written before all information is thoroughly verified and the customer's issues and concerns can be addressed;
- ▶ Direct supervision is provided on a weekly basis – cases are reviewed and timelines for completion of services to each individual are set;
- ▶ All contacts between a customer and a CWIC are logged in an electronic database or case management system, which can be accessed by the manager/supervisor. Contact logs are reviewed at least monthly and problems noted are addressed with the CWIC and corrected with the customer.

Timeliness

- ▶ Managers set realistic expectations when assigning cases to a CWIC and establishing a service protocol;
- ▶ New referrals are contacted within 24 to 48 hours to schedule an initial meeting; no more than 1-2 months passes from the initial contact to presentation/ mailing of the BS&A to the customer;

- ▶ Regular review of the case management data, customer feedback, and customer tracking sheets will allow project personnel to determine if services are being provided in a timely manner and to make improvements where necessary;

As Work Incentives Planning and Assistance is an evolving field, so are the indicators of quality. Paramount to all other requirements is the need to provide accurate information to beneficiaries seeking advice in order to make a decision regarding return to work. WIPA projects may need an incremental plan for continuous quality improvement, ultimately achieving the highest standard possible for excellence in service.

It is not sufficient to gather input, collect data, and evaluate processes. In addition, WIPA programs must create a feedback loop that uses the information gained from those efforts. A feedback loop involves the following:

- ▶ Identify the goals and objectives of the WIPA program relative to providing services to customers. Goals should be stated in measurable terms;
- ▶ Create the tools to measure the program's success in meeting the goals and objectives;
- ▶ Gather input from all stakeholders, e.g. customers, referral sources, community partners;
- ▶ Compile the input gathered and prepare it for dissemination in the form of reports to staff, administration, board of directors, and community stakeholders;
- ▶ Discuss the outcome of measures used with staff;
- ▶ Engage the staff in developing a plan for improvement;
- ▶ Review the plan at regular intervals during staff meetings;

CONDUCTING INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

- ▶ The Deming Cycle by Paul Arveson, (1998)
<http://www.balancedscorecard.org/TheDemingCycle/tabid/112/Default.aspx>
- ▶ Deming Distilled: Essential Principles of TQM by A. Mead (1996)
<http://well.com/user/vamead/demingdist.html>
- ▶ Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, Harper Collins, N.Y. 1994
- ▶ Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't, Jim Collins et al, Harper Collins, N.Y. 1991

An example of a customer satisfaction survey and an organization survey are included in the next few pages.

Please complete the following evaluation of the Work Incentives Planning & Assistance services that you have received and return it in the enclosed postage paid envelope. Your input will assist us in our efforts to provide high quality customer services. Please contact _____ with any questions or concerns, or if you require additional information.

Community Work Incentives Coordinator's (CWIC) name: _____ Date: _____

Did your Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) provide clear and understandable responses to your questions? YES NO

Did your CWIC respond in a timely manner to your request for information? YES NO

Did the CWIC provide helpful information to assist you in making a choice about employment? YES NO

Did the CWIC provide a good overview of how going to work and earnings will impact your Social Security and other benefits? YES NO

How would you rate the overall information and assistance provided by the CWIC?
 Excellent
 Very Good
 Good
 Fair
 Poor

Comments: _____

Please take the time to complete the following evaluation about the presentation on Work Incentives Planning and Assistance services. Your input will assist us in our efforts to provide quality services to you and your consumers. Should you have any questions, concerns, or require additional information, please contact _____.

Name of your Organization: _____ Date: _____

Name of the Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC): _____

Darken the square that best describes your opinion for each question.

	Do Not Agree	Somewhat Agree	AGREE	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
1. The CWIC was punctual.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The CWIC was organized.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The CWIC was knowledgeable about your consumers' Social Security issues and needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The CWIC presented herself/himself in a professional manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. The presentation met the expectations of my organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I would recommend this service to other agencies or organizations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please provide any additional suggestions or recommendations



Competency Unit 4

Quality Assurance Plans

For continuous quality improvement, the WIPA Project should consider a yearly planning process in which all systems and practices are reviewed, customer and stakeholder survey results are shared with all staff and considered when developing a strategic plan for improvement. For example, if customers complain that they wait weeks to get a call back from a CWIC, the manager should establish protocol with input from the staff on what is feasible, and develop a plan to review the wait time in two to three months.

