Chapter 5. Developing Action Plans and Contacting Families

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| Chapter 5 Learning Objectives |
| The recruiter will learn |
| how to develop an action plan; |
| how to canvass areas where concentrations of migratory children and their families are likely to be found (e.g., migratory labor camps, major local employers); and |
| how to make personal safety provisions (e.g., carry a cell phone with emergency numbers on speed dial, have a backup plan for areas that do not get cell phone reception, leave a visitation schedule with a responsible coworker, visit potentially dangerous areas during daylight hours and with a partner or team, know the locations of local police stations and hospitals, have reliable transportation, use  well-traveled roads). |

Developing State, Local, and Individual ID&R Action Plans

Every year I work with the recruiters in my region to develop a recruitment calendar. The calendar lists the best times to recruit based on crop cycles, dates of important school events like school enrollment and kindergarten orientation, and when employers do most of their hiring. Each quarter, we compare what the recruiters planned to do with what they actually did and decide how we want to change the recruitment calendar for the next year. We’ve learned how to use our time more efficiently.

Now that the recruiter has determined where migratory families are the most likely to live and work, the recruiter needs to use that information to develop a personal recruitment action plan. Action plans come in many different forms and have different names (e.g., recruitment calendar, “to do” list, time management plan). The goal of an ID&R action plan is to become more efficient at finding all eligible migratory children.

Reasons for Developing an Action Plan. An action plan helps the recruiter, the supervisor, and other recruitment staff, organize and prioritize recruitment activities and establish timelines for their completion. The recruiter who has clear objectives and a plan for reaching them is more likely to be successful than a recruiter who leaves things to chance. The primary reasons for developing an action plan include the following:

* The process of creating an ID&R action plan forces the recruiter to think about what should be accomplished, to establish recruitment objectives, to decide the best way to attain these objectives, and to develop specific action steps and timelines for their completion.
* An ID&R action plan encourages the recruiter to be efficient and to use time wisely.
* ID&R action plans keep the recruiter focused and on task. Recruiters will face many different situations in the field and on the job; an action plan focuses the recruiter to a specific set of tasks.
* The completed ID&R action plan can serve as the basis for evaluating the recruiter’s efforts and for continually adjusting and improving the recruiter’s strategies for finding migratory children.
* If the recruiter leaves the job (e.g., retires, moves), the new recruiter has a clear blueprint of how to recruit in the local area.

Contents of an Action Plan. Action plans are developed at the state, local, and individual level.   
Following are some examples of what a plan at each of these levels could include:

1. State. The state action plan provides overall direction for recruiters from across the state. It includes the State’s ID&R objectives, as well as strategies, staff assignments, and timelines to meet those objectives. The state action plan, which may be part of the comprehensive state plan for service delivery or the State’s ID&R manual, could also include useful resources like
   1. a statewide map of where migratory families live and work;
   2. a calendar with seasonal crop activities;
   3. profiles of major crops and employers;
   4. recruiter resources (e.g., technical assistance provided by the State, toll-free numbers for recruitment questions, agencies that serve migratory workers and families, related websites);
   5. state laws and state and local recruitment policies (e.g., child abuse reporting requirements);
   6. the State’s MEP ethics and safety policies; and
   7. the State’s quality control procedures, such as the prospective re-interviewing plan.
2. Local. The local action plan should build on the State’s plan and should provide direction for local recruiters. In some states, particularly small states, the local MEP may use the state action plan rather than developing a local plan. The local plan should have ID&R objectives that support the State’s objectives, as well as strategies, staff assignments, and timelines to meet those objectives. The local action plan could also include useful resources like
   1. procedures that focus on recruiter safety (see below) and related contacts;
   2. a consolidated calendar that tells when to recruit in specific areas (including information like seasons for major crop activities, housing availability, school calendar);
   3. maps or directions to major employers, agencies, and schools;
   4. who to contact at specific farms, agencies, or schools;
   5. enrollment procedures for specific schools;
   6. hiring procedures used by individual employers; and
   7. any memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between service providers.
3. Individual. The recruiter’s individual action plan should build on the state and local action plans, should be detailed and specific, and should translate into a schedule or “to do” list for the recruiter within a specific timeframe (see the example in Appendix VI). The recruiter’s initial action plan may be rather basic, but the objectives should evolve and improve over time. Year-round recruiters may work with their supervisor to develop an action plan or recruitment calendar. Part-time or summer recruiters may receive very specific instructions from their employer so they can start recruiting migratory children immediately. The local MEP should review the recruiter’s action plan to make sure it is consistent with the project’s recruitment priorities and the state action plan. Action plan recruitment objectives generally consist of the following four parts:
   1. what the recruiter will do
   2. when the recruiter will do it
   3. how the recruiter will do it
   4. how the recruiter will measure success

