

# Lifelong Learning Initiative Resources Guide

This guide provides an overview of each of the resources and tools that staff will use to support participants in the Lifelong Learning Initiative.

## Starting with the right mindset

Lifelong learning is an ongoing process. As you partner with participants in their journey through the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), your aim is to help them engage with the opportunities Employment Services has to offer and progress toward achieving their goals. Using an executive skills-informed coaching approach, you will **model** and **facilitate** a process for setting and achieving everyday goals with your participants.



The resources and tools outlined in this guide are designed to **support** your partnership with participants. However, it is your relationship and shared accountability with the participant that lays the foundation for success.

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## **GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Getting to Know You Questionnaire is designed to be used with a participant, particularly during an orientation session or an initial meeting between you and the participant. The questionnaire provides a holistic list of questions to help you get to know your participant better and help the participant become more aware of their own needs and interests.

### **How do I use this tool?**

Provide the participant with a copy of the questionnaire during your first interaction with them and ask them to work through the questions on their own, during or after orientation, or with you in conversation (whichever makes the most sense in the situation). As the participant moves through the questionnaire, ask probes or follow-up questions to learn more about their answers.

Be sure to review the completed questionnaire and apply what you've learned to your discussion with the participant throughout the remainder of your meeting, and in future conversations. Specifically, use the information to:

- ✓ Identify potential long-term goals and interests
- ✓ Figure out what might be in the participant's way of accomplishing their goals
- ✓ Determine a "goodness of fit" between the participant's activities and job placements

## Getting to Know You Questionnaire

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am here to partner with you.

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What skills and talents do you have that you enjoy? *Check all that apply.*

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Performing            | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking               | <input type="checkbox"/> Painting                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administration        | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Services     | <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Design          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building/Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Dancing               | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for animals    | <input type="checkbox"/> Driving               | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for children   | <input type="checkbox"/> Finances              | <input type="checkbox"/> Trading                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for people     | <input type="checkbox"/> Fixing things         | <input type="checkbox"/> Working with your hands |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coaching              | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership            | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning              | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing            | <input type="checkbox"/> Math                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Science               | <input type="checkbox"/> Computers/Electronics | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____          |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____          |  |  |

2. What do you think are your **three** strongest personal qualities? *Rank your top 3.*

- |                                       |  |  |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive  | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic      | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-controlled   | <input type="checkbox"/> Dependable          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determined   | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/outgoing | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking initiative | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hard-working | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative        | <input type="checkbox"/> Coping well       | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ambitious    | <input type="checkbox"/> Organized       | <input type="checkbox"/> Patient           | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Independent  | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent      | <input type="checkbox"/> Honest            | <input type="checkbox"/> Being a team-player |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |  |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |  |  |  |

3. Looking at the skills and talents you checked above, what **three** jobs come to mind that you might particularly enjoy?

- 1: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3: \_\_\_\_\_
-

4. What kinds of jobs have you held in the past? *Check all that apply.*

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction   | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail        | <input type="checkbox"/> Administration     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical labor | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare    | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervision        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Factory work   | <input type="checkbox"/> Logistics     | <input type="checkbox"/> Warehousing        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food services  | <input type="checkbox"/> IT            | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Human services | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality   | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education      | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-employed |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |  |   |

5. What are your educational experiences? *Check all that apply.*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Did not finish high school       | <input type="checkbox"/> High school diploma                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GED                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Vocational/technical certification |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some college (# credits: _____ ) | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate's degree                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree                | <input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                     |   |

What subject did you like **best** in school? \_\_\_\_\_

What subject did you like **least** in school? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are you currently in any training or education classes in order to improve your skills?

Yes *What is the program?* \_\_\_\_\_

*When will you complete the program?* \_\_\_\_\_

No

7. How would you describe your computer skills?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you have access to a computer or mobile device?  Yes  No

9. Do you have a phone?  Yes  No

10. What types of transportation do you have access to?

\_\_\_\_\_

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11. What is your current employment situation?

- Unemployed and looking for work
- Employed part-time and looking for additional work
- Employed part-time and looking for a new job
- Employed full-time and looking for a new job
- Picking up day labor or other work

12. What month and year were you last employed? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you leave your last job? \_\_\_\_\_

13. In the past five years, what is the longest amount of time you have worked (full-time or part-time)?

- Less than 3 months       3 – 6 months       6 – 9 months
- 9 – 12 months       1 – 2 years       2 – 3 years
- 3 – 4 years       I have worked steadily over the past 5 years

14. Do you currently have a trade license or certification?     Yes     No

If yes, what is the license/certification? \_\_\_\_\_

15. What have you done up to this point in searching for a new job?

- Applied in person for jobs       Created a cover letter
- Applied for jobs via email/online       Created a resume
- Attended job fairs       Have references
- Networked (with friends, employers, etc.)     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Are there any issues that might get in the way of you getting and keeping the job you want?

*Check all that may apply.*

- Bad credit score       Low reading, writing, or math skills
- Legal issues       Receiving benefits
- Delinquent child support       References or work history
- I-9 documentation       Residential program hours
- Lack of computer skills       Substance use
- Lack of education/training       Transportation
- Language or cultural barriers       Unstable housing
- Mental health       Child care
- Physical health       Other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Are you in need of any immediate assistance?     Yes     No

If yes, what do you urgently need? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **EXECUTIVE SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Executive Skills Questionnaire is designed to be used with a participant, particularly during an initial meeting between you and the participant. Executive skills are those that help us choose our goals and guide our behaviors so that we can reach our goals; executive skills also help us work around the behaviors that can derail our progress. Understanding our executive skills “profile” helps us to better use our strengths and to choose the kind of supports we need.

This questionnaire is ***not*** designed to be a clinical, diagnostic, or a research tool; it is ***not*** intended to measure changes in executive skills over time.

Reference the first page of the questionnaire for more information about what this tool is designed to do.

### **How do I use this tool?**

1. Before your meeting, be sure that you have reviewed the guidance for administering the executive skills questionnaire and feel comfortable explaining and answering questions about it.
2. Provide the participant with a copy of the questionnaire.
3. Introduce the questionnaire to the participant (see “Script and Tips for Using the Profile” section of the questionnaire).
4. Provide the participant time (10-15 minutes) to complete the questionnaire.

## WHAT ARE EXECUTIVE SKILLS?

Executive skills are a set of skills that:

1. Help us choose our goals and guide our behavior so that we can reach our goals.
2. Help us work around the behaviors that can derail our progress.

Everyone uses these skills every day. We can think of the 12 skills in 3 clusters:

- Skills we use to organize and plan,
- Skills that determine how we react to things, and
- Skills we use to get things done.

