Chapter 6. Interviewing Migratory Families and Youth

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| Chapter 6 Learning Objectives |
| The recruiter will learn |
| how to use an interview script, such as the Sample Interview Script provided in Appendix VIII; |
| how to prepare an introduction to the MEP and a way to connect with migratory families and youth; |
| the eligibility factors in the Child Eligibility Checklist in Chapter 7; |
| the importance of practicing to ask the questions and probes in the Sample Interview Script; |
| how to develop a form or system for taking and saving notes; |
| the steps to take before, during, and after visiting with a family or youth; |
| strategies for handling people who are uneasy or unwilling to be interviewed; |
| strategies for telling families that they are not eligible; |
| how to handle special situations, such as interviewing emancipated youth or someone who speaks another language; and |
| how to prepare for his or her first interview. |

The Recruiter as Interviewer

Recruiting requires a great deal of knowledge, skill, and sensitivity. In particular, the recruiter needs to thoroughly understand the MEP child eligibility requirements and be able to ask probing, yet not leading, questions to make informed decisions about whether a child or youth qualifies to receive MEP services. Furthermore, the recruiter needs to solicit this information without offending the migratory family or youth. This chapter addresses how the recruiter prepares to interview migratory families and youth, as well as how the recruiter should conduct the interview.

Is interviewing a science or an art? Is it the science of understanding rules and regulations, completing paperwork correctly, analyzing data, and making accurate eligibility determinations?   
Or is it the art of talking to people one-on-one to elicit information that may be very personal? Interviewing is both. The recruiter must strike a balance between having a relaxed conversation and gathering the very specific information needed to determine child eligibility.

Conducting a thorough interview and accurately documenting the information collected is key to determining a child’s eligibility for the MEP. Therefore, in addition to the National COE (or COE), the official record of the state’s eligibility determination for each individual child, many states also utilize a supplemental interview form to gather supporting information. For this purpose, a Sample Interview Script has been provided in Appendix VIII to guide the recruiter through the actual interview process. This chapter will walk the recruiter through the process immediately before visiting prospective families or youth all the way through what to do after completing the interview.

Sample Interview Script

To determine whether a child or youth is eligible for the MEP, the recruiter needs to interview the migratory worker or another responsible adult to obtain information regarding eligibility. Supplemental interview forms guide the recruiter through a series of questions to create a structured, yet comfortable, conversation to draw out the information needed to make a preliminary eligibility determination. It is the recruiter, not the migratory worker, with the help of other MEP staff, who makes the preliminary eligibility determination of whether a child qualifies for the MEP. In many states, it is the ID&R Coordinator or state MEP Director who makes the final eligibility decision. The recruiter should always remember his or her role.

While a supplemental interview form is a useful tool in determining child eligibility, it is not all-inclusive. There are situations where the recruiter may need to ask different questions to address a particular interview situation. However, supplemental forms provide two purposes: a starting point for new recruiters to understand the basic questions to determine child eligibility, and a supporting record of the underlying information the COE is designed to collect. The new recruiter may find a script more useful than a veteran recruiter. However, the veteran recruiter should consider making a script part of the standard interview process to ensure that he or she is asking all of the key questions through the process of the interview.

The Sample Interview Script in Appendix VIII is formatted to guide the new recruiter through an eligibility interview. It is organized into six sections that reflect the interview process. The sections, which are named for the tasks the recruiter should complete, are

1. Lay the Groundwork for the Interview
2. Transition to the Interview
3. Gather Information on Child Eligibility
4. Transition to the Confirmation Process
5. Confirm Responses
6. Close the Interview

The first two sections are introductions and explanations. The third section is what could be referred to as the eligibility interview, where the recruiter asks questions of the family or youth to determine eligibility for the MEP. After gathering information through these questions, the recruiter transitions to a summary and confirmation of the eligibility information. Finally, the recruiter closes the interview and leaves the family or youth.

Each section of the Sample Interview Script has a title and a series of basic statements or questions (written in regular typeface) that the recruiter should ask. Instructions to the recruiter and notes are written in italics or are provided as footnotes at the bottom of the page; the recruiter should not read these aloud since they are meant to guide the recruiter in completing the interview.

Section 3: Gather Information on Child Eligibility includes questions that are used to determine child eligibility. The section is organized by the factors in the Child Eligibility Checklist found in Chapter 7. Section 3 also includes a list of the items in the COE that the questions address. The script also provides space for the recruiter to take notes on the interviewee’s responses.

When using the Sample Interview Script, the recruiter should keep the following in mind:

* If the questions and subquestions do not draw out the information the recruiter needs, the recruiter can ask questions from the “Additional Questions” provided to obtain the same information in a different way or to request additional information, only if needed, to confirm, clarify, or supplement the initial response.
* If a recruiter gets a response to a question that would make a child ineligible for the program, the recruiter should make sure the interviewee understood the question before terminating the interview. The recruiter can restate the question in another way, using one of the additional questions provided, being careful not to lead the interviewee or make it appear as if there is a “right” answer.
* Space is provided on the Sample Interview Script form for notes.

