

Employment Services for MFIP Participants

SUMMARY

MFIP requires most adult welfare recipients to participate in work-related activities soon after they start receiving assistance. However, Minnesota only met one of the two client participation standards set by the federal government for 1998, and compliance will be more difficult in the future as these standards increase. Job search and unsubsidized employment have been the most common activities among MFIP clients, but levels of client participation in particular activities vary widely across the state. Most employed MFIP clients have received hourly wages high enough for them to leave MFIP cash assistance if they worked full-time; however, most have not received a wage high enough to be ineligible for MFIP food assistance. There is room for improvement in client assessment, services to help clients keep jobs and advance to better ones, and services for sanctioned and “hard-to-employ” clients.

When Minnesota replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), it changed the focus of its welfare system from a cash assistance entitlement to an employment program that provides temporary assistance. Consequently, much of the success of MFIP will depend on the success of its employment and training programs. This chapter addresses the following questions:

- **How are MFIP clients’ service needs assessed? Do service providers believe they have sufficient information about their clients?**
- **In which work-related activities have MFIP clients participated? To what extent have client participation levels varied across the state, and what accounts for the variation?**
- **Is Minnesota complying with federal participation requirements for work-related activities, and is it likely to meet future requirements?**
- **What work-related services do counties and providers think need improvement?**

In order to answer these questions, we reviewed the state’s employment services manual and each county’s 1999-2001 local service unit plan (which details the county’s employment and training efforts). We also visited 16 provider offices, interviewed 32 administrators and 93 job counselors, reviewed 166 client files,

analyzed statewide data on client activities, surveyed all counties and providers, and interviewed several MFIP clients and representatives of client organizations.

BACKGROUND

MFIP requires most adult recipients to participate in employment services soon after receiving cash assistance. Immediate employment is the primary goal of these services. According to the MFIP employment services manual:


Statewide MFIP is designed to encourage and enable early workforce attachment for participants in order to build job skills, experience, and work history. This approach has been shown to be effective in increasing earnings and income while promoting self-esteem and independence for participant families.¹

**MFIP
emphasizes
full-time
employment.**

The manual specifies the hierarchy of client activities shown in Table 4.1. When developing an employment plan for clients, job counselors are instructed to select activities as high up in the hierarchy as possible. In contrast, STRIDE – the employment program that preceded MFIP – focused more on educational activities for its clients.

Both parents in two-parent families, unless exempt, must participate in employment services immediately upon receiving cash assistance. MFIP requires

Table 4.1: Hierarchy of Client Activities

Highest Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate full-time employment. • Immediate part-time employment, preferably leading to full-time employment. • Combination of training and employment leading to full-time employment; or combination of social services and employment leading to full-time employment. • Short-term (less than one year) training leading to employment. • Long-term (less than two years) training leading to full-time employment. • Combination of social services and training leading to full-time employment.
	
Lowest Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social services.

SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Human Services, *Statewide Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Employment Services Manual*, policy 3.8.41; <http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/ecs/ReguProc/esm/Chapter3.htm>; accessed May 26, 1999.

¹ Minnesota Department of Human Services, *Statewide Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) Employment Services Manual*, policy 1.1.10; <http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/ecs/ReguProc/esm/Chapter1.htm>; accessed May 26, 1999. *Minn. Stat.* §256J.50, subd. 1 establishes a foundation for a “work first” approach, stating that “each county must develop and implement an employment and training services component of MFIP which is designed to put participants on the most direct path to unsubsidized employment.”

a single parent, unless exempt, to participate in services within six months of receiving cash assistance, but counties can require participation earlier.² Seventy-six counties require participation within 30 days of receiving cash assistance while ten others require participation within two to six months.³ Table 1.7 listed the characteristics of adult recipients who are exempt from participating in employment services.

Some counties provide employment services with their own employees, but most contract with other agencies. In total, over 100 providers currently serve MFIP clients.⁴ Some are workforce centers, which offer one-stop shopping for an array of federal, state, and local employment services. Some specialize in serving certain racial or ethnic groups, such as the Lao Family Community organization in Ramsey County or the state's five American Indian tribal providers. Agencies such as the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority and Lutheran Social Services in Hennepin County became employment services providers as a way of improving services to their traditional clientele. Unless a county uses one of the state's 53 certified workforce centers or claims financial hardship, it must offer MFIP clients a choice of at least two providers.⁵ We found that:

- **Seventy-seven counties (representing 42 percent of the MFIP employment and training clients) use workforce centers and do not provide clients with a choice of providers, while the remaining ten counties (representing 58 percent of the clients) have more than one provider.**⁶

At the two extremes, a single provider (Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program) serves 19 western and northern Minnesota counties, while 32 providers currently serve Hennepin County.

According to the state's employment services manual, most clients should follow a set sequence of activities during the first eight weeks of participation:

1. Overview of employment and training services,
2. Initial assessment,
3. Development of a job search support plan, and
4. Job search (for 30 hours per week).

If an initial assessment indicates that a client is unable to obtain suitable employment or a client completes eight weeks of job search without employment,

Most MFIP clients start employment services with eight weeks of job search.

² *Minn. Stat.* §256J.50, subd. 5.

³ Office of the Legislative Auditor review of local service unit plans for MFIP employment and training programs operating from July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2001. Three counties allow clients six months before participation is required (Blue Earth, Nicollet, and Olmsted). At the time of our July 1999 review, we did not have information about Houston County, which had not submitted a plan.

⁴ Including subcontractors and separate offices for providers with multiple offices.

⁵ *Minn. Stat.* §256J.50, subd. 8.

⁶ Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Economic Security's management information system for the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which the department uses to track MFIP clients in employment and training services. The ten counties are Hennepin, Ramsey, Aitkin, Carlton, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, St. Louis, Houston, and Olmsted.

job counselors must conduct a “secondary assessment.” Once a secondary assessment is completed, the job counselor and client must develop an employment plan, which may include short-term interventions or job search. Employment plans are supposed to outline long-term strategies to lead clients to self-sufficiency.⁷ However, the employment plans in client files that we reviewed were generally no more detailed and long-term oriented than job search support plans.