## THE ES PROFILE

Knowing our Executive Skills profile helps all of us to better appreciate and use our strengths. It also helps us to choose the kind of support we need. Administering the ES profile can help you get a clearer picture of a participant's skills and how to best support them. If used effectively, the ES profile has the potential to enhance individual goal attainment and overall program outcomes.

## GETTING STARTED

Before you begin administering the profile with participants:

- ❖ Complete an executive skills profile on yourself. This will make it easier to relate to the participant's experience. You will be able to give your own real-life examples of how these skills impact your day-to-day functioning. It may also help the participant be comfortable in making honest self-assessments.
- ❖ You should feel comfortable talking about what executive skills are, why they matter, and the statements in the profile. Participants will have questions about individual skills and what strengths and challenges mean for them.
- ❖ Three resources for getting comfortable with this material are the following webinars, available at [buildingbetterprograms.org](http://buildingbetterprograms.org) under 'Executive function, EF Webinars'
  - *Executive Function Skills: What They Are and Why They Matter*- Presented by Silvia Bunge, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>.
  - *Using an Executive Function-Informed Goal Achievement Framework to Redesign Employment and Related Human Service Programs*- Presented by LaDonna Pavetti, Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>.
  - *Administering & Using the Adult Executive Skills Profile*- presented by Richard Guare, Ph.D.<sup>3</sup>

## THE ES PROFILE IS DESIGNED TO:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.buildingbetterprograms.org/2015/05/27/executive-functions-what-they-are-and-why-they-matter/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.buildingbetterprograms.org/2015/07/22/using-an-executive-function-informed-goal-achievement-framework-to-redesign-employment-programs/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.buildingbetterprograms.org/2015/10/08/administering-using-the-adult-executive-skills-profile/>

- ❖ Offer clarity about a participant's existing strengths and challenges.
- ❖ Help prioritize time and resources to support a participant.
- ❖ Help staff and participants identify appropriate employment and/or education opportunities based on their current skill profile and desired skill development.
- ❖ Provide assistance to staff in planning client services.

#### **THE ES PROFILE IS *NOT* DESIGNED TO:**

- ❖ Be a clinical or diagnostic tool.
- ❖ Be a research tool – it is not intended to measure change in executive skills over time.

#### **SCRIPT & TIPS FOR USING THE PROFILE**

First, make sure you are familiar with all the statements and comfortable answering questions about the profile. Below is a sample script of how to introduce this to a participant:

*Today I want us to talk about something called executive skills. You may or may not have heard about these before, but we all use them every day and they are critical in helping us become successful. These skills are used to help us organize and plan, react to events, and get things done on a daily basis. We use these for both small and large tasks, from doing laundry to finding a job. The statements we will go over together assess 12 different skills. We all have some of these that we are better at and some that are real challenges for us. By honestly assessing these, you can hopefully get to know yourself better and we can better develop a plan for your continued success. Knowing what you are good at can help inform job searches and education opportunities. Knowing what creates challenges for you can help us to figure out what kind of support you need so those challenges don't get in the way. As we go through this, feel free to ask questions!*

As you go through the assessment, keep the following things in mind:

- ❖ Make sure the participant is comfortable with rating the statements. Remind them that we all have strengths and areas that are challenging for us. *Remember, no profile is "better" or "worse" than any other.*
- ❖ It is helpful to discuss your own skills profile to make a participant feel more at ease and also to give examples that highlight different skills. It may be especially helpful for you to talk about a challenge and what you do to not let it get in the way.
- ❖ It may be useful to point out your own observations if they are unsure of how to rate an item. You may help them remember situations when they needed to use these skills and discuss the outcome.
- ❖ Make sure to balance your discussion of challenges and strengths. This leads to a more productive plan and a willing participant.

#### **WHAT NEXT?**

When all items have been rated and each section has been totaled, look at the three highest and three lowest scores. *The highest scores are the strengths, and the lowest scores are personal challenges.* Other resources are available to help you and your client jointly use results of their ES profile.

## Executive Skills Definitions

### How We Organize and Plan Things

**Organization:** Knowing where I put things

*The ability to create and maintain systems to keep track of information or materials.*

**Time Management:** Knowing about how long a task will take and what the deadline is

*The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and*

**Planning/ Prioritization:** Deciding what steps to take

*The ability to create a road map to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions*

### How We React to Things

**Response Inhibition:** Seeing the consequence before I say or do something

*The capacity to think before you act – this ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation and how our behavior might impact it.*

**Flexibility:** Going with the flow, accepting change

*The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information, or mistakes. It relates to an*

**Emotional Control:** Keeping my cool when frustrated

*The ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior.*

**Stress Tolerance:** Managing my stress

*The ability to work in stressful situations and to cope with uncertainty, change, and performance demands.*

**Metacognition:** Evaluating how I'm doing

*The ability to stand back and take a bird's eye view of yourself in a situation, to observe how you problem-solve. It*

### How We Get Things Done

**Task Initiation:** Getting started without a delay

*The ability to begin projects without undue procrastination, in an efficient or timely fashion.*

**Sustained Attention:** Paying attention, even when I don't feel like it

*The capacity to maintain attention to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom.*

**Goal-Directed Persistence:** Sticking with my goal

*The capacity to have a goal, follow through to the completion of that goal, and not be put off or distracted by*

**Working Memory:** Remembering what I did and what I need to do

*The ability to hold information in memory while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future.*

**A Look at How You Organize Things, React to Things, and Get Things Done<sup>1</sup>**

You may have never heard of “**Executive skills**” but they are skills that you use every day -- we’re all good at some and not so good at others. They are skills we use to manage our life and achieve our goals. They help us accomplish big goals, like completing a training program, or saving for a down payment for a house. They also help us achieve smaller goals like getting to work on time or completing the paperwork to get childcare.

This profile will help you get to know yourself better by looking at how well you:

- ❖ Organize Things
- ❖ React to Things
- ❖ Get Things Done

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Read each item and then think about how well it describes you. Use the rating scale to choose the best score. If the item doesn’t describe you at all, circle 1, *strongly disagree*. If it describes you very well, circle 6, *strongly agree*. Often, you’ll find that you’re somewhere in between so circle one of the numbers from 2 to 5 that describes you best. Be as honest as possible—the more honest you are, the more you’ll learn about yourself.

2. Total each section in the box on the right. Here’s an example:

	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
<i>Organization (Knowing where I put things)</i>							
I am an organized person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	12
I keep my space neat and have things where they belong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I organize my work before I start doing it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

3. Now, look back over your whole profile. Your highest scores indicate what you do easily (strengths). Your lowest scores are the areas that are harder for you (challenges). We’ll look at these more closely so that you can use your strengths and work through your weaknesses – to reach your goals.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Peg Dawson and Richard Guare, Copyright Guilford Press (2012,2016). This adaptation was done in conjunction with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities for use with employment and human service programs.