Section 3 of the Sample Interview Script addresses the following Child Eligibility Factors:

**FACTOR 1: CHILD’S AGE:** The child is younger than 22 years old on the date of the interview.

**FACTOR 2: CHILD’S SCHOOL COMPLETION STATUS:** The child is entitled to a free public education (through grade 12) under state law. For example, the child is not a high school graduate or does not hold a HSED.[[1]](#footnote-2) OR, the child is not yet at a grade level at which the school district provides a free public education.

**FACTOR 3a: CHILD’S QUALIFYING MOVE:** The child moved within the 36 months preceding the date of the interview. The move made by the child was due to economic necessity, AND from one residence to another residence, AND from one school district to another.

**FACTOR 3b: CHILD’S QUALIFYING MOVE RELATIVE TO THE MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKER OR FISHER:** The child’s QUALIFYING MOVE in FACTOR 3a was with, to join, or to precede a parent, guardian, or spouse who is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher (whose status has been determined in Factors 4a and 4b).

**FACTOR 4a: MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKER’S OR MIGRATORY FISHER’S (MAW/MF) QUALIFYING MOVE:** The parent/guardian/spouse or child (if the child is the worker) moved within the 36 months preceding the date of the interview, AND the move made by the parent/guardian/spouse or child (if the child is the worker) was due to economic necessity, AND from one residence to another residence, AND from one school district to another.[[2]](#footnote-3)

**FACTOR 4b: QUALIFYING WORK FOR THE MIGRATORY AGRICULTURAL WORKER OR FISHER:** After the qualifying move in Factor 4a, the parent/guardian/spouse or child (if the child is the worker) engaged in new qualifying work soon after the move, OR did NOT engage in new qualifying work soon after the move, but he or she actively sought new qualifying work, AND has a recent history of moves for qualifying work. The qualifying work is seasonal employment, OR temporary employment, OR personal subsistence. The qualifying work is agricultural OR fishing.

The eligibility factors are based on the definition of a migratory child, migratory agricultural worker, migratory fisher, and qualifying move found in the statute. Chapter 7, will discuss how to interpret the interviewee’s responses.

Variations of Supplemental Interview Forms. While the Sample Interview Script described above provides a very detailed guide for the new recruiter, other supplemental interview forms may be more condensed for a traditional interview situation. The purpose of supplemental interview forms is to provide a recruiter with the questions needed in order to consistently obtain sufficient information to make an eligibility determination for a migratory child, youth, and family.

While no tool can meet the needs of every state, every recruiter, and every interview, states may wish to adopt a supplemental interview form to address state initiatives or to meet quality assurance goals. In some states, the recruiter may need to collect additional information that is required for the CSPR or for special program services, or may want to collect information on children’s home language, learning skills, or medical history including immunizations. Finally, the state may want to revise a supplemental interview form so it can be used to conduct re-interviews. Although recruiters are not required to use supplemental interview forms, every interview should address all of the child eligibility factors discussed in Chapter 7.

Asking Screening Questions. After the new recruiter has conducted several interviews and has gained experience with the structure and questions, he or she might want to select a few questions, as briefly mentioned above, that can be used to screen families and youth. This practice helps by quickly screening whether anyone in the household meets the primary eligibility criteria, thereby warranting a full interview. Although the most reliable way to determine which children or youth are eligible for the program is to conduct a full interview with every prospect, because of time constraints, the recruiter may decide to focus on those children and youth who are most likely to be eligible. As a word of caution, however, the recruiter must be very careful not to allow his or her implicit biases impact which families or workers he or she selects for interviews after screening. Any decisions on who should not receive a full interview should be based on objective facts, such as any eligibility factors that are obviously not met. The recruiter should recognize that using screening questions will mean that some eligible children are likely to be missed, so the recruiter must weigh the need for efficiency against the importance of identifying all eligible migratory children.

A recruiter may realize during a screening conversation that the circumstances of the family or youth are ambiguous or complex and therefore pose challenges to determine whether the family or youth might be eligible. If the recruiter is unsure whether the family or youth meets eligibility criteria after asking some screening questions, rather than decide not to follow up with a full interview, the recruiter should consult with his or her supervisor. The supervisor may have more experience to help analyze the information obtained from the family or youth or may recommend additional questions to clarify the family’s or youth’s circumstances. The risk in not seeking help and not persisting in getting more information is that the recruiter may miss qualifying an eligible child or youth who needs MEP services.