A plan for continuous quality improvement must begin with an identification of the indicators for quality. While there may be variances among projects, a generic list of quality indicators might include the following (not in order of importance):

1. All benefits are verified for accuracy.
2. BS&A are individualized for each customer.
3. The customer returns for more services and begins a continuous relationship with WIPA staff.
4. The customer calls back to say he/she has gone to work.
5. A CWIC receives a thank you note or letter from the customer.
6. The customer refers others to the WIPA program.
7. Repeated requests for outreach presentations come from the same referral agents.
8. The customer is able to reflect back what the CWIC tells them during the interview.
9. The customer is able to advocate on his/her own behalf, using the information provided by the CWIC.

Notice that none of the indicators include the number of people served. Although the number of beneficiaries served should be tracked, WIPA projects are cautioned not to sacrifice quality for the sake of quantity. If the goal of the WIPA program is to support a beneficiary's efforts to work, the availability of ongoing service is paramount to success. Providing high quality, intensive service to a smaller number of people who are successful in achieving their employment goal is preferable to providing inferior services to a large number of customers, with many of them never going to work.

At the very least, quality assurance plans should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Engaging both management and direct service staff in the development and maintenance of a quality assurance plan will ensure commitment to quality services on the part of all project personnel.

QUALITY ASSURANCE PLAN

Goal	Objectives	Responsibility	Timeline	Status
All benefits, entitlements and subsidies received by the individual and impacted by earned income or work activity are included in the benefits analysis	<p>Quarterly review of records to ensure accuracy of plans</p> <p>Regular peer review of benefits planning and analysis</p>	<p>CWICs to conduct peer review on plan</p> <p>Manager to conduct quarterly chart audit</p>	Ongoing audit process in January, April, July, and October	
All information gathered for the analysis is verified by the agency administering the benefit, entitlement, or subsidy, or reason for no verification will be stated in the analysis	Quarterly review of records to ensure effectiveness	CWICs to keep accurate records with verification	Ongoing audit process	
Initial contact with customer occurs within two business days of individual request for service	Review of records to ensure efficiency	<p>CWICs to document timelines. If timelines are not met, reason is stated in record.</p> <p>Manager to verify secretary's phone logs with benefits contact sheets</p>	Ongoing audit process	
Benefits Summary and Analysis and WIP (if needed) are completed within 30 days of initial intake for high priority referrals and within 30 days of beginning of job search for low priority referrals	<p>Review of records to ensure efficiency</p> <p>Requests for verification of benefits and entitlements occurs within 48 hours of initial contact</p> <p>Based on customer need documentation of timelines for services will be prioritized (priority services for individuals working or ready to begin employment).</p>	CWICs to document timelines. If timelines are not met, reason is stated in record.	Ongoing audit process	
Responses to requests for information and referral/problem solving occur within one week of referral	<p>Review of records to ensure efficiency</p> <p>Records indicate initial contact and disposition of information and referral, and/or response to customer's request</p>	CWICs to keep documented record of all requests for information and record of service/information or referral provided		

Goal	Objectives	Responsibility	Timeline	Status
Touch points are developed for ongoing follow-up with benefits assistance	CWICs keep contact information in record, and schedule dated for follow-up. Record indicates attempts to follow-up with individuals	CWICs Review of individuals needing follow-up in team meetings	Monthly team meetings to review follow-up Individual follow-up as scheduled with counselor and individual	
Confidentiality is maintained at all times	Records contain release of information for all documented contacts on the individual's behalf	CWICs	Ongoing audit process	
Information is reported to the individual in an objective manner and understandable manner	Records indicate alternative formats when needed Plans are explained in concise information with explanation of how SSA or other agencies calculate benefits	CWICs to use peer review process as needed Managers to follow-up in review	Ongoing audit process	
CWICs participate in ongoing continuing education on a quarterly basis	Team meeting in-services and TA with project assistant on a quarterly basis All counselors to participate in quarterly continued education through workshops, in-services, web casts, or conferences	CWICs, Project Managers and Director	Quarterly training	
Staff objectives for performance that are reviewed by Project Manager and Director and contracting host agency	Performance objectives developed annually for staff through project	CWICs and Project Manager	Annual review to occur in 2010	
Customer satisfaction surveys indicate satisfaction with services	Surveys indicate satisfaction with efficiency, effectiveness and accuracy of information. Follow-up interviews with individual customers indicate decision making around work efforts and implementation of work incentives	Project Manager to distribute and collect satisfaction surveys, and conduct interviews	Monthly random distribution of satisfaction surveys	