## 2 Executive Skills Profile

<b>Organization</b> ( <i>Knowing where I put things</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I am an organized person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I keep my space neat and have things where they belong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I organize my work before I start doing it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Time Management</b> ( <i>Knowing about how long a task will take and what the deadline is</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I finish what I set out to do by the end of the day.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I am good at guessing how long it takes to do something.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I am on time for appointments and activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Planning / Prioritization</b> ( <i>Deciding what steps to take</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I have a clear plan in mind for what I need to do each day.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I focus on the most important things when I have a lot to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I break big tasks down into smaller tasks and set deadlines to get everything done.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Response Inhibition</b> ( <i>Seeing the consequence before I say or do something</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I listen before I draw conclusions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I think before I speak.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I get all the facts before I take action.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Flexibility</b> ( <i>Going with the flow, accepting change</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I respond well to unexpected events.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I easily adjust when plans change.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I am flexible and adjust well to new situations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Emotional Control</b> ( <i>Keeping my cool when frustrated</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I do what I am supposed to do, even if I get frustrated.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I keep my cool, even if my feelings are hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I hold onto my temper.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Stress Tolerance</b> ( <i>Managing your stress</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I enjoy working in a highly demanding, fast-paced environment.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
A certain amount of pressure helps me to do my best.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I find it easy to manage a constantly changing work schedule.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Metacognition</b> ( <i>Evaluating how you're doing</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I can review a situation and see how I could improve.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I know when I am doing a good job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I easily recognize when a job is a good match for my skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Task Initiation</b> ( <i>Getting started without a delay</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
No matter what the task, I believe in getting started as soon as possible.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I do things that I say I'll do, without delay or putting things off.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Even if interrupted, I finish jobs before the last minute.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Sustained Attention</b> ( <i>Paying attention, even when I don't feel like it</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I stay focused on what I am doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I keep working until the job is done.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I find it easy to get back on track and complete what I started.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Goal-Directed Persistence</b> ( <i>Sticking with your goal</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I am driven to meet my goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I give up short-term pleasures to work on long-term goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I set goals and I perform to my best ability.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

<b>Working Memory</b> ( <i>Remembering what I did and what I need to do</i> )	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Tend to disagree	4 Tend to agree	5 Agree	6 Strongly Agree	Total
I have a good memory for facts, dates and details.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I am very good at remembering the things I am supposed to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
I set reminders to get things done.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

## MY PROFILE

My profile is a visual way to reflect the participant's executive skills profile and to easily identify their strengths (3 highest-scored skills) and weaknesses (3 lowest-scored skills).

### How do I use this tool?

1. Once the participant has completed the executive skills questionnaire and tallied their scores for each section, ask them to shade up through the row of their score. Do this for all twelve sections of the questionnaire.

**Example:** If the participant scores 12 for the "Organization" section, shade column 1 of the personal profile up through row 12.

2. Invite the participant to review their patterns of **strengths** (3 highest scores) and **weaknesses** (3 lowest scores). Have the participant mark with a plus sign ( + ) the skills at the bottom of the profile that scored as strengths; likewise, mark with a dash sign ( — ) the skills that scored as weaknesses.
3. Tell the participant that you will revisit this information as you identify a goal and begin planning to achieve it. Their strengths and weaknesses will help the participant understand how to best use their strengths and to choose to support for their weaknesses.

# My Profile

**Instructions:**

1. Use the graph below to create a visual of your executive skills profile. For each skill, shade up to the row that indicates your score. For example, if you scored 5 for Planning Ahead, shade in up through row 5 in the first column of the graph.
2. Look over your patterns of strengths (higher scores) and weaknesses (lower scores) in each area: **How I Organize Things**, **How I React to Things**, and **How I Get Things Done**.
3. In thinking about working toward your goal: *Name one way to use your strengths to accomplish your goal. Name one weak area that might get in your way.*

<b>Scores</b>	18												
	17												
	16												
	15												
	14												
	13												
	12												
	11												
	10												
	9												
	8												
	7												
	6												
5													
4													
3													
<b>Skills:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	
	<b>How I Organize Things</b>			<b>How I React to Things</b>				<b>How I Get Things Done</b>					

**ORGANIZATION**

Creating and maintaining systems to keep track of information or materials

**TIME MANAGEMENT**

Believing that time is important, estimating how much time we have, deciding how to use it, and staying within the time limits and deadlines we've agreed to

**PLANNING & PRIORITIZATION**

Creating a roadmap to reach a goal; making decisions about what is important to focus on and what is not

**RESPONSE INHIBITION**

Thinking before we act; resisting the urge to say or do something that we might regret later

**FLEXIBILITY**

Switching up when things get in our way; adapting to obstacles, setbacks, or unexpected changes.

**EMOTIONAL CONTROL**

Managing emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior

**STRESS TOLERANCE**

Doing well even in uncertainty, change, and high demands

**METACOGNITION**

Looking at how we are acting, how we handle ourselves, and how we affect other people

**TASK INITIATION**

Beginning projects and not putting them off; taking the first step

**10 SUSTAINED ATTENTION**

Pulling back from being distracted, tired, and bored to the person or task that is right in front of us

**11 GOAL-DIRECTED PERSISTENCE**

Following through to the completion of the goal and not being put off by or distracted by competing interests

**12 WORKING MEMORY**

Holding information in our minds while doing something new, remembering how we solved a problem and using that strategy to solve a new one

## MY BRIDGE OF STRENGTH

*A counselor's guide for using My Bridge of Strength to learn more about your participants and help participants learn more about themselves.*

### **How to use this guide:**

My Bridge of Strength is a tool to help you and the participant better understand how the participant views their present circumstances across ten key domains of life, how they have progressed, and what they hope to achieve. This guide is intended to support you (the counselor) in facilitating a meaningful conversation with the participant; **it is not meant to be an exhaustive assessment or checklist of questions.** Please use your discretion to focus the conversation with your participant, drawing on your skills in motivational interviewing and avoiding the back-and-forth question-and-answer process. This is not meant to be an interview. Walking through My Bridge with the participant is meant, primarily, to:

- ✓ Expose clients to different life areas related to work.
- ✓ Assess where clients are in the life areas that support employment
- ✓ Prioritize and set goals
- ✓ See progress toward goals

Take this opportunity to listen and allow the participant to share their story.

### **Introducing My Bridge for the first time**

If you are meeting with a participant for the first time, My Bridge can be used as a starting point to learn more about your participant and move the conversation toward a long-term goal that they would like to focus on.