If the recruiter uses screening questions, he or she should not make a preliminary eligibility determination without asking all of the questions (except for the “Additional Questions”) on the Sample Interview Script. The type of friendly conversation that often occurs during an initial screening will not give the recruiter enough information on each of the child eligibility factors to make a reliable child eligibility determination. During the full interview, the recruiter will need to ask enough follow up questions to gather all needed information. Asking screening questions may help the recruiter use time wisely by only conducting interviews when it is likely that a child or youth will be eligible for the MEP. However, screening questions cannot replace a full interview.

Changing the Order of Questions. Another adaptation or modification that a recruiter might consider is changing the order of the questions on the supplemental interview forms to get at the questions that would be most likely to disqualify a particular child or youth first. For example, if the recruiter is interviewing a mother who has three young children with her, the recruiter might find it more productive to begin the interview by asking whether the family has moved within the last 36 months rather than by asking the ages of the children. If the family has not moved, there is no reason to proceed further with the interview. Also, the recruiter may want to change the phrasing of questions to use language that local families might be more familiar with or may want to translate the questions into the family’s native language. Although recruiters have the flexibility to modify the order of questions, recruiters must examine the child eligibility factors to determine whether a child is eligible for the MEP.

Visiting Families or Youth

I don’t jump into a full interview too soon. I let the family see me around before I do a full interview.

Although the interview is the most important interaction in ID&R, there is important preparation work that the recruiter must do to make the interview successful. The state or local program may require the recruiter to complete some or all of the following activities before, during, and after interviewing families and youth.

Before the Visit. When the recruiter makes a home visit, often without an invitation or advance notification, the recruiter is stepping into the world and culture of the migratory family. Therefore, it is important for the recruiter to make a good first impression and respect the dignity of the individuals and families being visited. The following are general steps the recruiter may wish to follow prior to visiting a family:

* Pre-screen families or youth prior to the visit, if possible. For example, follow up with families or youth who have completed either a school or employer survey such as the ones found in Appendix III and appear to be eligible for the program or have a child or spouse who is likely to be eligible. If that is not possible, the recruiter can call the family prior to the visit or get information from others who know the family or youth.
* Develop a schedule of whom to visit each day and get directions to the family or youth’s home or workplace. If interviews will be conducted at a housing unit or work site, contact the housing unit manager, farm owner, plant manager, etc. first to explain the reason for the visit and ideally obtain permission to conduct the interview (see the sections on Identifying Important Information Sources and on Building Relationships and Gathering Data in Chapter 4).
* Determine whether an interpreter is needed and, if so, make suitable arrangements. Bring a copy of the COE that is translated into the family’s native language. Find out as much as possible about the family or youth’s needs prior to the visit so that the recruiter can bring useful resources. For example, if an older child did not complete high school, the recruiter may want to bring information on a local high school equivalency (HSE) program.
* Print out information on the family from the state migratory student database, if available, such as any COE data that is in the system or a list of courses the child has taken that are only partially complete.
* Dress neatly, but not too formally, so that the family feels comfortable.
* Give a colleague a copy of the day’s schedule, complete with locations, approximate times, and when the recruiter expects to return to the office or home (see Safety While Recruiting in Chapter 5). Notify the office or a co-worker if plans change.
* Print a copy of the Sample Interview Script and the child eligibility factors to be addressed during the interview.
* Bring any materials the recruiter will need to complete the COE and any other forms required by the state. For example, some states require the completion of a needs assessment for all families or an OSY profile for every OSY enrolled into the program. Some states use a paper copy of the COE form and require a pen. In other states, tablets, smartphones or laptop computers may be used (see suggestions for what to take on a recruiting visit in the section on Contacting Migratory Families and Youth in Chapter 5).
* Take time to get organized before conducting each interview. Fumbling for promotional materials or COEs makes the recruiter look ill prepared and canreflect poorly on the MEP.

During the Visit. As stated previously, during the interview, the new recruiter should follow the Sample Interview Script. Supplemental forms provide detailed questions that the recruiter should ask; however, the following are additional guidelines to follow when interviewing:

* Observe the surroundings. The recruiter should always be observant about the family or youth’s environment. For interviews that are conducted at the home or workplace, the recruiter should look for clues that may require the recruiter to ask additional questions to help determine if the child is eligible for the MEP. For example, seeing that a migratory family is operating a well-established day care center out of the home might alert the recruiter to ask more questions about whether the family has moved within the last three years. The recruiter should use all available information to ask the right questions to accurately determine the child’s eligibility for the MEP.
* Make introductions and explain the purpose of the visit. The recruiter should begin by introducing himself or herself and explaining the program the recruiter represents and the reason for the visit. It is not necessary to go into great detail about MEP services, but the recruiter should provide enough information to put the interviewee at ease so the recruiter can gather accurate information. A parent or youth may feel less apprehensive and may be more forthcoming if he or she understands the reason for the interview. The recruiter may also want to point out that he or she is not selling anything; the MEP is free for eligible children and the information they provide is confidential.
* Find common ground. The recruiter will need to think about how to build a rapport with migratory families. Saying things such as, “I see we both have three children” or “You’ve lived in Texas; I’ve been to Texas several times and really liked it” may relax the interviewee and keep the conversation going as the recruiter obtains the required information. Making friendly conversation with the children or admiring a pet or a child’s artwork may also make parents feel more comfortable.
* Use a conversational tone. This will help put the interviewee at ease and will make the recruiter more likely to obtain accurate information. Administrators often try to hire recruiters who are friendly, non-threatening, and if possible, from similar cultural backgrounds so families and youth feel comfortable talking with them. Being too “business-like” or asking probing questions too quickly can make a family or youth feel uneasy and unwilling to share information. Having an understanding of possible cross cultural differences will help to set the proper tone of the interview.
* Take notes. The recruiter should always take notes during the interview rather than rely on memory. These notes, which can be filed with the completed COE or on a supplemental interview form, become important when an eligibility determination is questioned or when a third party requests additional information on how the decision was made (e.g., as in the case of a quality control re-interview, or in an appeal by a parent).
* Practice active listening.The recruiter only gets the information that is needed when the interviewee is talking. Therefore, the recruiter should be sure not to dominate the conversation. The recruiter should use active listening skills, including techniques like the following:
  + Focus on the speaker.
  + Sit near the speaker.
  + Lean forward in an engaged pose.
  + Restate the speaker’s key points.
  + Summarize the conversation.
  + Ask relevant questions.
  + Show interest through facial expressions and gestures like nodding.
  + Let the speaker rest after talking.

Interrupting speakers, dominating the conversation, or even coaching answers from a parent or youth is not only a sign of disrespect, but it can lead to faulty eligibility determinations.

* Repeat or reword questions. The recruiter should feel comfortable asking a question a second time or approaching it from a different angle. For example, a recruiter might ask, “Has your oldest daughter graduated from high school?” “Has she received a HSED?” “Did she take a test and receive a certificate that said she passed high school?” Rewording a question may help the interviewee understand what information the recruiter is seeking.
* Answer questions or make a note to follow up. If the family or youth asks a question that the recruiter cannot answer, the recruiter should not be afraid to say, “I do not know the answer to that, but I’ll be glad to find out for you.” It is much better for the recruiter to admit not knowing something than to give the wrong answer. Writing down any questions or concerns the family or youth might have and following up with them later will help build the recruiter’s credibility within the migratory community.
* Ask for additional information or documentation. Following are several common scenarios in which the recruiter is advised to ask more questions or to get additional documentation:
  + The facts are unclear. An interviewee may give conflicting or unclear answers because of fear or stress, an inability to recall specific information, language issues, or other unintentional reasons. In particular, it is critical to gather enough information to be able to develop a timeline to chart moves, qualifying moves, dates of engagement with qualifying work, QAD, etc. because these dates determine if a child or youth is eligible for MEP services and on what date eligibility begins. For example, one family member may say the family moved in the spring, and another family member may say they moved in the summer. The recruiter should ask for more information to clarify the date of the move. Another example is where language issues prevent the recruiter from getting clear responses to eligibility questions (e.g., the person being interviewed speaks a language that is not typically spoken in that area and the local project is unable to find a good translator). Again, the child **should not** be enrolled until the MEP has enough information to determine if he or she is eligible.
  + It is not clear that the employment the worker is engaged in or actively sought is qualifying work. If the worker moved to find work that the state has not qualified previously, it may not be clear whether the work meets the definition of being agricultural or fishing or of being temporary or seasonal employment. In this case, the recruiter would need to collect enough information to allow the state to determine if the work qualifies for purposes of the MEP.
  + The worker did not engage in qualifying work soon after the move, information (1) on the ways in which the worker actively sought such employment and (2) the recent history of the worker’s moves for qualifying work is not evident. (These moves do not have to be qualifying moves.) For workers who did not engage in qualifying work soon after the move, the recruiter needs information on both (1) and (2). The recruiter should ask the worker about where he or she applied for work and how many potential employers he or she contacted within 60 days after the move. See the NRG for a recommended interpretation of “soon after the move” (NRG, Ch. II, C5). Also, the recruiter should review information on family moves that may be available in the state MEP student database or Migrant Student Information Exchange (MSIX).
  + The recruiter suspects that the family has not been truthful. In some cases, parents may say whatever they need to say to get their child a desired MEP service (e.g., extra tutoring). For example, a worker may claim to have moved to another state for qualifying employment during a specific time period. However, the recruiter may have viewed records that show the children in attendance at the local school or seen the worker in town during that time. In this case, the recruiter should ask for additional information such as proof of employment that may include verbal confirmation from the employer, a copy of a pay stub, or a copy of an employment application. The recruiter might also speak with school personnel to find out if the child missed any school during the time the worker claimed to have moved to another state.
  + The family made a short duration move. If a move was of an extremely short duration of time, for example a few days or less than one week, it may be questionable whether the move was a change in residence. In situations such as short duration moves the recruiter should ask the State for its written policy for determining and documenting when and why these moves qualify for the MEP. In cases where change of residence may be questioned, the recruiter should clearly document on the COE why he or she believes that a move of such short duration would be considered a qualifying move.
  + It is not clear that the move was made due to economic necessity. The MEP is premised on the Federal government’s understanding that migratory children have unique needs in view of their mobility, and generally are in low-income families. However, the statutory requirement that a qualifying move be made due to economic necessity clarifies that, under the ESEA, economic necessity is integral to a move that makes a child a “migratory” child. Thus, a person who leaves from the place where he or she lives to, for example, (1) visit family or friends, (2) attend a wedding or other event, (3) take a vacation, (4) have an educational or recreational experience, or (5) take care of a legal matter, would not have “changed residence due to economic necessity” because the person did not go to the new place because of financial need. Similarly, this person would not have “changed residence due to an economic necessity” upon returning home from one of these visits. The recruiter may want to ask additional questions if it is not evident that the move was due to economic necessity, as defined above.