Clients from one-parent families who have children under age six are required to participate in activities outlined in their employment plans for at least 20 hours a week, and other single parents need to participate for 30 hours per week. Once single parents work 35 hours per week, they are exempt from employment services; however, they can voluntarily receive post-employment services until they leave MFIP (and in some cases, for an additional year). In combination, both parents from two-parent families must participate for at least 55 hours per week. Once a client from a two-parent family works 35 hours per week, he or she is exempt from employment services (unless the other parent is already working 35 hours, in which case the client only needs to work 20 hours).⁸

ASSESSMENT

We found that:

- **In both policy and practice, MFIP’s initial assessments are usually cursory reviews of a client’s ability to obtain and retain employment.**

The state’s employment services manual says that one of the primary purposes of an initial assessment is to:

identify participants who have immediate and obvious barriers sufficiently severe to preclude all suitable employment. The expectation is that these cases will be limited in number. Given the labor market in most regions of the state, it is likely that most participants will go directly to job search (emphasis added).⁹

Most client files that we reviewed had a simple self-disclosure form as an initial assessment tool. These forms are not formal screening or assessment instruments and rely on clients to indicate their education, training, employment history, transferable skills, and barriers to employment. In addition, we surveyed providers statewide about their initial assessment practices. As shown in Table 4.2:

Employment services providers rely considerably on clients to disclose their barriers to employment.

⁷ DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policies 3.1 – 3.8.50.

⁸ DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policies 2.4, 3.1.30, and 4.4.20. *Minn. Laws* (1998), ch. 407, art. 6, sec. 90, subd. 5 specified in law the minimum hours of participation. *Minn. Laws* (1998), ch. 407, art. 6, sec. 103 changed the number of hours that clients must work before they are exempt from employment and training services from 40 hours per week (or 30 hours with 10 hours of job search) to 35 hours. *Minn. Laws* (1999), ch. 245, art. 6, sec. 77 increased the number of months that a county can continue to provide employment and training services to an MFIP client after the client leaves MFIP from 6 to 12 months.

⁹ DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policy 3.4.20.

- **Most providers said they use a formal instrument to assess the reading and math levels of all their clients. For other client characteristics, most providers said they do not use formal instruments during initial assessment or use them only when a problem is suspected.**

Conducting formal screenings and setting up professional assessments can be expensive and time consuming. Furthermore, many people who are mentally ill, chemically dependent, or learning disabled can obtain and retain employment. Consequently, MFIP relies largely on the labor market to be a screening tool. Job

Table 4.2: Percentage of Providers that Reported Using Formal Screening or Assessment Instruments During MFIP Initial Assessments

Client Characteristic	Percent of Providers Who:		
	Use a Formal Instrument to Assess All Clients	Use a Formal Instrument to Assess Clients with a Suspected Problem	Do Not Use a Formal Instrument
Reading skills	62%	25%	14%
Math skills	54	30	17
Attitudes toward work	27	22	52
English language skills	18	34	48
Learning disabilities	16	46	38
Chemical dependency	2	35	63
Mental illness	1	31	68

NOTE: N equals 96 for reading and English language skills and 97 for all the other characteristics.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor survey of providers (August 1999).

Jobs counselors usually limit more in-depth assessments to clients who have completed eight weeks of job search without employment.

counselors usually limit more in-depth or “secondary” assessments to clients who cannot find suitable employment after eight weeks of job search.¹⁰

The MFIP employment services manual provides very little detail on the scope and content of secondary assessments, only stating,

In the secondary assessment, the job counselor must evaluate the participant’s skills and prior work experience, family circumstances, interests and abilities, need for pre-employment activities, need for supportive or educational services, [and] barriers to employment.¹¹

Many employment services administrators and job counselors told us that a secondary assessment is not a single, structured event but an ongoing process during which job counselors accumulate information about clients. These

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, policy 3.7. The employment services manual also requires job counselors to conduct secondary assessments on clients who (1) work at least 20 hours per week and need a secondary assessment in the opinion of the client or job counselor, or (2) propose an alternative to a job search support plan, including education and training. *Minn. Laws* (1998), ch. 407, art. 6, sec. 96 required job counselors to inform clients who have worked at least 20 hours per week for six consecutive months that they can request a secondary assessment.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

There is room to improve the assessment practices of employment services providers.

assessments may or may not be based on formal screening or assessment instruments. During our file reviews, we observed that records of secondary assessments often contained less detail than initial assessments. In addition,

- **Job counselors often have not done secondary assessments in a timely manner.**

Our review of state employment service records indicated that job counselors performed secondary assessments on only 17 percent of clients who carried out twelve-weeks of job search without finding employment, which is four weeks beyond MFIP's eight-week deadline.¹²

According to a survey we conducted of four providers, specialists assessed only 15 percent of clients that job counselors thought had a chemical dependency problem, 29 percent of clients with a suspected learning disability, and 30 percent of clients with a suspected mental health problem.¹³ This could reflect job counselors not making referrals for assessment or clients not following up on referrals.¹⁴ Furthermore, as shown in Figure 4.1, we found that:

- **Most service providers said they usually do not have sufficient information about unemployed clients' chemical dependency, mental health, learning disabilities, and intelligence three months after the clients enroll for services.**

In contrast, providers said they most often have enough information about clients' previous employment, career interests, previous time on welfare, and reading skills. Several providers told us they would like to have a closer relationship with county social services staff, who could help them with assessments and referrals.