- Provide a blank, hard copy of My Bridge to the participant.
- Describe how My Bridge is organized into five domains of life: family stability, well-being, education, financial and legal, and employment.
- Describe how there are multiple areas within these domains that help us to be more specific about our life circumstances.
- Ask the participant: **Which of these domains is most important to you right now? Why?**
- Based on the participant's response, use the supportive questions in this guide for that domain to help guide a conversation with the participant.
- After discussing the participant's most important domain, work your way through the other domains of My Bridge using the supportive questions in this guide for each to help guide your conversation.
- Once you have completed My Bridge, move to the **My Pathway** tool to begin focusing in on setting a goal with the participant.
- Be sure to give the participant My Bridge to take with them, keeping a copy for yourself in the case file.

## Revisiting My Bridge

On a regular basis—at least monthly—you should revisit My Bridge with the participant to review any progress:

- Provide a hard copy of My Bridge to the participant that is marked based on your previous conversation.
- Ask the participant to look at the markers across each area and mark any changes in their life by circling a new level on My Bridge (higher or lower than before).
- Invite the participant to describe any changes they've indicated on My Bridge.
- Celebrate any **progress** with affirmation and praise; reassure the participant if they have experienced any **regression**.
- Always be sure to give the participant an updated copy of My Bridge to take with them; keep a copy for the case file.

## 1. FAMILY STABILITY

**Description:** In order for you to manage your work and family, it’s important that you have access to basic needs such as housing, dependent care, and transportation. When something goes wrong in these areas, life can feel stressful and you may be distracted at work. Let’s look at My Bridge together to see where you are today, where you would like to be, and what support you might need to get there.

### A. Housing

Which of these four descriptions is closest to your current housing situation? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

My family has no housing.	I am living in temporary housing, unsafe housing, or am at risk of losing my housing.	I have stable and safe housing that is <u>subsidized</u> .	I have stable and safe <u>unsubsidized</u> housing.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your housing situation?
  - Where are you currently living?
  - Do you feel safe there?
  - Do you have access to the things that you need?
- Is there anything you would like to change about your housing situation?
  - Is there anything getting in the way of you making this change?

### B. Dependent care

Which of these four descriptions is closest to your current child care situation? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

I have no child care.	I have child care, but it is not reliable.	I have reliable child care, but no back-up.	I have reliable child care and a back-up.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your child care situation?
  - How many children do you have in your home?
  - How old is/are your child(ren)?
  - Who do you count on now when you need someone to watch your child(ren)?
- How often, if at all, do you experience difficulties with your child care arrangements?

**TIP**

If you have previously reviewed the participant’s case file, you may already know information about the number of children the participant has and their age(s). Use this information to build rapport: name their child(ren) and ask about who cares for them.

- How do you handle these disruptions?
- Do you have a reliable back-up plan in place if something goes wrong (for example, if your child gets sick)?
- If you were to go to work (full-time or part-time), what additional child care arrangements would you need?

**C. Transportation**

Which of these three descriptions is closest to your current transportation situation? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

I have transportation options, but they are not reliable.	I have reliable transportation, but no back-up.	I have reliable transportation and a back-up.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your transportation situation?
  - How reliable is your transportation?
  - How, if at all, do you depend on public transportation?
  - Do you have a valid driver’s license?
  - Do you have car insurance?
  - Do you have any driving restrictions?
- Would you face any transportation challenges if you were working a full- or part-time job?
- Do you need any additional transportation support, such as a gas card or bus pass?

## 2. WELL-BEING

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**Description:** In Ramsey County, we understand the importance of your personal well-being and how it affects your ability to work and parent. When we aren't at our best, it can be difficult to juggle multiple responsibilities well. Our physical and mental health, our children's behavior, and our relationships with others can play important roles in our well-being. Let's look at My Bridge together to see where you are today in the areas of personal well-being, where you would like to be, and what support you might need to get there.

### A. Health

Which of these four descriptions is closest to your current health situation? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

Health concerns prevent my employment.	Health concerns often affect my employment.	Health concerns sometimes affect my employment.	No health concerns affect my employment.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your current (physical and mental) health?
  - Do you have any concerns that make it difficult for you to perform day-to-day tasks?
  - Does your health affect your home life or your ability to work?
- What resources do you have to care for your health?
  - What additional resources would be helpful to care for your health?
- Are there others in your home with health conditions, such as a child or other family members, whom you are caring for?
  - Do these responsibilities affect your ability to manage work and family life?
  - Are there additional resources that would be helpful to you in caring for these family members?

### B. Children's behavior

Which of these four descriptions is most accurate regarding your child(ren)'s behavior? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

Behavior prevents my employment.	Behavior often affects my employment.	Behavior sometimes affects my employment.	Behavior does not limit my employment.
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Supportive questions:

- Is your child(ren)'s behavior difficult for you to manage?
  - If so, how often does behavior interfere with your ability to perform day-to-day tasks?
  - Is your child(ren)'s behavior a major source of stress for you?

- How do you typically handle misbehavior issues with your children?
  - Are there additional resources or supports that would be helpful to you in addressing your child(ren)'s behavior?

**C. Social support**

Which of these four descriptions is closest to your current social support situation? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

I have no social support; my network is draining or destructive.	I have a limited social support network with few positive influences.	I have generally reliable social support that is growing.	I have consistent and effective social support and/or a leadership role in the community.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your current social network and support?
  - With whom do you spend most of your time?
  - How supported do you feel by your social network?
  - Who do you go to when you need someone to talk with?
- Is there anything you would like to change about your social network and support?
  - Is there anything getting in the way of you making this change?

### 3. EDUCATION

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**Description:** Education is an important part of lifelong learning and accessing good jobs. We understand, though, that pursuing an education takes time and resources. Let’s look at My Bridge together to see where you are today in terms of your education, where you would like to be, and what support you might need to get there.

Which of these four descriptions best reflects your current education? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

I have no high school diploma, GED, or entry-level certificate.	I am attending high school, GED, entry-level certificate classes, or other training.	I have a high school diploma, GED, entry-level certificate, or a post-secondary certificate.	I have at least an AA degree or higher.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your education journey?
  - How would you describe your experience with school?
  - Which subjects or topics interested you the most?
  - Did you experience any specific challenges that made it difficult for you to perform well in school?
  - What kinds of help or support did you receive, if any, when you were in school?
- What additional education or training is of interest to you?
  - Is there anything getting in your way of pursuing new education or training opportunities?

## 4. FINANCIAL AND LEGAL

**Description:** Many people face financial issues or legal challenges that interfere with their ability to get and keep the job they want. Worrying about paying your bills or meeting basic needs each month can be very stressful and interfere with your ability to focus on your work. Or, a legal issue could require a court appearance on a work day. Let’s look at My Bridge together to see where you are today in terms of your finances and any legal matters, where you would like to be, and what support you might need to get there.