The following are **sample** recruitment objectives:

* I will visit five agricultural or fishing employer(s) every month as documented by my activity log. (Note: The number of employers visited may vary by district and/or state).
* I will conduct employer surveys with at least six new growers in my recruitment area within the next 12 months as documented by the completed survey forms. (Note: The number of employers visited may vary by district and/or state).
* I will spend three days recruiting at the turkey processing plant in October when they hire seasonal Thanksgiving workers, as documented by my activity log.
* I will implement one new idea from this manual each month as documented by the completed actions on my task list.

Again, note that the recruitment objectives listed above are only examples. It is very important to understand that while it is good to set recruitment objectives such as the examples listed above, the recruiter should NEVER set an objective that establishes a recruitment quota or specifies that more migratory children will be found next year than were found in the current year. For example, a recruiter should NEVER set a recruitment objective that requires finding five percent more children in the coming year than were found in the last year. Furthermore, if the recruiter’s supervisor sets a recruitment quota, the recruiter should report the practice to the next level supervisor or the   
MEP state director (see the Sample Recruiter Ethics Guidelines in Appendix VII). These kinds of hard objectives or quotas are tied not to correct eligibility determinations but to annual increases in numbers. They therefore raise conflicts of interest that may not only create serious questions about the reliability of a recruiter's eligibility determinations, but also undermine the entire local or state MEP.

The individual action plan can serve as both an evaluation of the recruiter’s work and a time management tool. To evaluate his or her own work, the recruiter may wish to ask questions such as

* Were all of the objectives (i.e., action items) completed?
* Were they completed on time?
* Were the objectives (and the recruiter’s work schedule) revised as the recruiter learned more effective recruitment strategies?
* How can the objectives be improved to find all migratory children while making better use of the recruiter’s time?

The recruiter may also wish to evaluate the strategies in the action plans by asking new migratory families and recruitment network contacts how they heard about the MEP and by tracking the promotional strategies to learn which ones have been the most effective. Updating the ID&R action plan should be an ongoing task.

Each time a recruiter is hired or re-assigned, it is an excellent opportunity to conduct the research needed to develop new local and individual ID&R action plans or to update existing action plans. The recruiter who is new to an area brings fresh thinking to the task and an interest in learning about the local migratory community. Supervisors should gather as much information as possible from departing seasoned recruiters. Supervisors should make sure data logs and contacts have been updated and should consider conducting an exit interview that makes note of any suggestions the recruiter has for improvements. This will help prepare for the next recruiter’s action plan. If available, the recruiter should review state and local ID&R action plans to see what information already exists and talk to local MEP staff about whether any updates are needed. If there is no state or local plan, the recruiter should talk to local MEP staff about how past ID&R efforts were organized. Where action plans have not been developed, the recruiter’s plan could become a starting point for local or state planning.

I look forward to our end of season debriefings. We celebrate our accomplishments and plan for the coming year.

Time Management. To maximize productivity and manage time wisely, the recruiter should work with an immediate supervisor. For example, the recruiter may plan to canvass a migratory camp and visit a Migrant Head Start center located in the same area on the same day. Scheduling visits to several sites that are located in the same geographic area on the same day saves time and travel expenses. Some basic things the recruiter should consider when setting a schedule include the following:

Weekly/daily considerations:

* the best days/hours to work (early mornings, nights, weekends)
* the best times to visit migratory families, schools, and employers
* which employers, farms, or growers to visit in the current week
* when to promote the program with community agencies
* when to be in the office to complete paperwork and follow up on leads
* how the work schedule can be changed when needed

Monthly considerations:

* when to submit daily recruiter logs and other paperwork to the supervisor
* attending monthly recruiter meetings
* whether all schools, growers, employers, and farms have been contacted for   
  the current month

Annual considerations:

* the high recruitment seasons
* activities during low recruitment seasons
* when and how often training is conducted
* when professional development should be scheduled
* when to take vacations

Locating Migratory Families and Youth

To find local migratory farmworkers, I follow the port-a-john trucks to the fields and post flyers about the program on the inside of the doors.