Goal	Objectives	Responsibility	Timeline	Status
Marketing and outreach increases referrals for SSDI beneficiaries and SSI recipients	Marketing is targeted to diverse group of beneficiaries and recipients, and organizations supporting individuals Referrals come from various agencies and organizations across all Southern Indiana counties in catchment area	Manager to conduct quarterly analysis of results and update marketing plan	Quarterly Market Analysis, Bi monthly marketing plan update	

The organization’s quality assurance plan can be tied to individual performance evaluations. Programs cannot provide premium services without high performing staff. WIPA managers should consider external sources of information to measure not only the overall quality of the program, but the individual quality of each CWIC. Customers, co-workers, and other partner agency personnel can be a good source of input.

Finally, while the significance of engaging in continuous quality improvement is clear, the importance of recognizing quality among staff and programs cannot be overemphasized. By rewarding quality, WIPA managers will see a strong commitment on the part of program staff to provide the best service possible.

Managers should consider creative yet inexpensive ways to reward staff for quality performance. Send the staff home an hour early on Friday after a particularly tough week. Celebrate successes - every one-hundredth BS&A written, or a customer calls to report that he or she has used the work incentives information provided by a CWIC to succeed in reaching an employment goal. Give a CWIC additional, challenging responsibilities to reward consistent quality work. This tells them they are trusted, and their hard work and quality service are valued.

Planning for continuous quality improvement is not something a WIPA program engages in once a year. It should be reflected in the day-to-day work of all staff involved in the program.

PRINCIPLES OF WORKING IN A QUALITY WAY

Working in a quality manner requires individuals and organizations to act in the following ways:

- ▶ Be clear about your mission, your vision, and your goals.
- ▶ Remember that maintaining a high level of motivation and satisfaction is critical. This is true of staff in the WIPA projects, but it is also true of your work with beneficiaries.

On a daily basis:

- Have a long-term view of success in your work
- Eliminate practices that undermine workers’ self/mutual respect and motivation
- Foster all chances for pride of in the work done and sharing in the improvement process
- ▶ Understand and manage your system or process by breaking down the whole into small pieces of the process and identifying your internal and external customers. One strategy that is often used in this analysis is the “process map”. This map looks at the step-by-step- tasks that are involved in getting a job done.
- ▶ Actively seek input from your internal and external customers.

- ▶ Identify and use data including checklists and charting that display information in different ways.
- ▶ Use the PDCA cycle elements on a continuous basis to help use the information you are collecting and analyzing in a timely manner so that it can be used to improve the projects.
- ▶ Monitor output on an ongoing and regular basis. If your internal plan called for 15 beneficiaries to be employed during the second month of your program year – did that happen?

Three other key concepts are included in the distillation of the quality “way” of doing business. One, constant learning is key. It is important to seek out well-qualified individuals to become managers and CWICs in WIPA projects, but it is equally important to make sure that there is thorough pre-service training, consistent in-service trainings and updates and managers must be open to learning constantly from members of the team and the project’s customers.

The second key concept focuses on involving all levels of the organization. The goal of this portion of the approach is to break down barrier to team work. All levels of the organization are involved in quality and there is open communication of ideas and sharing of responsibility.

The third key concept is “reap the rewards”. Rewards in a non-profit environment may or may not be monetary but the idea is that recognition is important and that the organization has a responsibility to share the rewards it receives for quality work with its staff. It also has a responsibility to share what it has learned with the community.

(Source: Deming Distilled – The Essence of TQM, A. Meade, 1996, <http://www.well.com/user/vamead/demingdist.html>)

Finally, working in a quality way means you are customer-focused and data-driven. Always, your number one priority is your customers’ satisfaction with your service, and that data collected will provide you with the information you need to ensure your customers’ needs are being met and your project is on track to meet its performance objectives.

CONDUCTING INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

- ▶ Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, Harper Collins, N.Y. 1994
- ▶ Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't, Jim Collins et al, Harper Collins, N.Y. 1991
- ▶ The Deming Cycle by Paul Arveson, (1998)
<http://www.balancedscorecard.org/TheDemingCycle/tabid/112/Default.aspx>
- ▶ Deming Distilled: Essential Principles of TQM by A. Mead (1996)
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