### A. Financial

Which of these four descriptions is closest to your current financial situation? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

My income is not enough to cover my basic living expenses.	My income is sometimes enough to cover my basic living expenses.	My income is stable, I am current on my bills, but I don’t have money for saving or spending.	My income is stable, I am current on my bills, and I have money for saving and spending.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your current financial situation?
  - Are you able to cover your and your family’s basic needs each month?
  - Are you able to pay your bills on time each month?
  - How often do you have money left over, for saving or spending, after covering your basic needs and bills?
- Could you describe how you manage your money?
  - Do you have a budget or a plan for spending each month?
- Are there any other financial issues that are of concern to you right now? (For example, poor credit, home foreclosure, debt, healthcare costs, etc.)

### B. Legal

Which of these four descriptions is closest to your current legal situation? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

I work certain jobs, or I have lost a job because of my legal issues.	My legal issues take me away from work sometimes.	My legal issues are not work-related and do not take work time.	I have no current legal issues.
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Supportive questions:

- Are you experiencing any legal issues that affect the types of jobs you can take?
  - How have these legal issues affected your job(s) in the past, if at all?
  - What is the status of these legal issues as of now?
- What additional support or resources would be helpful to you to resolve these legal issues?

## 5. EMPLOYMENT

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**Description:** Everyone begins their job search process in a different place. Some have more work experience than others. It's okay if you don't have a lot of experience, it just means that we will need to work together to make sure you have the support you need to be successful. In particular, workplace skills are an important part of getting and keeping a good job. Some examples are: decision making, communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, anger management, time management, crisis management, planning, relationship skills, prioritizing, grooming, and other capabilities that facilitate job performance. Let's look at My Bridge together to see where you are today in terms of your workplace skills, where you would like to be, and what support you might need to get there.

Which of these four descriptions best reflects your workplace skills? **Circle where you are on My Bridge.**

I need to work on my workplace skills in order to obtain employment.	My workplace skills often interfere with my employability.	My workplace skills support my employability.	My strong workplace skills enhance my employability and support career advancement.
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Supportive questions:

- Would you share with me a little about your workplace skills?
  - How would you describe your work habits?
  - Have you ever received positive or negative feedback about your work? If so, would you mind sharing with me an example or two that sticks out in your mind?
- What specialized skills have you learned at previous jobs or in volunteer experience?
- Do you possess any certificates or training certifications?
- Are there any new skills that you would like to learn?
  - Are there any skills that you would like to improve?
- What resources or support would be helpful to you to build and improve your workplace skills?

Name:

Date:

Case #:



### My Bridge of Strength

Family Stability			Well-Being			Education	Financial and Legal		Employment
Housing	Dependent Care	Transportation	Health	Children's Behavior	Social Support	Education	Financial	Legal	Workplace Skills
I have stable and safe <b>unsubsidized</b> housing	I have <b>reliable</b> child care and <b>back-up</b>	I have <b>reliable</b> transportation and <b>backup</b>	No health concerns affect my employment	Behavior <b>does not limit</b> my employment	I have <b>consistent and effective</b> social support and/or a <b>leadership role</b> in the community	I have at least an <b>AA degree or higher</b>	My income is <b>stable</b> , I am current on my bills, I <b>have</b> money for saving or spending	I have <b>no</b> current legal issues	My <b>strong</b> workplace skills enhance my employability and support career advancement
I have stable and safe housing that is <b>subsidized</b>	I have <b>reliable</b> child care but <b>no backup</b>	I have <b>reliable</b> transportation but <b>no backup</b>	Health concerns <b>sometimes affect</b> my employment	Behavior <b>sometimes affects</b> my employment	I have <b>generally reliable</b> social support that is growing	I have a <b>high school diploma, GED, or entry-level certificate or a post secondary certificate</b>	My income is <b>stable</b> , I am current on my bills but I <b>don't have</b> money for saving or spending	My legal issues <b>are not work related</b> and <b>do not take work time</b>	My workplace skills <b>support</b> my employability
I am living in <b>temporary</b> housing, <b>unsafe</b> housing, or am <b>at risk of losing</b> housing	I have child care but it is <b>not reliable</b>	I have transportation options but they are <b>not reliable</b>	Health concerns <b>often affect</b> my employment	Behavior <b>often affects</b> my employment	I have a <b>limited</b> social support network with few positive influences	I am <b>attending</b> high school, GED, entry-level certificate classes, or other training	My income is <b>sometimes enough</b> to cover my basic living expenses	My legal issues <b>take me away</b> from work some times	My workplace skills <b>often interfere</b> with my employability
My family has <b>no</b> housing	I have <b>no</b> child care		Health concerns <b>prevent</b> my <b>employment</b>	Behavior prevents my employment	I have <b>no</b> social support; my network is draining or destructive	I have <b>no</b> high school diploma, GED, or entry-level certificate	My income is <b>not enough</b> to cover my basic living expenses	I work <b>certain jobs</b> , or I have <b>lost jobs</b> because of my legal issues.	I need to <b>work on my workplace skills</b> in order to obtain employment

Strengths:

\*Workplace skills include, but are not limited to, decision making, communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, anger management, time management, crisis management, planfulness, relationship skills, prioritizing, grooming, and other capabilities that facilitate job performance.

My Bridges is adapted from the Crittenton Women's Union Bridge To Self-Sufficiency and the Minnesota DHS Employability Measures.

## MY PATHWAY

My Pathway is designed to help the participant identify a specific long-term goal, relative to their current situation, and to then walk through the exercise of breaking that goal up into shorter-term progress goals and then into the day-to-day tasks that will move the participant toward accomplishing their goal.