The recruiter’s research and the recruitment network should help identify when and where   
migratory families can be most easily found. Some common recruiting sites include work sites, schools, community organizations, and migratory families’ homes. Each of these recruiting sites is discussed below.

Employer-based Recruitment

To get my foot in the door when I visit a new employer, I bring along someone the employer knows and trusts.

The recruiter may find it productive to visit the employer’s work site and interview migratory families in the fields, processing plant, or migratory labor camps. Depending on the history and the local MEP’s relationship with a particular employer, the approach may differ. For example, is this the MEP’s first contact with this agricultural employment site or does MEP have a pre-established relationship? To prepare, the recruiter may want to do the following:

* Use research and the recruitment network. The recruiter should use the previous research to determine which local employers are the most likely to employ temporary or seasonal migratory farmworkers or fishermen, including which employers have employed migratory workers in the past.
* Meet with individual employers. As discussed previously, if this is a first contact, the recruiter may wish to have the supervisor help establish the recruiter’s credibility with migratory employers by sending a letter about the MEP and following it up with a phone call. This gives the employer advance notice that the recruiter will visit and provides information about the MEP. While an unannounced visit is sometimes the only course of action in order to reach an employer, attempting to provide advance notice is recommended when possible.

In whatever manner the encounter is made, when the recruiter does meet with the employer, the recruiter should

* introduce himself or herself (a firm handshake is common in the agricultural community);
* determine the employer’s knowledge of the MEP;
* as appropriate, explain the purpose of the MEP;
* determine if the employer has temporary or seasonal jobs;
* solicit the employer’s cooperation in recruiting migratory children;
* determine which workers are the most likely to qualify for the MEP or to have a child or spouse who qualifies;
* find out the best times to interview workers (e.g., provide information about the MEP and the upcoming recruitment visit by including it with their paychecks) and which languages the workers speak;
* find out if there are any workplace requirements that the recruiter needs to obey (e.g., parking locations, farm or plant safety measures, where to meet workers);
* schedule the recruitment visit;
* when meeting with key personnel, the recruiter should remember to keep the meeting short, positive, and to the point;
* conduct onsite recruitment – onsite recruitment usually involves direct interviews with family and youth to determine eligibility (see Chapter 6 on Interviewing Migrant Families and Youth); and
* follow up – after the meeting, the recruiter should
* thank the employer;
* discuss the results of the recruitment visit (e.g., how many migratory children were identified);
* solicit feedback on how the employer thought the recruitment visit went and whether any changes need to be made for future recruitment visits;
* ask the employer to inform MEP staff when new workers are hired who might qualify for the MEP or might have a child or spouse who qualifies;
* schedule future recruitment visits; and
* request that employers put MEP contact information in new employee packets or allow the recruiter to hang posters in the employee break room.

School and Community-based Recruitment

I had a hard time getting a school to work with me, so I had my coordinator send the school a letter of introduction and call the school principal. The school was much more open the next time I visited.

The recruiter may find it beneficial to recruit during annual school enrollment periods or to participate in community health fairs or other community outreach efforts. When recruiting at these venues, the recruiter may find it useful to have families fill out “pre-qualification” forms to identify the parents who are the most likely to have children who are eligible for the MEP. If the pre-qualification form looks promising, the recruiter can interview the family immediately. Establishing a positive relationship with school personnel is very important. Many recruiters work with school registrars by having MEP surveys or pre-qualification forms inserted into the school’s new student enrollment packets. Promising surveys then get mailed to the ID&R office, allowing for the screening of potentially eligible families throughout the year. The local recruiter follows up with a phone call to further screen the family for eligibility details, and if eligibility looks good, sets an appointment to visit the family as soon as possible. To find possible leads, the recruiter may want to find out which children are enrolled in other school-based programs that often enroll migratory students, like the ESL program. Similarly, the recruiter should attend community service fairs where local service providers set up temporary intake offices in a single location to allow migratory families to sign up for a number of benefits and services at one time. As with agricultural employment logs and profiles, recruiters may find it useful to keep school profiles detailing the primary MEP contact at the school (registrar, guidance counselor, school nurse, main office secretary, etc.). When the recruiter maintains a contact log, he or she is establishing a record of communication that helps to maintain the relationship. Email is another common form of communication with school personnel.

Get a copy of the student handbook from all the schools in the area where you recruit. Read the handbooks and become familiar with the policies for such things as attendance, discipline, graduation requirements, and grading periods. Keep the handbooks for reference. Then you’ll be prepared to help the parents when they have questions.

