

Employment Services Orientation Guide

This orientation approach was created using Global Learning Partners' rigorous Eight Steps of Design[™]. Each aspect of the orientation outlined in this document is built upon a deep understanding of the participant's perspectives, the staff's philosophy, and the program's overall vision. We invite facilitators to study it carefully and refer back to it periodically overtime to ensure fidelity to this very intentional design.

Understanding the participant

Orientation participants are parents (male and female) from a wide range of cultures and with a breadth of personal histories. All have successfully applied for public assistance, completed the intake process with a Financial Worker and followed-up on a referral to the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Employment Services (ES).¹ All referred parents attend Employment Services Orientation (ESO) if it is their first experience with MFIP, if they've been away from MFIP for more than six months, or if they are switching from another county or agency.²

Many of the parents attending orientation have had limited or difficult job histories; others have been gainfully employed in a career and are having trouble finding work at the moment; and others have part-time jobs when they arrive. Finding a job is not always the issue—sometimes the challenge is securing a career where they have the opportunity to earn enough income to support their family financially. Many have a sense of urgency for child care services, and some even bring their children with them to orientation.

Those who have accessed MFIP in the past (about half) are usually familiar with the program's offerings and requirements. However, they are often unaware of the breadth of what is offered. Some may doubt that the services will be helpful to them (for example: "I have a job, why do I need to be here?"). But when they discover what is available, they often see how useful it could be. Parents new to MFIP live in poverty, have children, and need help. But beyond that, each story is unique.

Parents bring a mix of thoughts and emotions to ESO. Here are some common ones:

- Eagerness to get to a better place
- Fear and confusion about what might be expected of them
- Frustration from past experiences

Recognizing how participants may feel coming into ESO is a critical first step in building a new approach curriculum, and in preparing staff to facilitate it. *Why?* Because we make decisions based largely on our feelings. We must work with the whole range of emotions that may inspire or hinder participants' decisions to actively engage in the program after orientation. We acknowledge that participants' perceptions of MFIP during this initial impression can either facilitate or hinder their willingness to engage.

¹ All participants will have received a letter of invitation to MFIP ESO.

² Exemptions exist for parents with children under 1 year of age.

Leaders of orientation

ESO is now delivered in a single format across Workforce Solutions (WFS) and Goodwill/Easter Seals (GES): counselors conduct orientation one-on-one with participants during their initial meetings. A successful leader of this new orientation will exhibit these characteristics:

1. Solid experience navigating the MFIP process with participants;
2. Empathy for the participant’s situation and a sincere curiosity about their story; and
3. Strong use of active listening skills.

An effective facilitator will follow the orientation design faithfully (achieving the agreed-upon objectives and using all relevant materials). However, they will also adapt the orientation to their own natural style and the participants with whom they are working.

Facilitators are not expected to know answers to every question a participant may raise; but, rather, should find and communicate answers promptly back to the participant.

The redesign process

As part of the Lifelong Learning Initiative (LLI), Ramsey County seeks to reduce the information overload and cognitive tax placed upon participants during this crucial (mandatory) introductory session, and, instead, to focus on the most relevant and timely topics. At the very start of this process, a working group of Ramsey County program administrators and supervisors offered recommendations toward this end, which are summarized in Table 1. We kept these initial recommendations in mind throughout the creation of this new Orientation.

Table 1. Management workgroup recommendations

- ✓ Rebrand “Overview” as “Employment Services Orientation” (ESO)
- ✓ Streamline the delivery of information by remove non-essential materials and integrate these, as appropriate, later in the participant service delivery flow
- ✓ Focus orientation on the concept of MFIP ES as an opportunity for personal growth and inspire participants to tap into it (see list of contributing materials)
- ✓ Ensure that required paperwork is completed during orientation (see shortened list of required materials).

Key features of the new ESO approach as compared to the previous “MFIP Overview” are:

- Fewer assumptions and more personalization of content
- Less focus on paper and PowerPoint; more focus on people
- Less telling; more listening and responding.

Time, place, and materials

Orientation is designed to last about one hour, but it may exceed that at times when the dialogue with a participant naturally goes longer. Orientation is provided in a one-on-one format between the counselor and the participant during standard business hours. Individual orientation is typically held at the counselor’s desk or a small room, which offers a fairly private and quiet setting. The space in which orientation occurs has implications for mitigating distractions, creating comfort, and building relationships. The slide deck is not meant to be displayed but, rather, to be printed as a hard copy packet for each participant to read, write in, and take home with them.