### How do I use this tool?

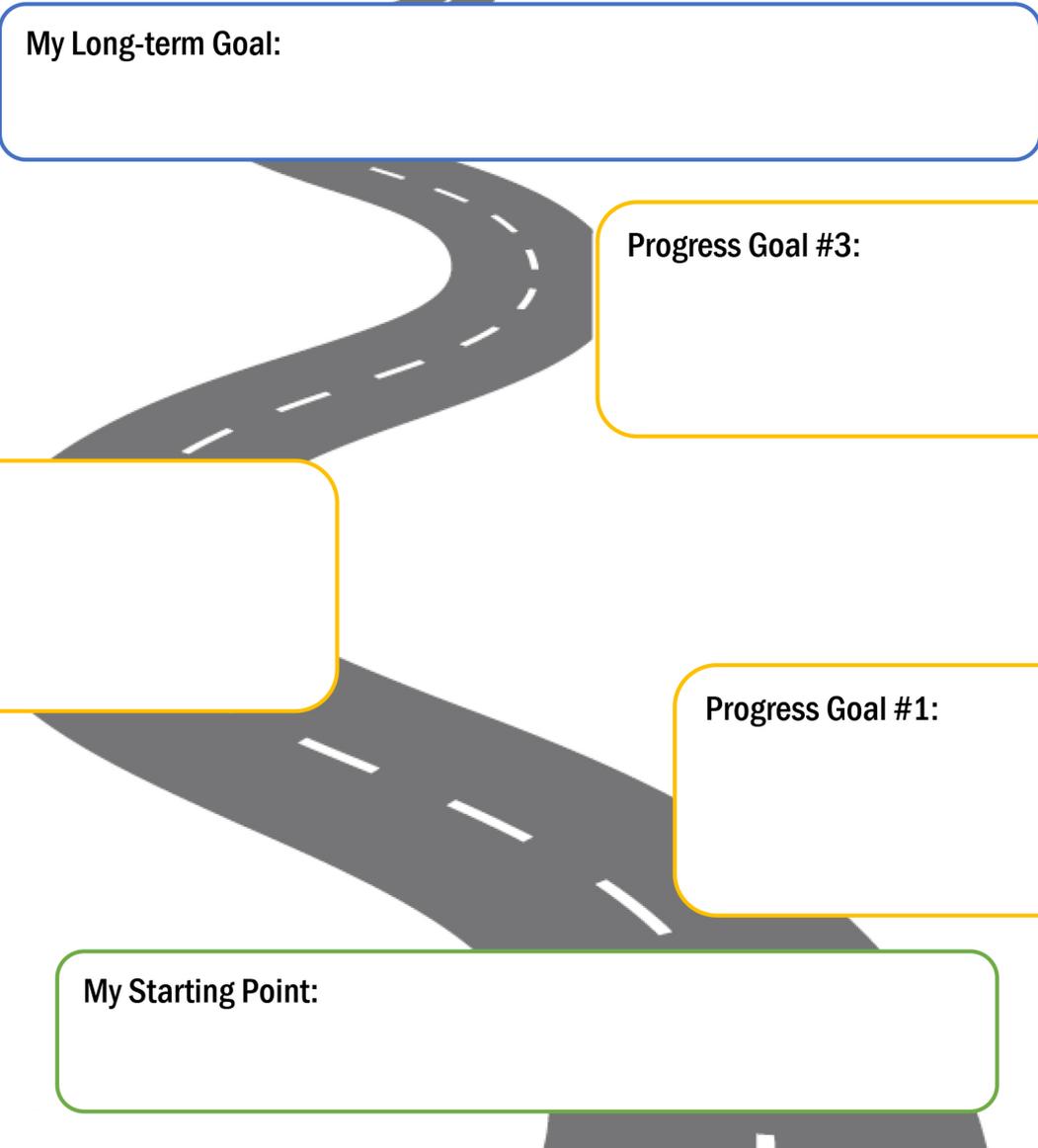
Begin with the “road” side of the tool:

1. Using the domain/area of My Bridge of Strength that the participant identified as most important to them right now, ask the participant: *In your own words, tell me where you want to be in this area? What is your long-term goal?*
2. Once the participant has identified their long-term goal, affirm their starting point, either by making reference to the statement they circled on My Bridge, or by asking the participant: *In your own words, tell me where you're at today...what is your current situation?*
3. Ask the participant to brainstorm a few of the big steps between where they're at today (“my starting point”) and where they want to be (“my long-term goal”). Have the participant write these big steps down as progress goals (one, two, or three of them).

Flip to the back side of the tool:

4. Using the first progress goal that the participant identified, invite them to brainstorm the smallest possible tasks they need to complete in order to achieve that single progress goal (up to four individual tasks). Have the participant write these tasks in boxes below the progress goal—one per box.

# My Pathway



My Long-term Goal:

Progress Goal #3:

Progress Goal #2:

Progress Goal #1:

My Starting Point:

# My Pathway

**Progress Goal:**

**Tasks:**

## MY TASK-PLAN-DO-REVIEW

My Task-Plan-Do-Review is a tool to guide day-to-day goal achievement using a simplified, four-step, evidence-based process.

### How do I use this tool?

1. Building on the first of the small tasks that the participant identified through the My Pathway exercise, affirm that this is the very next step for the participant to get started working toward their goal. You can ask: *Is [this task] what you want to do next?* Invite the participant to record their task in a few words or a single phrase in the **TASK** box.
2. Once you have confirmed the task that the participant wants to work on, ask them: *What is your plan to get this done? How will you accomplish this single task?* Invite the participant to record their plan, in a few words or phrases, in the **PLAN** box.
3. Refer back to My Profile—the participant’s executive skills strengths and weaknesses—and ask them:
  - *How might you use your strengths to get this task done?*
  - *How might your weaknesses get in the way?*
  - *How might other things (around you) get in the way?*
  - *What resources or support might you need if these things were to happen? What is your “back-up” plan?*

Invite the participant to write down their original plan and their back-up plan in the **PLAN** box in a few simple phrases each.

4. Ask the participant: *When will you get started with this task? When will it be done?*  
Invite the participant to record timeframes for getting started and finishing the task in the **DO** box.
5. At this point, review the task, plan, and do sections of the page with the participant and affirm each. Describe for the participant that this Task-Plan-Do-Review process is one that they can use to address any task they wish to take on. Remind the participant that you will spend some time during your next interaction following up on their progress, to see how things went with accomplishing this task and any others they worked on.
6. During your next conversation with the participant, address the **REVIEW** phase by asking the participant: *How did it go? Did you accomplish your task in the timeframe you committed to?*

If the participant did not accomplish the task, invite them to brainstorm what got in their way and have them write these points down in brief in the **REVIEW** box.

Partner with the participant in brainstorming some ways they could overcome those challenges moving forward.

**Always be sure to allow the participant to take home their My Task-Plan-Do-Review.**

*(Make a copy for the case file.)*

# My Task-Plan-Do-Review

**TASK**

**What do I want to do?**

**PLAN**

**How will I do it?**

**DO**

**When will I do it?**

**REVIEW**

**How did it go?**

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS: A GUIDE TO HELPING PARTICIPANTS ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS**

The strategies for success pocket guide is a resource for you (as the counselor) to identify relevant strategies to help the participant overcome particular challenges. This pocket guide also serves a direct resource for participants, which you can provide to them to guide their own use of executive skills in working around particular challenges.

### **How do I use this tool?**

The strategies for success guide includes a mix of strategies—some involve changing the environment, some aim to make a task easier, and some involve reaching out to others. Thinking about these three different types of strategies can be very useful. For example, if a participant is trying environmental modifications and isn't getting where they want to go, you might suggest they change the task or ask others for help.

In your conversation with the participant about their **PLAN** and the **REVIEW** of their progress, this guide can offer helpful strategies.