Additional documentation should only be requested when the information is needed to determine a child’s eligibility for the MEP, since parents may view these requests as unnecessary and intrusive. The recruiter should talk with a supervisor to decide if additional documentation is needed and, if so, what type of documentation to request (more information on documentation is provided in Chapter 7). If the recruiter and supervisor are not able to determine if a child is eligible for the MEP because the parent is unwilling to provide additional documentation or there are still questions about the child’s eligibility after the recruiter reviews the additional documentation, the child **should not** be enrolled in the MEP.

* Confirm the information on the COE and get the form signed. The recruiter should review the COE with the person who was interviewed to make sure that everything recorded on the form is accurate. When you review the information, the interviewee may make corrections or remember additional details; the recruiter should take the time to get it right. The recruiter should summarize the information gathered from the interview and repeat it back to allow the interviewee to make corrections if necessary. Once any needed corrections have been made to the COE, the recruiter can then ask the interviewee to sign the form to verify that he or she provided the information and that it is true to the best of his or her knowledge. The recruiter may have permission slips or other forms that need to be signed as well.
* Thank the interviewee and ask for referrals. The recruiter should thank the interviewee for his or her time and ask whether there are other farmworkers or fishers who live in the local community who might be eligible for the program or have additional family members or co-workers who might be eligible.

*I’m careful not to promise the family that their child will receive services because my state doesn’t get enough money to serve every child. I’d rather tell the family that I will find out whether their child can get extra services so I don’t promise something I can’t deliver. I want migratory families to be able to trust me.*

After the Visit. After the recruiter has completed the interview portion of the visit, he or she should do the following:

* Check the COE to make sure it is complete, clear, signed, and correct (see the sample COE Review Checklist in Appendix XII).
* If needed, consult with the translator to verify the information on the national COE and observations regarding the interview.
* Make a note of any observations about the family or youth that may assist in making the final eligibility determination.
* If appropriate, thank the housing unit manager, farm owner, or employer for being cooperative.
* Follow up on any promises made to the family during the interview.
* With the interviewee’s permission, contact community agencies and provide them with referral information so they can help address any needs the family may have that are outside of the scope of the MEP.
* Where required by the state or local program, record the interview in an activity log (i.e., a record of how the recruiter uses his or her time) and complete any other required paperwork.
* If the recruiter gathered any new or updated information from the family or youth, enter that information in the state or local migratory student database.
* Avoid sharing private information about the family that came out of the visit. Respecting confidences is a way of gaining the respect and trust of the family. Much of this information is also protected by privacy laws.

Difficulties While Interviewing

The recruiter may encounter any number of difficulties during an interview. While it is impossible to anticipate every possible issue a recruiter might encounter, some of the most common are discussed below.

Resistance. Migratory family members or youth may refuse to be interviewed or may not want to disclose information about their employment, particularly if the family or youth is not familiar with the program. While there are many reasons why a recruiter could face resistance, one reason is that a number of recent immigrants and farmworkers are uneasy about providing information to a government representative for privacy or other reasons. It is important that the recruiter assure the interviewee that the COE will only be used to document the child’s eligibility for the MEP and that the MEP does not collect information on immigration status of a family or individual. By explaining the MEP’s basic purpose, the recruiter may be able to persuade the family member to allow the recruiter to interview him or her. The recruiter may also ask a family who has been served by the MEP to talk with the new family. Many times a resistant migratory family or youth will become more cooperative after talking with a satisfied parent or other OSY. Another strategy is to give the family time to think about the request and come back later.