Learning objectives, content, and anticipated changes

Table 2 presents the relationships among the **learning objectives** (what the participants will accomplish during the session), the **content** (the information shared during the session), and the **anticipated changes** (what we expect to see as a result of an effective orientation session). Table 3 displays a sample orientation session agenda.

Table 2. Learning objectives, core content, and anticipated changes

During orientation (1 hour session)		After orientation
Learning objectives		Anticipated change in the participant
MFIP Services	Participants clarify the role of ES services within MFIP	A brief description of 3 complementary types of MFIP services: financial, childcare, employment.
MFIP - ES Philosophy	Participants explore the core philosophy and approach of MFIP	A snapshot of beliefs at the core of MFIP Employment Services
Personal Focus	Participants name areas they want to focus on in their lives right now	A simplified overview of life areas (based on pillars in “My Bridge of Strength”)
Personal Journey	Participants briefly describe a personal vision and compare it to their current reality	A worksheet for participant to reflect on: - <i>Where am I going?</i> <i>How will I get there?</i>
MFIP Opportunity	Participants begin to identify how MFIP ES may best support them as they work toward their vision	A comprehensive picture of supports offered through MFIP ES
Mutual expectations	Participants examine what they can expect of MFIP and what the program expects of them	Mutual expectations are captured and communicated on one page

During orientation (1 hour session)		After orientation	
Learning objectives		Core content	
		Anticipated change in the participant	
The MFIP journey	Participants anticipate and prepare for their MFIP journey	High level “map” of the participant’s journey	
Closing	Participants record personal next steps, sign required forms, and select (optional) resources that may be useful for them	Our Task-Plan-Do-Review framework. Forms with required signatures. Optional resources to take home.	

Table 3. Sample orientation flow, noting pages of participant packet and estimated time

Content Flow and Use of Orientation Materials	Estimated Timing
MFIP Services and Philosophy <i>Packet pages 1-4</i>	8 min
Personal Focus and Personal Journey <i>Packet pages 5-6</i> <i>(Counselor may also use My Bridge of Strength here)</i>	15 minutes
MFIP Opportunity <i>Packet page 7</i>	10 minutes
Mutual Expectations <i>Packet page 8</i>	10 minutes
The MFIP Journey and Your Personal Next Step <i>Packet pages 9-10</i>	12 minutes
Closing <i>Packet page 11</i> <i>Counselor also has forms for required signatures and a set of brochures of potential interest to participant.</i>	5 minutes

Orientation leader's checklist: Before orientation

1. The counselor reads all available information about the participant(s) coming to orientation. Think through:
 - ✓ How many months are available to the participant(s) on MFIP?
 - ✓ Which of the array of programs and services will most likely suit their needs?
 - ✓ What next step(s) might the participant(s) need or want to make after orientation?
2. If possible, arrange for someone to care for the participant's child(ren) while they are in orientation. If not, have an area with toys set up.
3. If possible, offer a beverage—even water—and make the space feel inviting.
4. Have a clock you can clearly see so that you can pace orientation smoothly.
5. Prepare folders with list of items named in box above. Have pens/pencils ready for participants to complete the worksheets.

The orientation folder should include:

1. Participant packet (11 pages total)
2. Required documents for participant to sign at end:
 - DHS Notice of Privacy Practices
 - Authorization to Communicate
 - DHS Rights and Responsibilities and Consent
3. Select resources for participant to take home such as:
 - Do you need help paying for childcare?
 - MFIP time limits
 - Domestic Violence
 - Disability
 - 211 cards/community resource list
4. Additional docs to collect at end of session (at GES):
 - Data sheet
 - DEED Wage and Employment

Orientation leader’s guide to the learning tasks

Opening (page 1)

To open, introduce yourself. Congratulate and thank the participant(s) for making it to orientation—this is the first step that truly shows their commitment to themselves and their families.

Explain that the orientation packet will guide the conversation while leaving space for them to share whatever is on their mind. Explain that his orientation is different from most in that it invites them to be very active. We believe this is the only way to begin a journey for which they will be in the driver’s seat.

Although there is no written agenda in the packet, we recommend a **STRONG OPENING**. How you lean toward participants, look at them, and talk to them will help convey the spirit of the program more than anything written in the packet. From the very start, take time to listen in order to understand who they are and what matters to them.

MFIP Services (page 2)

- **Explain** the three main components of MFIP as well as the three main staff with whom the participant will interact. Explain the distinct but complementary roles that different staff have and the value of having the counselor communicate with the others on behalf of the participant.