1. **Explain to the participant:** *Our weaknesses don't need to block us from our goals. The key is to look honestly at our tendencies and try out strategies that have worked for others. For example, instead of saying, "I'm always late" or "My temper gets me in trouble," try out one idea to help you manage time better or to keep your temper in check.*
2. Give your participant the **Strategies for Success: A Pocket Guide**. Support your participant as they read and follow the steps on the front page. Given the participant's My Profile and what you see in them, you may offer to direct them to useful ideas in one of the following areas:
  - ✓ How I Organize and Plan Things
  - ✓ How I React to Things
  - ✓ How I Get Things Done

These are not exhaustive lists. Encourage your participant to use one of these or any other strategy that might help them.
3. Support the participant in planning out a way to implement one idea or strategy. Tie it to their My Task-Plan-Do-Review. For example, if the strategy involves using a calendar, begin with what the participant already uses. (A smartphone calendar? A hard copy calendar?) If not, brainstorm with them about what type of calendar they would like to try using. Then, suggest that they get started by writing in their calendar before leaving that day.
4. Suggest that the participant practices their new strategy for a week or so at a time. Plan to be in contact with them during the week, if possible, to check in about how the strategy is working for them.

## **Strategies for Success**

### **A Pocket Guide**

When we're working toward goals, we can get in our own way. Despite our best efforts, we sometimes find it hard to organize things, control our reactions, or get things done. If we just had some strategies to help us get past our own weaknesses, life would be easier!

This pocket guide is divided into three sections: (1) **How I Organize Things**, (2) **How I React to Things**, and (3) **How I Get Things Done**. Each section offers a variety of strategies that other have found useful.

- ✓ Focus on one weak area that might get in your way this week. For example, maybe you find it hard to organize things. Start there!
- ✓ Go to the "How I Organize Things" section of this pocket guide, and see which ideas are most useful for you. For example, the section has strategies for keeping track of information and materials, managing time, or planning a task.
- ✓ Find one strategy you'd like to try out and put it into place right now. For example, one idea for keeping track of materials is to write down everything you need for each day and put it in a calendar. Pull out a calendar and draft your lists for each day this week.
- ✓ Choose realistic expectations for yourself. For example, if you forget stuff almost every day of the week, you might aim to have all your things organized 2 out of the 5 days this week. That's a step in the right direction!
- ✓ Don't feel "childish" with the detail and simplicity of some of these strategies. The best strategies are often ones that seem so simple, but which make a huge difference!
- ✓ Try out your new strategy for one week. See how things go and adjust as you see fit.
- ✓ Remember two things:
  1. These are new habits; experimenting will take a bit of time.
  2. Aim for improvement, not perfection!

We hope that the strategies in this pocket guide are useful to you. These are just a few ways you can try to support yourself to accomplish goals near and dear to your heart. Experiment and ask others for support.

***You can do this!***

## **SECTION 1**

# **HOW I ORGANIZE THINGS**

### **1. Ideas for keeping track of information and materials**

It drives us all crazy when we can't find something—it eats up our time and our energy. There are many ways we can keep track of where we put things and find them when we need them! Here are a few strategies:

- ✓ When you go to bed at night, put things right where you need them in the morning. For example, put things you need to take with you by the front door with your keys.
- ✓ Take an hour this week to clear out the clutter in one living or work area. Get rid of as many distractions as possible from the area. If you don't have a place for the stuff you clear out, put it all in one box marked "don't need this here now."
- ✓ Spend 30 minutes each day this week deciding on a "home" for each of the things you use regularly so that you can find what you need easily and quickly. Every item in your house should have a "home."
- ✓ Create a simple calendar just for this week. List all the things you need to get ready each evening in preparation for the next day (including your outfit). Post your "What I'll Need Tomorrow" calendar somewhere you're likely to see it, such as on the fridge or bathroom mirror. Each night this week, check the calendar and see how it helps you keep track of your things.

## **SECTION 1 HOW I ORGANIZE THINGS**

### **2. Ideas for managing and estimating time**

Do you run late, lose track of time, or underestimate how long things will take? Don't kick yourself. Time management may not be one of your strengths, but there are lots of ways you can help yourself to better estimate how long something will take and how to stay within the time you have to do it.

- ✓ Set clocks ahead to give yourself a cushion of time.
- ✓ Set reminders on your phone 30 minutes before you need to be out-the-door to get somewhere.
- ✓ Create a visual reminder for yourself and post it somewhere you will see it—and notice it!
- ✓ Ask a friend to call you or send you a text well in advance of a deadline.
- ✓ Map out all the steps you need to take in order to complete the project you're working on. Use arrows and write down how long you realistically think each step will take. Ask a friend or co-worker to take a look at your steps and estimated times. How realistic do they think these are? Edit the timeline based on their feedback.
- ✓ If you feel like you underestimate how long things will take, you might want to “time” how long it takes you to do specific things each day (getting ready for the day, getting children out the door, getting the bus to work/school/regular appointments AND walking in to appointment). Use the timer on your phone that starts when they get up and ends when they get out the door, etc. Having an accurate representation of how long things take will help you manage time better and allow yourself enough time to get things done without stress.

## **SECTION 1 HOW I ORGANIZE THINGS**

### **3. Ideas for planning a task you care about**

You may be someone who feels constrained by the idea of planning—and doesn't even like the word "plan!" But, without a doubt, a plan saves time, energy, money, and frustration. And, a written plan is a lot easier to follow than one in your head. Follow this process to create a plan.

- ✓ Identify one task that is especially important to you – something you really want to get *done* this week.
- ✓ Break down, in order, the steps required to complete the task. Put a star beside those steps that you really want to get down.
- ✓ Each night this week, before going to bed, review your steps. Check what you've done and celebrate that. If you didn't get something done on the day you planned to do it, rewrite it for another day later in the week. And, as always, ask for help if you need it.
- ✓ Each morning tell yourself one thing -- one specific thing that you want to accomplish that day before laying down to bed. Make it your business to get that one thing done, even at the expense of other things that may feel urgent but are less important to you.

## SECTION 2

# HOW I REACT TO THINGS

### 1. Ideas for staying cool in situations where you tend to have problems

Do you say or do things without thinking that get you into trouble? Or, do you tend to react strongly when plans change? If so, dealing better with unexpected things that come up may have a real positive impact on you at home and at work. Envision the situation and envision what you want to do instead. Here are the steps:

1. Think about a situation in which you have reacted strongly or impulsively.
2. Write down some things about that situation that “push your buttons.”
3. Imagine what you could have done instead that would have felt better and led to a better outcome.
4. Now imagine a similar situation in the future and describe how you would like to react instead. Write it down:

**If this happens ..... then I will .....**

5. If you like, post this reminder of how you want to act in this situation. You may also tell someone whom you trust what you are working on and ask them to give you feedback on how you are doing.
6. Give yourself an inspiring incentive after every time you react the way you had hoped.

