Chapter 2. The MEP Recruiter

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| Chapter 2 Learning Objectives |
| The recruiter will learn |
| * the characteristics of a successful recruiter; |
| * the recruiter’s basic duties and responsibilities; |
| * how personal emotions can affect the recruiter’s behavior toward needy families and youth; |
| * the importance of knowing what services the recruiter’s local MEP provides; and |
| * that recruitment is a team effort. |

Recruitment Duties and Responsibilities

A good recruiter is determined more by his or her aptitude and attitude toward performing the unique responsibilities of the job than by any formal educational process.

Recruiters are very important because they often serve as the first contact between a migratory family or youth and the local school district, as well as the community at large. Also, for OSY, the recruiter may be the first direct contact with someone outside of their work crew. The initial contact is crucial because it provides the recruiter with the opportunity to determine whether the child may be eligible for the MEP. During this visit, the recruiter also sets the tone for the home-school relationship. It is the responsibility of the recruiter to be helpful without allowing the family or youth to become overly dependent on his/her assistance. The recruiter is often considered an ambassador in the eyes of migratory parents, the school district, agricultural employers, and the community. For example, a bilingual recruiter may be instrumental in explaining important school policies to a migratory family and may be an important connection for an OSY to educational and social service opportunities. In this way, the recruiter is the main link between the migratory family or youth and the MEP and other resources.

The recruiter’s primary job is to find and enroll eligible migratory children into the MEP. Locating migratory children can be hard work, and the recruiter must become skilled at performing a range of duties and adapting to situations to be successful. While recruiting migratory children is the recruiter’s primary responsibility, he or she also often plays an important role in helping to ensure that these children receive vital educational and social services. Thus, while “recruiter” is the most commonly used term to describe this staff position, other terms used include

* advocate ⦁ school liaison
* home visitor ⦁ community liaison
* recruitment specialist ⦁ outreach worker
* interviewer

The MEP recruiter’s primary responsibilities include the following:

* learning the MEP eligibility requirements
* establishing and maintaining a recruitment network
* becoming familiar with locations where migratory families and youth live and work
* finding migratory children and their families and youth
* explaining the MEP to migratory families and youth
* interviewing migratory families and youth
* making preliminary determinations on the eligibility of the child and youth
* completing the Certificate of Eligibility (COE)
* collecting child eligibility and other basic program data
* implementing state quality control procedures
* following ethical standards and confidentiality laws
* facilitating communication among migratory families, schools, agricultural   
  employers, and the community

The recruiter often has job responsibilities beyond ID&R. For example, the recruiter may help   
migratory families navigate the unfamiliar, and sometimes unfriendly, environment that families   
might encounter in a new community. As mentioned previously, the recruiter may also work as an advocate, translator, home-school liaison, or parent involvement coordinator.

Characteristics of a Successful Recruiter

Great recruiters are made, not born. If a recruiter doesn’t feel ready to do the job, the recruiter should work with a supervisor to identify and develop the skills needed to be successful.

Experienced ID&R coordinators say that, as a general rule, it takes about three years for a recruiter to fully learn the job. The specific skills required to be a great recruiter are developed over time using strategies such as those described in Chapter 3. If the recruiter does not initially possess these skills, the supervisor can help the recruiter cultivate them.

When ID&R coordinators and MEP administrators are asked about “a great recruiter” or “their best recruiter,” certain characteristics emerge. A great recruiter is able to

* make correct eligibility decisions,
* document child eligibility accurately and clearly,
* manage time wisely,
* work independently,
* remain flexible and adapt to a constantly changing environment,
* relate well to others and gain their trust,
* create positive relationships with agricultural employers,
* use effective interviewing (i.e., questioning) skills,
* maintain appropriate relationship boundaries,
* follow confidentiality laws,
* demonstrate personal integrity, and
* speak local migratory families’ native language and exhibit cultural sensitivity.

Few recruiters come to the job with all of the skills that make a great recruiter. Effort, enthusiasm, and a willingness to learn are necessary. Although it may take a number of years to be considered great, it is within the grasp of every recruiter to achieve excellence.

Lessons Learned: Recruiter Roles & Responsibilities

Each recruiter has stories about things that went wrong or that could have been done differently in carrying out his or her roles and responsibilities. These lessons learned may help the new recruiter avoid pitfalls that experienced recruiters have faced.

Know About the Local MEP. The recruiter must know more than just recruitment. As stated earlier, the recruiter is often the face of the MEP to families, OSY, schools, and the local community. A recruiter is also a champion for the MEP. A migratory family will often ask the recruiter questions about MEP services that the school and other programs offer, such as does the MEP offer a pre-school program, is there a summer school, are dropouts eligible for the MEP, and what programs are available to help my son/daughter graduate? The recruiter should learn about the MEP and other school and community programs that migratory children and families are eligible to receive.

Develop A Recruitment Network. A recruitment network is a system of contacts, including individuals, agencies, and other institutions, that provide information on how to identify and locate potentially eligible children. Establishing a recruitment network and developing a strong working relationship with each member of that network is an important way of finding migratory children who may be eligible for MEP services. When done properly, a recruitment network can serve as the eyes and ears of the recruiter. Key sources of information include employers, schools, community-based agencies, commercial establishments, and others. The recruitment network is further explained in Chapters 4 and 5.