To overcome resistance, it might be helpful for the recruiter to make the following points:

* A family or worker’s immigration status is not a factor in determining eligibility for   
  the MEP.
* In the U.S., all children are entitled to receive a K-12 education, regardless of their immigration status. In fact, each state has compulsory school attendance for children who are within a specific age range.[[3]](#footnote-4)
* The state is required to look for all children who are eligible for MEP services.
* The MEP is a supplemental educational program that helps migratory children   
  who are struggling to keep up in school due to factors such as a lack of educational continuity, lost instructional time, difficulty adjusting to a new school, lack of educational support in the home, health issues, and access to services.
* Even if a child does not need help at this time, the family should know about the MEP for future reference.

The recruiter does not need to mention all of these points if the family is comfortable with sharing information or already knows about the program.

Assumptions and Judgments. The recruiter is susceptible to making assumptions and judgments about people he or she encounters that may make interviewing difficult. Some common assumptions the recruiter may unintentionally make include those found in Table 1.

Table 1. Eligibility Interviewing Assumptions and Facts

| Assumption | Fact |
| --- | --- |
| Every child in a family qualifies  for the MEP. | There are times when one or more children in a family may not be eligible for the MEP. For example, a child may have been born after the family made the qualifying move or an older child may already have completed high school. |
| If the children did not move with the worker they do not qualify for the MEP. | In some cases, a worker may move alone, leaving the children with a spouse or grandparent. In these cases, the children are not eligible for the MEP because they did not move. However, it is possible that some or all of the children made a subsequent qualifying move with the worker. |
| All workers at a particular job-site qualify. | Some sites have both permanent and temporary or seasonal jobs. The recruiter should make sure that the job the worker sought is temporary or seasonal. |
| All migratory families or workers are Latino (or some other ethnic group). | Migratory workers have been identified in many different ethnic groups. |
| All Latino immigrants are migratory families or workers. | There are many Latino immigrants who do not meet the eligibility requirement for the MEP. |
| If the worker’s most recent qualifying move was not to find qualifying work, his children do not qualify. | If a child makes a qualifying move with or to join a parent/guardian who is a migratory agricultural worker, regardless of whether this particular move was to find qualifying work, the child could still be eligible for the MEP if the child’s move was within the 36 months preceding the date of the interview, and the parent still retains his/her status as a migratory agricultural worker. |

The recruiter may unconsciously make judgments about individual families or youth that affect the outcome of the interview. For example, over time the recruiter may become aware that some families are more or less respected by other members of the local migratory community. The recruiter should be careful not to base eligibility decisions on assumptions or judgments formed by others, but rather look objectively at the facts. Even if the recruiter is uncomfortable with a particular family or youth’s lifestyle or behavior, the recruiter cannot factor these feelings into the eligibility decision. The recruiter’s role is not to judge a family or youth, but rather to make objective eligibility determinations for the MEP.

Language and Culture. The recruiter may come in contact with unfamiliar languages or cultural norms. If the recruiter does not speak the family’s language, he or she may overcome linguistic differences with the use of an interpreter. When using an interpreter, the recruiter should remember to communicate with the family, not just the interpreter. Avoiding slang and long statements can make interpretation easier. The interviewee should be reminded that talking slowly and pausing when responding will help the interpreter. Cultural challenges can be more difficult to overcome. However, most people generally appreciate sincere attempts to be cordial and respectful. Having sincere concern for the welfare of the family and children will also help to avoid awkward cultural misunderstandings.

Distractions. The recruiter should be aware that distractions can diminish the quality of an eligibility interview. To increase the reliability of the interview, the family or youth should be in a comfortable environment with limited distractions. For example, a recruiter that interviews a worker at the doorstep of the home—with cars passing, children playing, and dogs barking—may not get accurate information or may not record the information accurately. The recruiter should be aware of the surroundings, and if there are too many distractions, the recruiter could ask screening questions,   
but wait to do the full interview at a more convenient time. If appropriate, the recruiter could also suggest moving the interview to a more accommodating space.

Leading Questions. Because the interview is critical to determining the child or youth’s eligibility for the MEP, the recruiter should avoid asking questions that lead families to give vague or untruthful answers. Leading questions can often be answered by “yes” or “no” responses and prompt the interviewee to give a particular answer. On the other hand, open-ended questions prompt the interviewee to provide more information than simply yes or no. In the first example below, “you moved here to work in agriculture, right?” the phrasing makes it appear that “yes” is the correct response. Rephrasing the question to “why did you move here?” allows the interviewee to provide various reasons without having a predetermined answer in mind. Below are several examples of leading questions that the recruiter should avoid, along with suggestions on how to rephrase them   
to be open-ended.

Table 2. Comparison of Open-Ended vs. Leading Questions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ask open-ended questions… | DO NOT ask leading questions… |
| Why did you move here? | You moved here to work in agriculture, right? |
| What kind of work were you looking for?  How did you know this type of work was available? | Did you move to engage in any type of agricultural work? |
| Has anyone in your family moved recently?  When did they move? | You have moved recently, have you not? Say, within the past three years? |
| How long has your family been living in  [name of current home town]?  Did you ever travel anywhere else? | You know we have a great summer program for children who have moved. I will bet your kids have moved in the last few years, have they not? |

The recruiter should not tell the interviewee the MEP eligibility requirements before the interview begins as this might inadvertently affect the interviewee’s responses. Instead, the recruiter should ask questions similar to those in the Sample Interview Script in order to obtain accurate information.