Note: You may need to clarify questions about child care opportunities. *Childcare is available, if the participant is eligible. Most child care centers require that you are working at least a part time schedule—often, 20 or more hours per week. Keep this in mind when you are developing your plan.*

Your MFIP Experience (page 3)

- Use this page only with past participants. You may give them this worksheet to jot down reflections or pose the questions while you jot down notes on your own copy. Then, continue with all the other pages of the packet, as you would for all participants.
- Remember that the participant’s past experience with MFIP is likely to have been quite different from what they will now experience. Believe in the “new MFIP” and convey this to participants in all ways you think and talk about the program. Make no assumptions about what past participants do or don’t know about the MFIP opportunity.

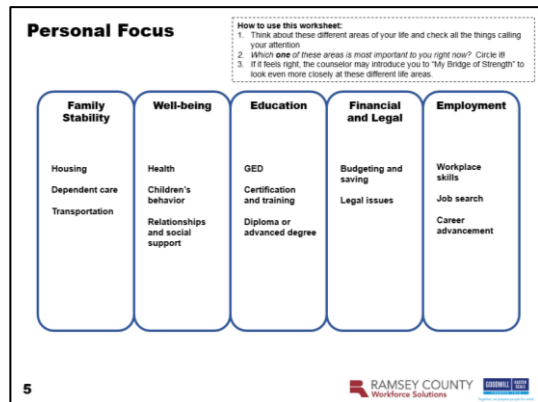
What We Believe (page 4)

Briefly describe the philosophy at the program’s core. Make sure to use common words to explain concepts like “self-determination” (deciding on our own future) and “lifelong learning” (continually growing and learning). Feel free to add what is at the heart of this philosophy for you in your role as counselor.



Personal Focus (page 5)

- **Explain:** *This worksheet shows several areas of our lives, all of which demand our attention. MFIP is designed to support you in all of these areas, since they overlap to create stability for you and your family.*
- **Read** the top bolded headings of the worksheet.
- **Guide** the participant through a short a series of questions to reflect on an area in which they most want to focus this MFIP opportunity.
- **Ask:** *As you think about each of these areas in your own life, which one is calling for your attention now? Or, which one of these areas do you most want to focus on now while partnering with Employment Services?*



Note: This personal focus worksheet allows participants to take a holistic, high-level view of their lives and to practice focusing (rather than to scatter their attention and energy). It also helps you, as counselor, to get to know their felt priorities. You have the freedom to use this sheet and/or “My Bridge of Strength (MBS)” here at the start of Orientation. If you choose to use MBS, see p. 16 of LLI Resource packet “Introducing MBS for the first time”. Make sure to 1) mention that the bridge creates a really useful “picture” of where they see themselves – and helps them decide where to put their attention. 2) you will review this bridge together about once a month so they can see how things change overtime.

Where I'm Going and How to Get There (page 6)

➤ **Ask** the participant(s) to focus on the one area of life they identified during the previous Personal Focus section of the orientation.

➤ **Explain:** *The three questions on this worksheet help us see the big picture of where we are and where we're going.*

➤ **You may share** a very brief story from your own life where you thought through these 3 questions, and sought support from others to get where you wanted to go.

➤ **Guide** the participant(s) through the instructions in the upper right-hand corner of the worksheet.

Where I'm Going and How to Get There

Using this worksheet...
 1. Sign on the far right. In a few words, write down where you want to be in one "focus" area of your life. For example: I want to have my GED and hold a better-paying job.
 2. When it's time, move to the far left of the worksheet. In a few words, describe where you see yourself now. For example: I don't know where to begin to get my GED.
 3. Next, move to the center of the worksheet. Name whatever you already see it will take to get where you want to be. For example: I need to make time to go to GED classes and study each week OR I need help finding a GED program that's easy for me to get to.

Your name: _____
 Today's date: _____

2 Where I see myself now

1 Where I want to be

3 What it will take (effort & support)

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➤ **Suggest** that the participant(s) give it a time frame (for example, where they want to be one year from now, six months from now, or at the end of their participation in MFIP). If you go with this option, you should help the participant(s) figure out how much total time they have remaining for MFIP benefits. Or picture your child two years older than they are now, what would your life ideally look like at that time?