Here are a few more tips for those of us who react strongly:

- ✓ If you feel your buttons getting pushed in a conversation, ask the other person if you can think about this and continue the conversation another time. “I’m feeling a little worked up right now and need to step away. Can we come back and discuss this tomorrow morning?”

If you feel your buttons getting pushed often at work, designate someone you can call or go see when you feel worked up. This can also be the person you go to when you’ve reacted beautifully and want to proudly tell someone!

## **SECTION 2 HOW I REACT TO THINGS**

### **2. Ideas to manage your stress**

Stressful situations affect everyone differently. What is stressful to you may be exciting to someone else. Here is a strategy to help you manage your reactions to stress:

1. Think about tasks at home or at work that you find stressful.
2. Write them down on one side of a piece of paper.
3. On the other side of the paper, think of possible ways to change the task. Examples:
  - ✓ Find someone else to do the task or switch with them and do a task they don't want do.
  - ✓ Make a plan to mentally prepare what you will say to get ready
  - ✓ Break the task into small pieces and do something that you enjoy between each piece
4. Reward yourself for every time you react to a stressful situation in a positive way.
5. Keep a log of the ways that you have made progress.

Another universal strategy for keeping cool is to meditate for a few minutes each day. There are many ways to try meditation. Here's one:

1. Find a quiet space where you can sit without any distractions for 10 minutes.
2. Choose something small to concentrate on. One option is your breathing; say to yourself as you breathe: "This is the in breath; this is the out breath." You can also choose a word or a phrase that inspires you and repeat that to yourself several times.
3. As thoughts come up, let them float by in your mind and return to concentrating on your breath. Notice the thoughts that come into your mind and then let them go. Don't judge yourself harshly for having other thoughts.
4. If possible, try to meditate at the same time every day. Do not feel that you have to keep increasing the time you meditate. Doing 10 minutes every day will help you for a very long time.

If you get into a meditation habit, you can recreate the calmness in your body and mind whenever you need. Stressful situations will still come up, but you will be better able to let them pass without reacting.

## **SECTION 2 HOW I REACT TO THINGS**

### **3. Ideas for learning from the past**

Some of us have trouble learning from our experiences. We tend to run into the same situation again and again, and wonder how we got there. It may help to stop and pause once in a while and look back.

1. Think of a problem that happened recently.
2. Write down answers to the questions below.
  - ✓ *What happened?*
  - ✓ *How did I handle things?*
  - ✓ *What were others trying to tell me that I may have missed?*
  - ✓ *What can I do differently the next time this situation occurs?*

Ask someone you live or work with the same questions to check if you both see things the same way. Do this exercise over the next week and notice what you've learned that can help you in life moving forward.

## SECTION 3

# HOW I GET THINGS DONE

### 1. Ideas for getting started

Do you tend to procrastinate? Remember: the greatest journey begins with the first step. Here are three tips for those of us who find it hard to get started.

- ✓ Write down your goal and then write down the tiniest and easiest possible next step you could do toward achieving that goal. For example, if you've been meaning to make a call but don't feel like doing it right now, simply look up the phone number and write it down large on your table – or (better yet!) put it in your phone under an appointment so your phone will show you the number at a time when you'd like to make the call.
- ✓ Imagine you told yourself you'd study for the GED every day this week. It is time and you really have to go do something else now. Take out your GED study guide and put it where you will see it as soon as you are home. Or, better yet, take it with you, so you have it if you find some downtime while out and about.
- ✓ Commit to starting your task and working on it for a small amount of time (10 minutes). After the 10 minutes, if you want to keep going you surely can. If not, congratulate yourself for spending the time that you did on the task and move on.

The bottom line is this: *when you don't feel like starting something, take one tiny step toward doing it.*

## **SECTION 3 HOW I GET THINGS DONE**

### **2. Ideas for staying focused on your task**

Sometimes, once we get started on something, it is difficult to keep working on it. Think about a task you have started but can't quite seem to finish. Do you get bored, distracted, or drained of energy? If so, here are two ideas:

- ✓ Write down the steps you want to accomplish. Write down the reward you will give yourself after each step. Do the first step and take a break to reward yourself by doing something you really enjoy. Some ideas for breaks and rewards: listen to your favorite music, walk outside or look at nature, take a nap, stretch your body, call a friend, paint or draw something you see, look at an art book, or even dance at your desk. Do the next step and the reward you'll get when complete.
- ✓ Check out the app "Forest." It times you to stay on task for 25 minutes; if you do not touch your phone, you get to grow a tree! Sounds silly, but can be super useful!

## **SECTION 3 HOW I GET THINGS DONE**

### **3. Ideas for sticking to your goal until it is complete**

Once you have a goal, you will need strategies to keep following that goal even though many things in your life will get in the way. One helpful strategy is to tell your family and friends about your goal so that they can support you. Other people helping you towards your goal is one of the most important factors in making sure that you actually accomplish it.

- ✓ Identify 3-5 family members and friends that you trust and tell them out loud your goal and your detailed action plan.
- ✓ Ask them for help in reminding you of smaller action steps (for example, if you tend to be late, ask a friend to send you a text message that says “nearly time to go”).
- ✓ Ask them to give you encouragement and positive feedback.
- ✓ Choose one or more friends to have a daily check-in to report on what each of you have accomplished and give support to one another for the challenges you encountered.
- ✓ In addition to asking others for help, you may want to create a visual reminder for yourself of what you are doing and why. (For example, paste images from a magazine or an inspirational quote, or write your goal on brightly colored paper)

### **SECTION 3 HOW I GET THINGS DONE**

#### **4. Ideas for remembering what you need to do**

If you struggle with forgetting what you were doing, losing personal items, or losing chunks of time in your day, checklists and routines can be your best friends. Don't feel that you have to remember everything in your brain. Writing things down is a way of "off-loading" a task so the brain doesn't have to work as hard or can use its power to do something else instead.

- ✓ Find a regular "home" for that one item and make an effort to put it back in its "home" every day.
- ✓ Use a whiteboard or a piece of paper to leave yourself giant notes for when you get up or go out.
- ✓ Establish a space by your front door to put things you will need to take with you.
- ✓ Put things you need to remember (items or notes) with your keys or wallet.

Ramsey County Division of Workforce Solutions - Contact us for more information at [askworkforcesolutions@co.ramsey.mn.us](mailto:askworkforcesolutions@co.ramsey.mn.us)

**Developed by:**  
Global Learning Partners and Mathematica Policy Research  
for the Ramsey County Division of Workforce Solutions

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