Residence-based Recruitment. Canvassing, or going door-to-door, is the primary form of residence-based recruiting. However, if there is insufficient preparation or research done before conducting a canvass, it may not be the most efficient method. For example, it can be extremely efficient to go door-to-door looking for migratory children in a migratory labor camp. On the other hand, it can be extremely inefficient to randomly go door-to-door in a large urban center. Through research and the recruitment network, the recruiter can often identify the most productive areas to canvass. For example, the recruiter is likely to find migratory children in housing near local farms and in modest apartment complexes or local trailer parks where migratory children have been found in previous years. The recruiter may want to use the State’s migratory student database to print off a list of children along with their previous addresses that have been eligible in the past to look for them as well as any new children who may be residing in the same area.

It can be useful to invite school personnel to participate in recruitment visits to break down barriers between the school system and migratory families. Moreover, it is often preferable for teams of recruiters to canvass together, especially in areas where large numbers of OSY might be found.

A good recruiter is prepared. Recruiters should always have a stocked toolkit on hand containing materials and resources relating to ID&R, such as

* blank COEs and pens (or a laptop computer or tablet with an electronic national COE);
* a local map that can help identify promising areas in which to recruit;
* an online georeferencing map or other directional guide;
* the Child Eligibility Checklist (Chapter 7) and the Sample Interview Script (Appendix VIII);
* business cards or a badge that identifies the recruiter as being employed by the MEP;
* brochures on the MEP;
* local school student handbooks;
* language dictionaries (e.g., English/Spanish);
* important contact information (e.g., names and phone numbers for the recruiter’s supervisor and co-workers, key school personnel, emergency contact information for local hospitals and police, etc.);
* local resource guides (e.g., a list of local schools, social service agencies, adult education materials);
* school information (e.g., school bus schedules, enrollment procedures, school calendars);
* “While-You-Were-Out” doorknob hangers or sticky notes that include the recruiter’s contact information;
* a U.S. atlas and list of state abbreviations to look up the spelling of city names when filling out the COE;
* maps of Mexico and a state/city index to help identify migratory family origins and to help the recruiter look up the spelling of city names in Mexico when filling out the COE;
* a cell phone, walkie-talkie, or other communication device; and
* a whistle or other safety device.

Each of the three main recruitment activities (i.e., employer-based recruitment, school and community-based recruitment, and residence-based recruitment) is effective in certain settings. Therefore, the recruiter should mix and match these approaches, depending upon which will be the most effective and efficient in the local community. For example, K-12 students are usually the easiest to locate, as they are are likely to attend school. Parents bring the children to school to register, and elementary school-aged children, in particular, usually attend regularly. Networking at the school and getting referrals from school staff can be an effective and efficient strategy for recruiting these students. Pre-school children, on the other hand, may not have any connection to the school system unless a local school or other agency operates a daycare or preschool; thus, the recruiter may need to find pre-school children through networking with other service agencies, agricultural employers, or by canvassing in neighborhoods where migratory families often live. Finally, OSY, who are often teenagers, are usually found in the community where they live or work. Promotional activities combined with employer-based recruitment may be the best way to contact this hard-to-reach group.

Safety While Recruiting

Dogs have chased me on recruitment visits, so now I always check to be sure that they are chained. If they aren’t chained, I stay in my car and call for someone to come out and get the dog before I get out of the car. I’m required to call my office twice a day so they know I’m safe.

The recruiter should always be alert to the surroundings and be aware of his or her personal safety and security. Driving down a country road after dark, entering a building in a dangerous part of town, coming across threatening dogs guarding a farmhouse, or being female in a camp full of males are just a few situations the recruiter may encounter. Many of these circumstances arise in any outreach job and some occur because of the rural nature of ID&R. Each MEP should have safety policies that are reviewed during the recruiter’s initial training. In addition, many MEPs find it useful to meet annually with local law enforcement officers to review personal safety strategies. Planning, preparation, awareness, and common sense can be the recruiter’s best defense. Experts on safety refer to an individual’s “instincts” or “sixth sense” that warns of danger. If a situation does not “feel” right, the recruiter should rethink the visit and return another time. Safety is always the first priority of the MEP. No student enrollment opportunity is greater than a recruiter’s personal safety. If the recruiter is in a dangerous situation, he or she should leave and return another time with additional support (recruitment team or agricultural employer). Using personal safety strategies such as those described below are important. States may come up with a range of safety measures. For example, some safety strategies may be best practices, others may be part of a safety system and finally, many states enforce safety protocols.