CLIENT ACTIVITIES

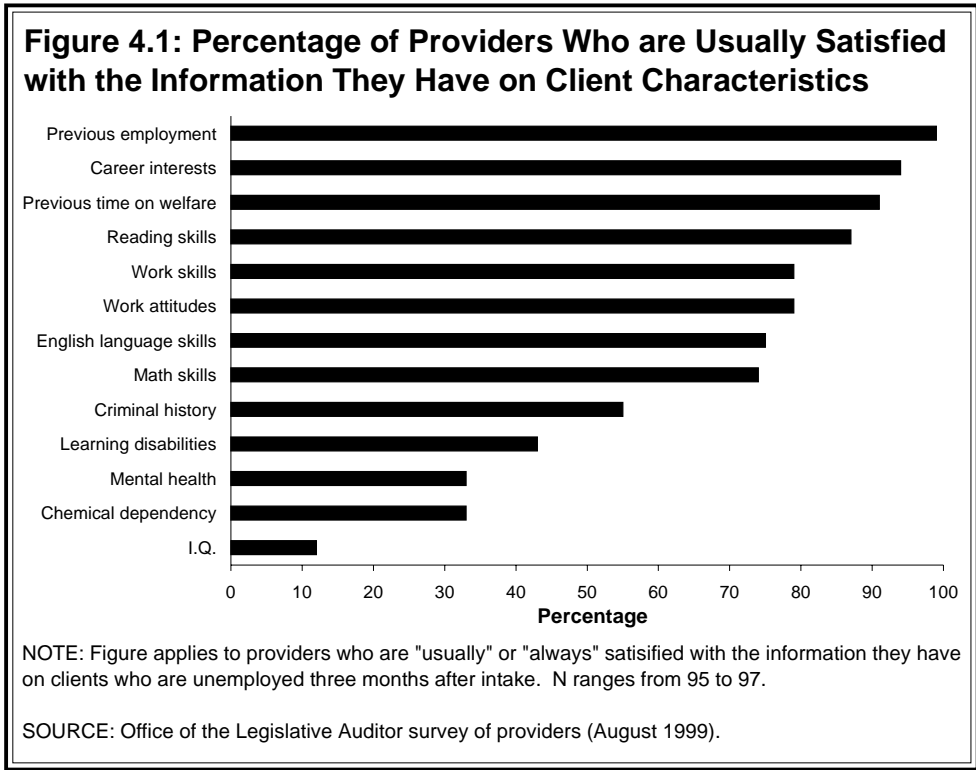
As Table 4.3 shows, the participation rates of MFIP clients reflects the hierarchy of activities outlined in the employment services manual (shown in Table 4.1). We found that:

- **Between January 1998 and June 1999, most clients participated in job search and unsubsidized employment, with much lower levels of participation in education and other services.**

¹² Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from DES' management information system. Providers varied in their use of secondary assessments. Minnesota Valley Action Council in Sibley County recorded secondary assessments for 81 percent of its clients who completed 12 weeks of job search without a job, while 18 providers did not record a single secondary assessment for these clients. In some cases, job counselors may be carrying out secondary assessments but failing to record them in the state's information system.

¹³ Office of the Legislative Auditor questionnaire on client employment obstacles (July-August 1999). See discussion in Chapter 3.

¹⁴ Under *Minn. Laws* (1999), ch. 245, art. 6, sec. 65, job counselors can now require clients to receive a chemical use or psychological assessment if the counselor has objective evidence supporting the need for an assessment.



In the first 18 months of MFIP, most clients participated in job search and unsubsidized employment.

Table 4.3: Participation by MFIP Clients in Various Employment and Training Activities

Activity	Percentage of Clients Who Participated:	
	Sometime Between January 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999 (N=49,821)	On June 30, 1999 (N=28,878)
Job search	65%	25%
Unsubsidized employment	62	46
Education	30	19
Hold ^a	19	10
Subsidized or sheltered work	3	2
Social services	2	1

NOTE: Rural Minnesota CEP (the state's largest provider, accounting for 6,387 of the state's 49,821 cases during the first 18 months of MFIP) and Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (accounting for 1,374 cases) have their own computer system to track activities. Their data were translated into DES' management information system; however, we discovered some errors in the translation that we could not correct. The errors appear to affect a small percentage of their cases.

^aThe hold category does not include clients in sanction.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Economic Security's management information system for the Job Training Partnership Act, which the department uses to track MFIP employment and training activities.

In addition, human services directors from counties that served 97 percent of the MFIP clients reported that the overall percentage of unemployed caregivers that participate in a work-related activity (such as job search and education) has increased under MFIP.¹⁵

In the sections that follow, we discuss work-related activities, as well as statewide variation in client participation.

Job Search

Most providers require MFIP clients to start job search by attending a workshop, which often teaches job searching skills (for example, how to interview) and how to get along in the workplace. In our statewide survey, providers usually said they required attendance at a workshop by at least three-fourths of their clients who were about to start job search.¹⁶ Among providers, the median length of a job search workshop was 20 hours.¹⁷



Workshops teach MFIP clients how to prepare for job interviews and how to get along in the workplace.

After or during the workshop, clients start their job searches. Although clients often search for jobs independently, many spend time in “job clubs” (or similar activities). At job clubs, employment services staff meet with MFIP clients in

¹⁵ Office of the Legislative Auditor survey of county human services directors (August 1999), *N*=83 counties that served 27,484 clients. While the vast majority of directors said that the overall rate of participation has increased, it is possible that participation in some individual activities has not. For example, directors from counties that served 43 percent of MFIP clients perceived that participation in post-secondary education or specialized training has decreased.

¹⁶ Office of the Legislature Auditor survey of providers (August 1999), *N*=97.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *N*=91.

groups and individually, help clients develop resumes and find job listings, and bring prospective employers into their offices to talk to clients. All but 6 percent of providers expected at least some of their clients to attend a job club,¹⁸ but we found that:

- **The level of structure in job search programs varies.**

For example, Wings (a Hennepin County provider) requires most clients looking for jobs to attend job club 12 to 25 hours per week. Wings structures its job club like a job. Clients must sign in and wear work-appropriate clothing. If a client misses two or three sessions, Wings starts the sanctioning process. In contrast, a typical client with the median provider participated in job club only 3 hours a week.¹⁹ In addition, 26 percent of providers reported that they expect no more than half of their job-seeking clients to attend job clubs.²⁰

Education and Training

As Table 4.3 showed, 30 percent of employment services clients participated in an education activity at some time in the first 18 months of MFIP. The state's MFIP employment services manual clearly emphasizes employment over education and training:

The primary focus of Statewide MFIP is to help participants move into the labor market as quickly as possible. Since the most direct path to unsubsidized employment will not often be a training or education program, the circumstances under which these activities will be included in an Employment Plan are limited.²¹

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In cases where education and training services are appropriate, the manual says that the “preference should be for short training programs, and plans which combine training with work.”²² The only clear exception to the “work first” philosophy of MFIP applies to parents under the age of 20 who lack a high school diploma or GED. Most of these clients must develop a plan with completion of an education program as its primary goal.²³

As Table 4.4 shows, we found that:

- **The education activity most frequently used by MFIP clients was post-secondary education.**

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, N=96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, N=90. We asked, “During a typical four-week period, how many total hours does your typical job club participant spend in job clubs (or similar activities)?” The median response was 12 hours.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, N=96. The 26 percent includes providers that did not require their clients to participate in a job club.