Chronological Confusion. Experienced recruiters often report that it is easier to get a worker to tell what was done than when it was done. For example, a worker may recall having worked at a chicken processing plant, but may have trouble remembering the exact start date. Many people have trouble remembering specific dates; this can be even more difficult for migratory families who move frequently. Because the SEA must approve the COE on or before the parent’s status of a migratory agricultural worker expires, it is critical that the recruiter establish the most recent date that the children made a qualifying move with the parent/guardian who is a migratory worker

To help the worker place the event in time, the recruiter may wish to

* review a calendar with the worker and ask the worker to point to the date of the move;
* ask about the weather during the time the worker moved or obtained the agricultural or fishing work;
* help the worker recall important news, school, or family events and try to determine if the move happened before or after that event;
* ask the worker to recall the ages or grade levels of the children at the time of the move;
* check with other family members; or
* ask to see pay stubs or school records.

If the family has previously qualified for MEP services, information in the MEP student database or MSIX may help place the family or youth’s move.

Contradictions. During an interview, a family may give answers that appear to be contradictory or inconsistent with what the recruiter has observed. For instance, the recruiter may observe that the family runs a thriving construction business even though the parent says he moves frequently for agricultural work. If a situation is unclear or if the recruiter is not satisfied with the answers that the interviewee provided, the recruiter should tell the interviewee that he or she has to consult with a supervisor before determining if the child or youth is eligible and that he or she will inform the family of the supervisor’s decision. A family or interviewee may feel pressure to give false or exaggerated information for a variety of reasons: to qualify for services, to please a friendly recruiter, to appease another family member, or to compensate for not knowing or remembering the answers to certain questions. The recruiter should be aware of these motivations and clarify any information that does not appear to be accurate. More information on this topic is found earlier in this chapter; material on falsification of information by the recruiter is found in the next chapter.

Premature Determinations. The recruiter should avoid telling the interviewee whether the child or youth is eligible for the MEP during the initial visit. There may be circumstances or issues that the recruiter did not consider during the interview that may later affect the eligibility determination. For example, the MEP staff person who reviews the COE may question whether the work that the family does is temporary or may know something about the family that might affect the child’s eligibility (e.g., the child did not move with the parents to do agricultural work). This additional information could change the recruiter’s initial eligibility determination.

Similarly, the recruiter should avoid telling the interviewee that the child or youth will receive MEP services. The MEP is not required to serve every eligible migratory child. In some areas, there may not be enough migratory children to justify the cost of starting a program. In others, an eligible child may not be served because there are other eligible children who have greater needs. Funds are limited and local programs are often forced to make tough decisions. Families often ask what kind of services their children will receive, and the recruiter may be tempted to list all the services the local program provides. However, the recruiter should keep in mind that not all eligible children will receive all services. Therefore, while most programs assess migratory children and do their best to deliver the most appropriate services, there is no guarantee that every child will be served.

The recruiter should avoid the uncomfortable and unpleasant position of having to return to a family to inform them that there has been a mistake and their child is not eligible for the MEP and will not receive promised services. The recruiter should inform the family that others need to review the COE before a final eligibility determination is made, and that someone from the MEP will notify the family of the outcome.

Lessons Learned: Interviewing Migratory Families and Out-of-School Youth

In the fall of 2004, most states re-interviewed a sample of children who had been determined to be eligible for the MEP as part of a National Re-Interview Initiative. Through this initiative, there were a number of lessons that were learned about interviewing migratory families and youth. Some of those lessons are listed below.

The Role of the Recruiter. The recruiter may encounter families who are living far below the poverty level and who have great needs. Regardless of the level of poverty the recruiter finds in a home or shelter, the recruiter cannot confuse empathy for the family with the duties of the job. The recruiter should be careful not to perceive himself or herself as having the power to decide which children are eligible to receive services and which ones are not. Furthermore, the recruiter cannot use the MEP as a way to “level the playing field” by occasionally making a questionable eligibility determination to help a particularly deserving family. While it might feel good to be able to help a deserving family, the role of the MEP recruiter is to identify and recruit eligible migratory children, not children in need.

Moreover, for families that have domestic problems, there are social organizations that can help them with issues like domestic violence, drug abuse, child abuse, or neglect. The recruiter may not feel comfortable giving unsolicited information about these services to a family, but he or she should be aware that these services exist and should provide the information if necessary. In addition, the recruiter should learn the local, district, and/or state policy with regard to when and how to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.