➤ **Invite** the participant(s) to briefly share what they wrote:

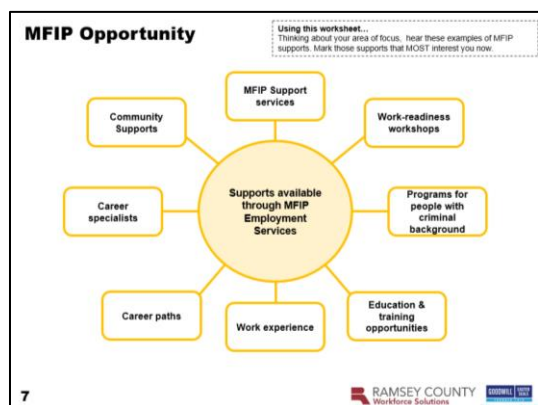
- *Where am I going?* (guided self-determination)
- *How will I get there?* (effort + support)

Notes: The power of this worksheet might reveal itself over time. In fact, the first time through you might be met with silence, even frustration. Let clients draw their answers to #1 and #2 if they like – or share their thoughts with you while you jot them down. The key is 1) LINK “where I want to be” back to the focus area they named previously; 2) REFLECT back what you heard them say about where they see themselves now with regard to that one focus area. If they don’t get as far as naming anything in #3, that’s fine. Explain that next you’ll be sharing some of the kinds of supports that MFIP offers to work WITH them to get where they want to be.

MFIP Opportunity (page 7)

Review a snapshot of MFIP supports. From your heart and experience, speak briefly to each “spoke” of the MFIP opportunity. Invite the participant(s) to ask questions.

Ask: *Which supports most interest you now, why?*



Mutual Expectations (page 8)

➤ **Explain:** In order to make this venture successful, MFIP has expectations of you – and of ourselves. First let’s look at our responsibilities around setting and achieving goals. Then, let’s look at responsibilities for communicating with each other and documenting accomplishments.

➤ **Explain** the Employment Plan is a useful document describing activities, and number of hours you will complete in pursuit of your goals.

➤ This plan is considered a **signed contract**, which the participant and the counselor develop together and each sign. The plan guides the activities that you will be engaged in during our time together, leading to accomplishment of your individual goals and economic independence.

➤ The hours you invest in your plan activities will pay off. Hours reflect the attention you are giving at the moment to your goals and activities (such as attending school, working, locating housing, and job searching).

➤ **Ask:** *What are your questions or thoughts about these mutual expectations?*



Note on Employment Plans (EPs)

You need not explain the different types of EPs during orientation, as they will be explained later in the process based on the situation of each participant. However, the types are listed here as a reference for you:

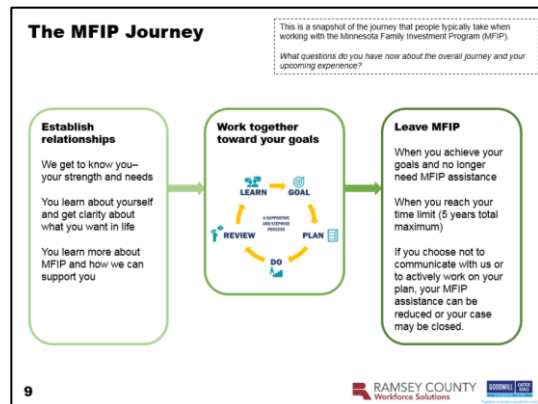
- **Regular Employment Plan:** Single parent families with a child under the age of six participate at least 87 hours a month; single parent families with all children over the age of six participate at least 130 hours a month; two-parent families participate 55 hours a week.
- **Reduced Hours for Good Cause Employment Plan:** Depending on the situation, this might be an option for some families. It requires fewer hours of participation.
- **FSS Employment Plan:** Some families have a permanent or longer-term disabling condition and qualify for Family Stabilization Services.

The MFIP Journey (page 9)

We want participants to leave orientation with a clearer sense of what comes next... and how their MFIP journey will unfold.

➤ Briefly walk participants through the visual of the MFIP participant flow diagram, laying out at a high level that participants can expect and how you (counselor) will both support them and hold them accountable.

➤ **Ask:** *What questions do you have about what happens next in MFIP? What do you see as your personal next step?*



My Task-Plan-Do-Review (page 10)

- Explain that this simple form is one that you'll encourage them to use regularly as your meetings continue. It is designed to help all of us set very clear and concise plans for one specific thing we want to get done. It helps keep us from feeling overwhelmed!
- As you walk through the blocks on the form, you may interview the participant and jot down their words - or they can write on it themselves. But, either way, make sure they go home with this – and are encouraged to bring it back with them.