Determine Work Priorities. The recruiter often has many roles. If the recruiter is expected to recruit and do other work for the MEP, the recruiter should determine the work the supervisor considers the highest priority and allocate time accordingly. For example, the recruiter, with guidance from the supervisor, may need to decide which of the following activities would be most productive: attending a job fair to recruit, staying in the school’s main office to meet new families that may be eligible for the MEP, knocking on doors to canvass for new families, or translating at the MEP after-school program. In order to prioritize, the recruiter will need to assess which of these activities provide the greatest benefit to the MEP.

Give the MEP Its Due. If a recruiter is paid by more than one funding source, the recruiter should ask an immediate supervisor how much of his or her time is paid from MEP funds and how many hours per week should be spent on ID&R activities. The recruiter should then devote that amount of time to MEP work. If the school asks the recruiter to spend MEP time on work that does not directly benefit the MEP (e.g., playground or lunchroom duty or translating for non-migratory parents), the recruiter should respectfully decline. If the school insists that the recruiter spend MEP-funded time on non-MEP work, the recruiter should contact a supervisor. Similarly, a recruiter who works full-time for the MEP should guard his or her time to make sure all work activities benefit the MEP.

Ask Questions. There are many people who work in the MEP who are willing to help the recruiter do the job correctly. If the recruiter has a question or does not understand how something should be done, the recruiter should ask someone who is knowledgeable and write down the answer. In this way, the recruiter will become increasingly knowledgeable over time.

Make Ethical Decisions. The recruiter will meet families and youth who have great needs. The recruiter may believe that those children need and deserve help, even if they do not qualify for the MEP. On the other hand, the recruiter may meet families whose children clearly qualify for the MEP, but may not find them as deserving. Because of these feelings, the recruiter may experience internal conflict about making accurate eligibility decisions. Each recruiter brings a set of personal beliefs and biases to the job; the recruiter will need to put these personal feelings aside in order to make objective decisions based on the MEP eligibility criteria.

Maintain Appropriate Relationship Boundaries. The needs of migratory families can be overwhelming to a recruiter. However, it is important for a recruiter not to make promises that cannot be kept. The recruiter should exercise caution in assisting needy families and youth with non-educationally related needs. Good judgment and tact must be used in deciding when and for how long to help a family. For example, a migratory family that has recently arrived from another country is often more dependent on the recruiter’s guidance, assistance, and support than a family who has spent more time in the U.S. The bilingual recruiter may be the only one who can make a school appointment for a family, help the family resolve an unpaid medical bill, or direct the family to other services in the community. However, there is a fine line between providing support to a family and hindering the family’s ability to become self-reliant. The recruiter should learn when it is appropriate to help a family and when to refer the family to other local services. The best service a recruiter can provide migratory families or youth is to help them develop skills that will enable them to become increasingly independent.

Be Aware of Federal, State and Local Requirements. States and LOAs may have their own requirements for the recruiter that go beyond the federal requirements. For example, if the vast majority of migratory families are of Mexican origin, a state may require the recruiter to know Spanish and demonstrate sensitivity to the various cultures of Mexico. Other state-specific requirements may include responsibility for knowing and understanding privacy laws and reporting suspected cases of child abuse or child abduction. Recruiters also need to become familiar with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the federal law that protects the privacy of student education records from unauthorized release. While these areas should be part of every recruiter’s training, if the recruiter is not aware of FERPA or the applicable state privacy, child abuse, or other relevant laws, the recruiter should ask a supervisor.

Volunteers Expand Services. A well-established volunteer network can provide recruiters with resources outside of the realm of MEP funding and can be called into action when a recruiter is feeling overwhelmed with service requests. Despite assumptions to the contrary, many people are interested in assisting the migratory community—churches, students at institutions of higher learning, retirees, community members, and various coalitions frequently seek a fulfilling volunteer experience. A recruiter’s impact can increase exponentially when working in collaboration with a strong volunteer network.

Remember That a Recruiter Is Not Alone. Being a recruiter can sometimes seem like a lonely job. However, ID&R is a team effort. It is important for the recruiter to understand that identifying, recruiting, and determining the eligibility of migratory children is the mutual responsibility of the recruiter and the ID&R team. When the recruiter has questions or needs help, there are other people who work in the MEP at the local, state, and federal levels who can assist. For example, local program staff may be able to provide leads on children who may be eligible for the MEP, a recruitment supervisor may help in planning recruitment strategies, and state staff may be able to assist in resolving eligibility questions. Spending a day in the field shadowing a fellow recruiter can also be beneficial to learn new recruiting techniques and get a different perspective from another person who understands the challenges facing recruiters.

Conclusion

Reaching migratory children and youth is at the heart of the MEP, and the importance of effective recruitment cannot be overemphasized. Without a good recruiter, the neediest migratory children may not be served. The effective recruiter can become the center of a network that connects migratory families and youth to schools and communities. When migratory families trust the recruiter, they are much more likely to tell him or her when new migratory families move into an area. When growers and other employers trust the recruiter, they are more likely to allow recruitment at the employment site and to support the MEP. Recognizing the value of these networks is the beginning of great recruiting. Chapter 3 will discuss how the recruiter learns the job.