Quality Control Procedures. Routine quality control checks are important for catching eligibility determination errors. The 2004 National Re-Interview Initiative resulted in ED’s issuance of regulations that mandate quality control procedures nationwide. Annual prospective re-interviews are designed to catch errors prior to reporting the number of migratory children in the state. An ongoing random sampling of students allows concrete training opportunities when errors are found. It also leaves less room for intentional inaccuracies from recruiters when they know ahead of time a family may be called for a random re-interview.

**Double check dates.** Dates for qualifying moves are critical. For that reason the recruiter must make the extra effort to ensure that the dates recorded on the COE are as accurate as possible. The qualifying move date for the children establishes the QAD, which determines the length of time the child is eligible for the MEP. The qualifying move date for the worker establishes the timeframe for the individual’s status as a migratory agricultural worker/migratory fisher. This date is also critical because the SEA must approve the COE on or before the parent’s status of a migratory agricultural worker expires.

Services Vary. States and school districts offer a variety of different types of services through the MEP. A child may receive a service in one state that is not available in another state. Moreover, services may even vary within a state from one local project to another. Therefore, the recruiter should inform the family that services can vary from one MEP to the next.

Referring Families and Youth to Appropriate Services. The recruiter, with the family’s consent, should feel free to refer a family to other suitable service providers. When the recruiter is able to accurately identify the family’s needs and provide complete information on the referral source, the family is more likely to get the services they need. In making a referral, the recruiter should provide the family with the

* name of organization,
* location and hours of operation,
* name of contact person and telephone number,
* eligibility criteria, and
* services provided.

To increase the likelihood that the family will actually receive services, the recruiter should follow-up by

* contacting the person to whom the migratory family was referred—after receiving the family’s consent to do so—and providing the following information:   
  (1) the name of the family, (2) the service(s) needed, (3) the date the referral was made, and (4) contact information for the recruiter (or the family) if the family does not make contact; and
* following up with the family to see if they received the service(s) they needed.

Youth who qualify for the migratory program may be eligible for a variety of other services, including

* ESL classes,
* Adult Basic Education classes,
* referrals to health and other community services (e.g., legal, housing, clothing),
* “reconnection” to high school programs,
* semi-independent study courses, and
* local volunteer or student group contacts.

Do Not Set Recruitment Quotas. At times, the recruiter may use techniques that are similar to the strategies used in sales and promotion to find and recruit migratory children; however, the recruiter is not a salesperson. The recruiter should never feel compelled to meet specific recruitment targets or quotas. Instead, the recruiter should concentrate on finding all of the eligible children in the recruitment area to the best of his or her ability. Agricultural and fishing jobs may change over time due to factors such as development, farm consolidation, changing weather patterns etc., which can affect the number of migratory families and youth who move into a particular area to work. All the recruiter can do is find the eligible children who reside in the recruitment area. The recruiter should never feel pressured to make questionable eligibility determinations to increase the number of identified migratory children.

Do Not Give Families Recruitment Incentives. Never give families gifts like jackets or backpacks to entice them to enroll their children in the MEP. Giving gifts may encourage a family or youth to say what the recruiter wants to hear to get the gift. It can also cause hard feelings if one child receives a gift and another one does not. Once enrolled into the program, some programs may offer small “welcome bags” to eligible students as a means of reminding them about the MEP and preparing them for school, but this is not appropriate as a recruitment tool.

Conclusion

When conducting an eligibility interview, the recruiter should be prepared to do the following: introduce himself or herself, explain the reason for the visit, find common ground with the family to build rapport, screen the interviewee using the child eligibility factors to determine whether the child qualifies for the MEP, and use a supplemental interview form to obtain the supporting information needed to determine whether the child is eligible for the MEP and to fill out the COE. The new recruiter may rely heavily on the more in-depth Sample Interview Script when conducting an interview, while a seasoned recruiter will learn how to draw out the information that is needed to determine eligibility using a more conversational approach or a more condensed supplemental interview form.

Interviewing skills develop and improve over time. With solid research, a good individual ID&R action plan, working knowledge of eligibility requirements, and practice, the recruiter will gain confidence and proficiency as an interviewer. The next chapter provides tools that will help the recruiter make accurate preliminary eligibility determinations.

1. The recruiter should find out which older children are still entitled to a free public education in his or her state. If a question arises (e.g., the child has a secondary school degree issued by another country or has received a certificate of completion in lieu of a diploma), the recruiter should find out from state officials whether the child is entitled to continue to pursue a high school diploma in that state. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In a state that is comprised of a single school district, the child moved from one administrative area to another within such district or resides in a school district of more than 15,000 square miles and migrates a distance of 20 miles or more to a temporary residence. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. For information on age range for compulsory school attendance and special education services, and policies on year-round schools and kindergarten programs, by state, as of 2015, visit: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/statereform/tab5_1.asp>. This information is also available from each SEA. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)