²¹ DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policy 3.12.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, policies 3.4.50 - 3.4.80.

Table 4.4: Participation by MFIP Clients in Various Education and Training Activities

Fourteen percent of employment services clients have enrolled in post-secondary education.

Activity	Percentage of Clients Who Participated:	
	Sometime Between January 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999 (N=49,821)	On June 30, 1999 (N=28,878)
Post-secondary education	14%	7%
General equivalency diploma	8	5
English as a second language	5	4
High school	3	3
Adult basic education	2	1

NOTE: Rural Minnesota CEP (the state's largest provider, accounting for 6,387 of the state's 49,821 cases during the first 18 months of MFIP) and Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (accounting for 1,374 cases) have their own computer system to track activities. Their data were translated into DES' management information system. These two providers included ESL participation as part of ABE participation and high school as part of GED participation.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Economic Security's management information system for the Job Training Partnership Act, which the department uses to track MFIP employment and training activities.

When counties develop their criteria for accepting post-secondary training in an employment plan, the MFIP employment services manual suggests that they consider: (1) clients' employability and wages with and without additional training, and (2) work experiences that clients will forego if education is pursued. The manual also suggests that job counselors limit post-secondary training to less than one year, in most cases. If a counselor authorizes a second year, the client must repay (interest-free) the employment and training funds used to support him or her during the second year. Job counselors cannot include education beyond two years in a client's employment plan.²⁴

In general, job counselors refer clients to adult basic education (ABE) and general equivalency diploma (GED) programs if their basic education skills present a barrier to employment. Prior to the 1999 legislative session, the MFIP employment services manual instructed job counselors to question the appropriateness of ABE and GED programs for clients who have not experienced success in school in the past, which are likely to be clients with low basic skills.²⁵ The 1999 Legislature modified the policy by requiring job counselors to allow any MFIP client with a reading or math level below the eighth grade to participate in an ABE or GED program.²⁶ In any event, 72 percent of the providers told us that they have encouraged over half of their clients who have reading or math scores below the eighth grade level to enroll in an ABE or GED course.²⁷

²⁴ *Minn. Stat.* §256J.53, subd. 1; and DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policies 3.12.30 – 3.12.33. Clients who had a STRIDE education plan that was approved before March 1, 1997 had the option of continuing that plan for two years after their cases were converted to MFIP.

²⁵ DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policy 3.12.10.

²⁶ *Minn. Laws* (1999), ch. 245, art. 6, sec. 67.

²⁷ Office of the Legislature Auditor survey of providers (August 1999), N=97.

Finally, we found that:

- **State MFIP policy is unclear about who should participate in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes and for how long.**

Although the employment services manual states that clients with limited English skills are employable, it requires job counselors to allow any client who can demonstrate that his or her English proficiency is a barrier to employment to participate in an ESL program. However, the manual does not specify a minimum level of obstruction that a barrier has to present. Furthermore, job counselors are supposed to review a client's progress in an ESL program, but the state's definition of "satisfactory progress" is quite vague.²⁸ Due to the ambiguity of these provisions, clients and providers sometimes disagree about how much ESL instruction should be allowed as an employment services activity.

Employment

As Table 4.3 showed, 62 percent of employment services clients participated in unsubsidized employment during the first 18 months of MFIP. In fact, more clients participated in unsubsidized employment on June 30, 1999 than any other activity, including job search. We found that:

- **Between June 30, 1998 and June 30, 1999, the percentage of clients in unsubsidized employment increased from 38 to 46 percent.**

In contrast, the percentage of clients in job search decreased from 36 percent to 25 percent.²⁹

In addition, we found that:

- **To help clients earn enough to become ineligible for MFIP cash assistance, increasing their hours of work is a more immediate challenge than increasing their hourly wages.**

Increasing clients' hours of work is a more immediate challenge than increasing their hourly wages.

On June 30, 1999, 73 percent of employment services clients in unsubsidized employment received an hourly wage high enough to be ineligible for MFIP cash assistance if they worked 40 hours per week.³⁰ However, most MFIP clients are not working full-time hours. During May 1999, the average MFIP case with at least one adult working and participating in employment services had 23 hours of employment per week, and only 14 percent of these cases had 40 or more hours per week.³¹

The state's average wage for MFIP clients in unsubsidized employment was \$7.29 an hour on June 30, 1999. The average wage ranged from \$7.95 in the suburban Twin Cities area to \$6.29 in the northeastern part of the state. Only 32 percent of

²⁸ DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policies 3.10 - 3.10.30 and 3.12.20.

²⁹ Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from DES' management information system.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from DHS. The number of hours applies to MFIP cases that have an adult who is not exempt from employment and training services.

employed clients received a wage high enough to be ineligible for all MFIP assistance (including food benefits) if they worked 40 hours per week.³²

Other Activities

Given the “work first” emphasis of MFIP, a surprisingly large number of clients (19 percent) were in a “hold” status at sometime during the first 18 months of MFIP. A hold is a temporary exemption from participating in MFIP employment services. For example, a job counselor may temporarily exempt a client who is homeless in order for him or her to find housing. On average, clients who enrolled in employment services in March 1998 and eventually received a hold had accumulated about four months in this status by June 30, 1999.³³

Very few clients have participated in subsidized or sheltered work programs.

Only 3 percent of clients participated in subsidized or sheltered work programs during the first 18 months of MFIP, and this low percentage probably reflects MFIP’s preference for unsubsidized employment. However, considering that Chapter 3 indicated that low skills and a lack of experience are primary barriers confronting MFIP clients, client participation in these programs is quite low. Table 4.5 lists the range of subsidized and sheltered work programs, which are specifically designed to give clients the skills and experience to succeed in the competitive job market. Some providers, such as the Rural Minnesota CEP (which serves 19 western and northern counties), told us they would like to expand these programs, but the cost has limited their efforts. Rural Minnesota CEP has financed some of these programs with non-MFIP funds from the federal Welfare-to-Work (WtW) program and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA).³⁴

The low percentage of clients in social services (2 percent of clients in the first 18 months of MFIP) is consistent with its position at the bottom of the activity hierarchy shown in Table 4.1. Clients receive social services for personal or family problems that create a barrier to employment, such as mental illness or chemical dependency.