Best practices for recruiters include the following:

* Only enter migratory housing if necessary; most recruitment paperwork can be completed outside regardless of the season.
* Conduct pair or team recruiting visits whenever possible.
* Female recruiters can have a male outgoing message on their voicemail such as,   
  “Hi, you’ve reached Jen and Jason, please leave a message,” in order to deter unwelcomed voicemail and text message advances.
* Always have car keys readily accessible.
* Always carry a cell phone; 911 still works without a service provider and in many cases you can still text 911 with no reception.
* Consider carrying mace or pepper spray.
* Pay attention to instincts; recruiters should react appropriately if feeling unsafe.
* Pay attention to personal behavior; sometimes a recruiter’s friendly behavior can   
  give the wrong impression, especially if cultural differences are present.
* Notify farm employer or manager upon visiting farm worker housing.
* Consider taking a self-defense course.

Best practices for systems include the following:

* Pre-schedule farm visits whenever possible.
* Use a buddy information system with colleagues to keep everyone informed of when and where the recruiter is going to be while conducting recruitment efforts.
* Provide training on proper responses to uncomfortable advances.
* Provide training on how to report incidents and provide samples of previous reports to make new staff aware of potential situations.

Protocols include the following:

* Do not distribute personal phone numbers of colleagues (or others) without their permission.
* Dress code—recruiters should wear MEP t-shirts and/or MEP vests if possible.
* Maintain a schedule with information on when and where recruitment efforts will be   
  taking place.
* Do not recruit after dark unless pre-scheduled and accompanied by a buddy. (University of Vermont Extension, Migrant Education Program, 2011)

The information provided above is intended to be utilized as a guide to help ID&R administrators and recruiters come up with their own safety measures. While serious safety situations are a rarity in the MEP, unfortunately they do occasionally occur. The best defense against danger is being informed, having a proactive safety plan, and knowing what to do if a problem does occur.

Communication. The recruiter should always carry a cell phone with emergency numbers in the speed dial and have a backup plan for rural areas that may not have cell phone reception (recruiters who do not have a cell phone may want to invest in a walkie-talkie or other communication device). Before going on the road, the recruiter should tell a responsible coworker the day’s visitation schedule and an expected time of arrival back at the office or home. When recruiting at a work site, the recruiter should check in with the farmer or crew leader before beginning recruitment activities. The authorities should be notified if the recruiter does not arrive at a particular destination on time and cannot be reached by telephone.

Local Knowledge. The recruiter should plan visits with safety in mind. Knowing which labor camps or neighborhoods may be cause for concern or what apartment complexes should not be visited alone may keep the recruiter from entering a potentially dangerous situation. The recruiter should consider which areas are best visited during daylight hours and whether a team, rather than an individual, should visit a particular apartment building. This type of information, which may be shared by local school personnel or community agency staff, should never be ignored. The recruiter should also be aware of the locations of local police stations, hospitals, and businesses that are open late. It is also important that the local community is aware of the MEP and the recruiter. Wearing a badge that has the recruiter’s name and place of employment can establish credibility and identity in case of an emergency. The recruiter should also be careful not to share too much personal information, particularly his or her home address or home telephone number.

Transportation. Recruiters should make sure that car doors are locked when not in the vehicle and should also keep valuables out of view. The recruiter’s car should be properly maintained and mechanically sound. Having a reliable car with a full tank of gas is a necessity when driving in rural areas. When possible, the recruiter should choose well-traveled roads and avoid shortcuts through isolated areas. The recruiter should have good maps (traditional or those downloaded from the Internet) to avoid getting lost. Many recruiters are issued GPS units or other navigation devices to aid in recruitment safety and efficiency. Emergency items (car jacks, flares, blankets, matches, flashlights, candles, water, a shovel in colder climates, etc.) can help the recruiter stay safe until help arrives in the case of an accident or an emergency.

Conclusion

The most effective recruiters plan their work and follow their plan. Gathering information on the migratory community before beginning recruitment activities and using that information to develop an individual action plan can save both time and effort. Furthermore, individual action plans help recruiters set priorities and manage time efficiently. The recruiter should consider which recruitment strategies are the most likely to be successful when developing his or her own recruitment action plan. Safety factors must always be considered when planning work in the migratory community.

Once the recruiter has identified areas that are likely to have migratory families, the next step is to interview individual families and youth, using the Sample Interview Script provided in Appendix VIII. Chapter 6 provides an interview protocol, discusses the interview process, and provides lessons learned from interviewing.