The form is titled "My Task-Plan-Do-Review" and is divided into four colored sections: a blue "TASK" section with the prompt "What do I want to do?", a yellow "PLAN" section with "How will I do it?", a green "DO" section with "When will I do it?", and an orange "REVIEW" section with "How did it go?". The number "10" is in the bottom left corner, and the "RAMSEY COUNTY Workforce Solutions" logo is in the bottom right corner.

Note: 1) This is their first exposure to this form so don't expect every block to be filled out "perfectly" 2) Set the date for your next appointment and use this form for them to name one thing they want to do between now and then.

Before Leaving (page 11)

- **Distribute** documents for required signatures and explain each one, giving time for them to read what they are signing (This is a very important practice!)
- **Offer** optional take-home materials on specific programs, such as: "ADA / MFIP Do You Have a Disability?" and "Family / Domestic Violence." WFS may also distribute information on Pathways, Career Links, MJSP, or Adult basic education/GED "Your Dreams become Reality."
- **Explain:** *We won't go into any of these materials today but please talk with me afterward if you have any questions or you are interested. Feel free to take brochures on topics that are relevant to you.*
- **Explain** that MFIP takes domestic and family violence very seriously, and that there are supports in place to allow more flexibility for those experiencing domestic violence situations to focus their time and energy on safety activities.
- **Ask** the participant to please take their orientation packet and extra materials home with them.
- **Make a copy** of the "Where I'm Going and How to Get There" worksheet (page 6). With your colleagues, decide where to keep this worksheet in the physical file (GES) and in the electronic filing system (WFS) so that it is easily accessible to counselors in subsequent stages of the client flow.

The form is titled "Before Leaving...." and contains the following text: "Please sign the following documents for our files: 1. DHS Notice of Privacy Practices, 2. Authorization to Communicate, 3. DHS Rights and Responsibilities and Consent." It also says: "Please also: 1. Take home your worksheets from this session because we will build on them! 2. Choose brochures on other related topics you might find useful." There is a section for "Jot down this information for our next conversation:" with fields for "My counselor's name:" and "Date of my next meeting:". The number "11" is in the bottom left corner, and the "RAMSEY COUNTY Workforce Solutions" logo is in the bottom right corner.

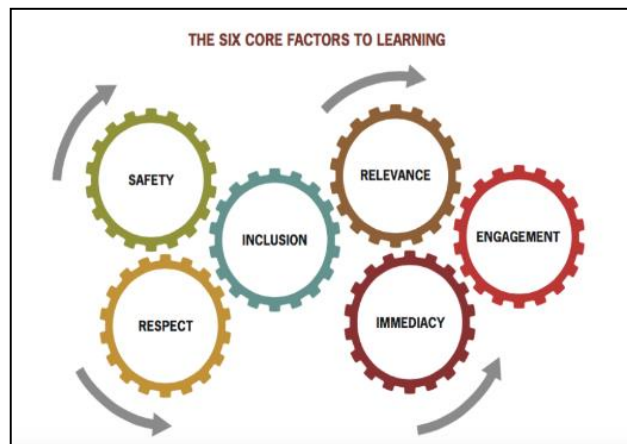
Adult Learning Principles: Orientation Facilitation Tips³

RESPECT

- At the start, listen to the participant's story and refer back to it throughout.
- Make note of what they name in the "personal focus" section so that you can refer back to it, and their story, as the orientation unfolds.

INCLUSION

- Acknowledge that goals and plans are unique to each of us. For example, while some are ready for their next job tomorrow, others will focus on wellness or training before entering the workplace.



RELEVANCE

- Use examples throughout orientation that this participant can relate to.
- Invite participants to share what they know about the program, and add to it (rather than give them information they already know).

IMMEDIACY

- Let the participant learn by doing. For example, rather than spend time talking about our philosophy of self-determination, practice it by naming something that really matters to them right now, and then getting concrete support from you.

SAFETY

- Avoid language and emphasis (i.e. sanctions, compliance) that might distance the participant or shut them off from this new experience.
- Be crisp and clear in the information you provide. Create ample space for questions. For example: "MFIP has two important expectations of you: an active employment plan and communication with your counselor. What are your questions about these expectations?"

ENGAGEMENT

- Balance the "push" (information you are giving to participant) with the "pull" (information, perspectives and questions shared by the participant).
- Use open instead of closed questions to invite conversation (i.e. Closed: Do you know the child care rules? vs. Open: What do you already know about child care opportunities?)

³ For more about adult learning principles operating in this orientation design, visit: www.globallearningpartners.com. Please cite Global Learning Partners specifically when sharing these principles or tips with others.