Statewide Variation

As Table 4.6 shows, we found that:

- **Across the state, the extent of client participation in particular employment services activities varies widely.**

For instance, we compared the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) in Itasca County with the American Indian Opportunities

³² Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from DES’ management information system.

³³ *Ibid.* This figure applies to clients who enrolled in employment and training services in March of 1998 (the month with the highest MFIP enrollment – 17 percent all enrollments) and includes the cumulative time in one or more holds.

³⁴ Welfare-to-Work (WtW) and the Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) are federal employment programs. WtW helps finance employment programs for the hard-to-serve MFIP clients and non-custodial parents. JTPA programs serve a broader base of disadvantaged clients than MFIP or WtW. Some MFIP clients are eligible for these programs.

Table 4.5: Subsidized and Sheltered Work Activities

Volunteering – Clients volunteer or participate in community service to gain work-related experience.

Community Work Experience Program – Clients work a specified number of hours in a community service job in return for their MFIP grant (i.e., workfare).

Paid Work-Experience – Clients work in a temporary public or nonprofit sector job for pay.

Grant Diversion – Providers use all or part of a client’s MFIP grant to develop or subsidize a job.

On-the-Job Training – Providers reimburse employers to train a client for a job.

Self-Employment Investment Demonstration – Providers offer technical assistance to clients who want to become self-employed, including help securing seed capital.

SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Economic Security’s Management Information System Manual for the Job Training Partnership Act.

Table 4.6: Variation Among Providers in Client Participation, January 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999

The activities of clients vary widely among providers.

Activity	Statewide ^a	Percentage of Clients in Various Activities	
		Highest Percentage Among Providers ^b	Lowest Percentage Among Providers ^b
Job search	65%	100%	41%
Unsubsidized employment	62	88	35
Education	30	77	9
Hold	19	47	0
Subsidized or sheltered work	3	26	0
Social services	2	17	0

^aRural Minnesota CEP (the state’s largest provider, accounting for 6,387 of the state’s 49,821 cases during the first 18 months of MFIP) and Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (accounting for 1,374 cases) have their own computer system to track activities. Their data were translated into DES’ management information system; however, we discovered some errors in the translation that we could not correct. The errors appear to affect a small percentage of their cases.

^bThese columns exclude two specialized programs. Hennepin County has a program for 18- and 19-year-olds, who participate almost exclusively in high school or GED programs. Olmsted County has a program that specializes in 18- and 19-year-old and hard-to-serve clients.

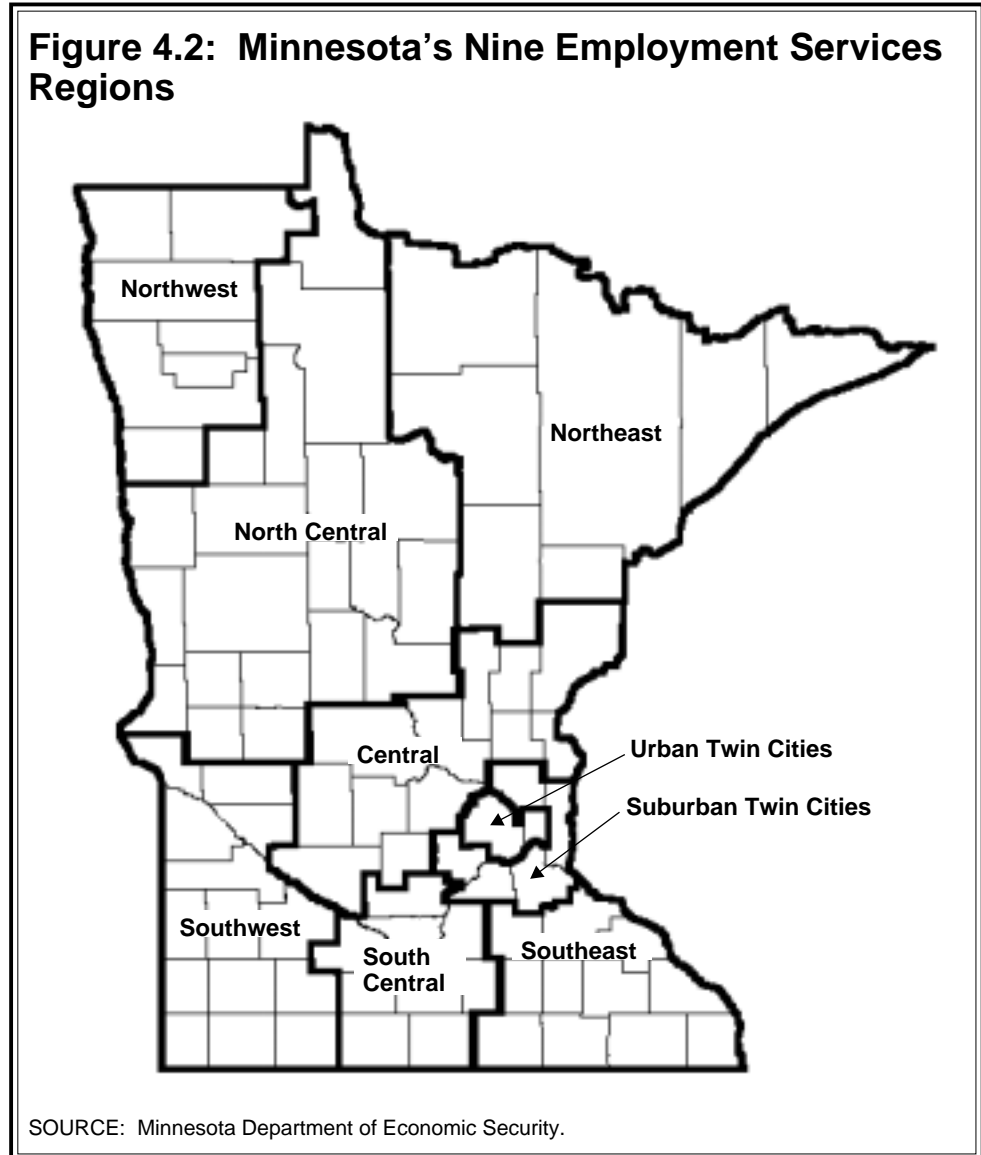
SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Economic Security’s management information system for the Job Training Partnership Act, which the department uses to track MFIP employment and training activities.

Industrialization Center in Hennepin County. In the first 18 months of MFIP, AEOA directed more clients to job search (98 vs. 44 percent) and fewer clients to education (16 vs. 41 percent) and holds (15 vs. 41 percent). AEOA also had more of its clients employed at some time during this period (68 vs. 35 percent).³¹

³¹ Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from DES’ management information system.

In part, such differences reflected a broader pattern of variation between the Twin Cities urban region and other parts of the state. Minnesota's nine employment services regions are displayed in Figure 4.2. As Table 4.7 shows, we found that:

- **Compared with other parts of the state, clients from the Twin Cities urban region (Hennepin and Ramsey counties) engaged more frequently in education and holds and less frequently in job search, subsidized or sheltered work, and unsubsidized employment.**



There are several reasons for the statewide variation in participation rates (and the differences between the Twin Cities urban region and other parts of the state).

One possible reason is the variation in client characteristics. A higher percentage of clients in the Twin Cities urban region have the obstacles to employment listed in Table 4.8. If a provider has a clientele with many barriers, a greater emphasis

on education and holds may be appropriate. Clients with limited English skills may need an ESL program, and homeless clients may need to resolve an immediate housing crisis before they can take part in any employment training activity.

Table 4.7: Regional Variation in Participation in Employment and Training Activities Between January 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999

Region	Cumulative Caseload	Percentage of Clients Participating in:					
		Job Search	Unsubsidized Employment	Education	Hold	Subsidized or Sheltered Work	Social Services
Northwest	926	92.3%	60.0%	20.3%	5.7%	2.5%	0.0%
North Central ^a	6,387	54.9	67.1	14.3	10.8	2.6	2.4
Northeast	4,361	82.9	68.3	29.4	14.4	12.3	1.8
Central ^a	4,845	67.4	70.8	23.7	24.1	2.4	1.1
Southwest	1,294	73.8	66.5	28.7	11.8	10.4	3.2
South Central	1,765	67.2	67.9	31.4	8.2	4.5	6.0
Southeast	3,703	74.0	75.5	36.7	10.3	1.5	0.9
Suburban Twin Cities	5,327	69.8	66.7	31.1	18.8	1.3	3.6
Urban Twin Cities	20,554	55.9	52.5	34.5	24.4	1.2	1.7
Tribal Providers	1,722	74.6	50.8	16.4	12.3	5.3	0.9

^aRural Minnesota CEP (the only provider in the north central region) and Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (one of four providers in the central region) have their own computer systems to track activities. Their data were translated into DES' management information system; however, we discovered some errors in the translation that we could not correct. The errors appear to affect a small percentage of their cases.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Economic Security's management information system for the Job Training Partnership Act, which the department uses to track MFIP employment and training activities.

Table 4.8: Percentage of Clients with Selected Employment Obstacles by Region (June 30, 1999)

Region	Percentage of Clients with a Family of Six or More People	Percentage of Clients with Limited English Skills	Percentage of Clients with No High School Diploma or GED
Northwest	9.3%	8.9%	39.7%
North Central ^a	8.1	6.9	33.4
Northeast	5.5	3.3	22.3
Central ^a	9.0	8.6	35.2
Southwest	10.5	7.0	40.5
South Central	8.0	9.4	36.8
Southeast	11.6	15.0	39.5
Suburban Twin Cities	7.3	11.6	32.8
Urban Twin Cities	16.6	20.5	48.7
Tribal Providers	13.8	0.3	35.9
Statewide	12.4%	14.0%	40.7%

^aRural Minnesota CEP (the only provider in the north central region) and Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (one of four providers in the central region) have their own computer system to track activities. Their data were translated into DES' management information system; however, we discovered some errors in the translation that we could not correct.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Economic Security's management information system for the Job Training Partnership Act, which the department uses to track MFIP employment and training activities.

Across Minnesota, adherence to the state's "work first" philosophy varies.

A second possible reason for the statewide variation in client participation is differences among counties and providers in their adherence to the "work first" philosophy. For example,

- Some counties and providers discourage client participation in education while others encourage it. For example, the Northeast Minnesota Office of Jobs and Training (NEMOJT) serves both Carlton and Itasca counties. According to staff from this provider, Carlton County accepts almost any education plan while Itasca only accepts the very shortest programs, such as a three-week course to become a certified nursing assistant. This may help explain why 65 percent of NEMOJT's Carlton County clients participated in an education activity in the first 18 months of MFIP, compared with 34 percent its Itasca county clients.³⁶
- There is variation in the extent to which clients combine education with work, as recommended by the MFIP employment services manual. For example, both the Southeast Asian Collaborative in Ramsey County and the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA) in Olmsted County serve mostly clients with limited English skills. However, on June 30, 1999, 96 percent of IMAA's clients in ESL programs simultaneously participated in another non-education activity, while only 4 percent of the Southeast Asian Collaborative's clients did so. This may partly explain why IMAA also had a higher percentage of clients in job search (52 vs. 23 percent) and unsubsidized employment (70 vs. 40 percent) on June 30, 1999, even though more of its clients participated in ESL programs (37 vs. 14 percent).³⁷

Once again, the variation reflects a broader statewide pattern. As Table 4.9 shows, only 30 percent of the Twin Cities urban region's MFIP clients in an education activity participated simultaneously in a non-educational activity. In contrast, the southeastern part of the state had high levels of participation in education, employment, and job search, partly because 76 percent of its clients in education simultaneously engaged in another activity.

Access to employment and training resources has also varied.

A third possible reason for variation in client participation levels is differences in the employment and training resources available to counties and providers. For example,

- In 1999, the allocation of MFIP employment and training funds ranged from \$505 per client in Lake of the Woods County to \$2,331 in Mahnommen County. During the 1999 legislative session, the state changed the formula, and almost all counties will receive \$1,054 per client in 2000. (In the allocation formula, the state uses a broad definition of client, which

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The Southeast Asian Collaborative's clientele is exclusively of Asian descent, while IMAA's clientele is 45 percent of African descent (largely Somali refugees), 45 percent of Asian descent (largely Southeast Asian refugees), and 10 percent of European descent (largely Eastern European refugees). Ninety-one percent of the Southeast Asian Collaborative's clientele has limited English skills, compared to 75 percent of IMAA's clients.

Table 4.9: Percentage of Clients in an Education Activity Who Simultaneously Participated in a Non-Education Activity (June 30, 1999)

Urban Twin Cities clients who are in education programs usually do not participate simultaneously in other activities.

Region	Percentage of Clients
Northwest	64.0%
North Central ^a	64.1
Northeast	76.5
Central ^a	62.4
Southwest	60.0
South Central	58.7
Southeast	75.7
Suburban Twin Cities	50.7
Urban Twin Cities	29.8
Tribal Providers	32.7
Statewide	45.8%

^aRural Minnesota CEP (the only provider in the north central region) and Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (one of four providers in the central region) have their own computer system to track activities. Their data were translated into DES' management information system; however, we discovered some errors in the translation that we could not correct. The errors appear to affect a small percentage of their cases.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from the Minnesota Department of Economic Security's management information system for the Job Training Partnership Act, which the department uses to track MFIP employment and training activities.

includes some MFIP recipients who are currently exempt from participation.)³⁸

- Providers' access to non-MFIP employment and training funds varies. If providers do not receive federal WtW or JTPA funds, they are supposed to be able to refer clients to providers who have these funding sources. However, according to the Minnesota Department of Economic Security:

There appears to be a process in place to refer and share resources among programs, but in areas with multiple providers it continues to be a challenge to ensure total collaboration and sharing of participants and funding.³⁹

³⁸ In state fiscal year 1999, the state allocated \$38 million to counties for employment and training services based on a formula that relied partially on each county's previous funding under STRIDE, rather than solely based on MFIP cases. For state fiscal year 2000, the allocation formula relied entirely on caseload, except for seven counties that received an upward adjustment to their base allocation. These seven counties lost funding between 1999 to 2000 (even with the 30 percent overall increase in employment and training funding). For the 2000 formula, each county's caseload is its average monthly MFIP cases during calendar year 1998, with some adjustments. The count excludes child-only cases and cases where all adults are age 60 or older. It also excludes cases that are eligible to be served by tribal providers. Finally, two-parent cases are multiplied by two. For comparison reasons, we used this case count when calculating spending per client for 1999 and 2000.

³⁹ Minnesota Department of Economic Security, unpublished information sheet titled "The MFIP Connection to WtW and JTPA," (St. Paul, October 26, 1999).

Regardless of how well providers share funding and collaborate, clients who want to participate in activities funded by WtW or JTPA (such as education) may have an incentive to choose providers that receive WtW and JTPA funds directly. Clients who choose these providers only have to work with one provider. In contrast, clients who choose another provider and are referred to a WtW or JTPA provider for supplemental services have the added task of working with two providers. This may partly explain why the provider in the northeast region that receives WtW and JTPA funds had 43 percent of its MFIP clients in an education activity in the first 18 months of MFIP, while the region's other provider had only 25 percent.⁴⁰

- Some providers do not have many appropriate training programs that are offered at nearby locations. For example, only 14 percent of clients served by Rural Minnesota CEP in western and northern Minnesota participated in education in the first 18 months of MFIP.⁴¹ The provider's staff told us that the technical colleges in the region do not offer the types of short-term training programs the provider wants.

A fourth possible reason for the variation in client participation patterns is differences in employment opportunities across the state. For example, during June 1999, the seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate was only 2.7 percent in the southeastern part of the state while the rate was nearly twice as high in the northeast (5.2 percent).⁴² On June 30, 1999, employment services providers in the southeast had 64 percent of their clients in unsubsidized employment, while providers in the northeast had 56 percent.⁴³

Overall, it is reasonable to expect some variation in employment services, reflecting local agencies' efforts to tailor services to clients' needs. On the other hand, it is important for state officials to ensure that key MFIP policies are interpreted consistently by local agencies and that these agencies share resources in an equitable way.

Some service variation is reasonable, but the state should ensure that clients receive consistent, equitable treatment.

COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL PARTICIPATION RATES

The 1996 federal welfare reform law has minimum participation rates for the states. In federal fiscal year 1998, 30 percent of all TANF families had to participate in work-related activities (including job search, education, and employment) for at least 20 hours per week. In addition, 75 percent of two-parent

⁴⁰ Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from DES' management information system. In the northeast region, NEMOJT receives the WtW and JTPA funds, while AEOA does not. The comparison excludes the Duluth Job Training Program, a third provider that only operates in St. Louis County.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² DES, "Unemployment Statistics, Minnesota Service Delivery Areas, Not Seasonally Adjusted;" <http://www.des.state.mn.us/1mi/laus/sda.htm>; accessed October 27, 1999.

⁴³ Office of the Legislative Auditor analysis of data from DES' management information system.

families had to have the parents participating for a combined 55 hours per week.⁴⁴ As a credit, the federal government reduces each state's participation target by a percentage point for each percentage point that the state reduced its welfare caseload since 1995. (The federal government calculates separate credits for the overall and two-parent caseloads.) Table 4.10 shows the various participation targets for Minnesota. Unlike most other states, Minnesota has a waiver from certain aspects of the federal participation requirement through 2002. For example, while other states can only count a clients' participation in job search if they have participated in it for six or less weeks, Minnesota can count clients' participation regardless of their time in job search.

If a state fails to meet the participation targets, the federal government can reduce the state's annual TANF grant by 5 percent for the first failure. For each subsequent and consecutive failure, the penalty can increase by two percentage points, with a maximum penalty of 21 percent. However, the actual penalty will depend on the "degree of noncompliance."⁴⁵

Table 4.10: Minnesota's Compliance with Federal Participation Rates for Work-Related Activities

Federal Fiscal Year	Number of Hours that Cases Must Participate in Work-Related Activities	Percentage of Caseload that Must Participate in Work-Related Activities	Caseload Reduction Credit	Required Participation Rate after Applying the Caseload Reduction Credit ^a	Actual Percentage of Caseload that Participated in Work-Related Activities
All Cases					
1998	20	30%	13.0%	17.0%	30.6%
1999	25	35	a	a	a
2000	30	40	a	a	a
2001	30	45	a	a	a
2002	30	50	a	a	a
Two-Parent Cases					
1998	55	75%	32.5%	42.5%	30.8%
1999	55	90	a	a	a
2000	55	90	a	a	a
2001	55	90	a	a	a
2002	55	90	a	a	a

^aTo be determined.

^bThe federal government reduces each state's required participation rate by a percentage point for each percentage point that the state reduced its welfare caseload since 1995.

SOURCE: Part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42, U.S.C. 601 et seq.), section 407; and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "FY 1998 TANF Work Participation Rates;" <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/98table.htm>; accessed September 21, 1999.

⁴⁴ If a two-parent family does not use federal child care assistance, it only needs to participate for 35 hours per week.

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Summary: Final Rule: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program* (Washington, D.C., 1999); <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/program/ofa/exsumcl.htm>; accessed May 5, 1999.

We found that:

- **Minnesota (like all other states) met the overall federal participation target for work-related activities for 1998, but it failed to meet the two-parent standard and could have difficulty meeting either standard in the future.**

To meet federal targets, Minnesota must increase client participation in work-related activities.

Minnesota's overall participation rate (31 percent) and caseload reduction credit (13 percent) for 1998 were below their national medians (35 percent and 21 percent, respectively). They were also the lowest of the upper Midwest states.⁴⁶ In addition, although Minnesota's overall rate exceeded the state's adjusted target by 14 percentage points, the federal government will increase the target by 20 percentage points by 2002. (The unadjusted target will increase from 30 to 50 percent.) Furthermore, starting in 2000, the state will only be able to count TANF cases that participate for at least 30 hours, rather than the 20 hours that counted in 1998.

Finally, Minnesota was one of 13 states that did not meet its two-parent target in 1998, and this target jumped from 75 to 90 percent in 1999. Minnesota's 1998 two-parent participation rate (31 percent) was significantly below the state's federally-adjusted target (43 percent). For not meeting the two-parent target, the state could receive a penalty of as much as \$260,000. Some state and local officials told us that the two-parent target is unrealistic.⁴⁷

Some MFIP clients are not reporting their level of participation in job search. In our survey of employment services providers, the median provider reported that clients do not turn in 30 percent of job search logs.⁴⁸ This level of noncompliance potentially jeopardizes Minnesota's ability to meet the federal targets. While many of these cases may involve clients who are not participating, some may involve clients who participate but fail to record their activities.

On the positive side, it is likely that the state's participation rate will increase between 1998 to 1999. The MFIP requirement that adult recipients participate in work-related activities was in effect for all of federal fiscal year 1999, while it was not in effect for the first three months of 1998 and did not apply to many clients for several more months.

46 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "FY 1998 TANF Work Participation Rates;" <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/news/98table.htm>; accessed September 21, 1999. The other states included Wisconsin (64 percent participation and 46 percent caseload reduction), Iowa (57 percent participation and 21 percent reduction), Michigan (49 percent participation and 25 percent reduction), South Dakota (39 percent participation and 19 percent reduction), Illinois (38 percent participation and 16 percent reduction), and North Dakota (32 percent participation and 19 percent reduction).

47 DHS officials said that there is more turnover among two-parent MFIP cases than among single-parent cases, due to the higher employment levels of two-parent families. They said that it would be difficult to get new two-parent cases participating quickly enough to comply with the federal standard.

48 Office of the Legislature Auditor survey of providers (August 1999), N=92.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

More welfare recipients work today compared with the months before MFIP, but the state has faced some difficulties making the transition to a new program. This section discusses some of these implementation challenges.

Employment Services Needing Improvement

MFIP relies on county human services agencies to develop employment services plans and select providers to carry them out. We asked human services directors to rate the adequacy of various employment services, and Table 4.11 shows the extent to which various services received low ratings. In addition, we asked employment services providers to indicate up to three services that they thought they least adequately delivered in the previous year. Table 4.12 shows the results. These tables suggest that:

- **There is room for improvement in services for sanctioned and hard-to-employ clients and in services related to housing assistance, job development, job retention, and career advancement.**

Table 4.11: Employment-Related Services that County Human Services Directors Said Were Least Adequately Provided

Service	Percentage of MFIP Clients for Whom Adequate Services Were "Sometimes, Rarely or Never" Provided (N=27,664)
Helping employed clients keep their jobs	53%
Developing strategies to bring sanctioned clients into compliance	51
Working with employers to develop job opportunities for clients	48
Being creative in its (their) efforts to serve MFIP clients	42
Developing job search and employment plans that are tailored to client's individual needs	39
Understanding the range of community resources available to clients	31
Developing strategies and services to address the needs of the hardest-to-employ clients	29
Helping clients enter careers in which they can achieve self-sufficiency in the long run	27
Providing clients with sufficient amount of structure in job search activities	17
Assessing client's employment barriers and strengths in a sufficient manner	7
Holding clients accountable (e.g., through sanctions) for failing to meet agreed-upon expectations	5
Recruiting qualified staff as job counselors	4
Informing clients about education and training opportunities	3
Conveying to clients the urgency of the five-year lifetime limit on TANF benefits	3
Teaching clients how to look for (and apply for) jobs	1
Conveying to client the importance of work	1

NOTE: We asked human services directors if their employment services provider(s) adequately meets the needs of their county's clients in the areas listed above. The possible responses were: (1) always or almost always, (2) usually, (3) sometimes, (4) rarely or never, and (5) don't know or not applicable. For this table, their responses were weighted by their counties' employment services case-loads on June 30, 1999.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor survey of county human services directors (August 1999).

Table 4.12: Services that Employment Services Providers Ranked Among the Three They Least Adequately Provided

Service	Percentage of MFIP Clients for Whom Services Were Least Adequately Provided (N=26,664)
Trying to bring sanctioned clients back into compliance	46%
Making regular contacts with current employers of working clients	33
Helping clients arrange for stable, affordable housing	31
Helping clients prepare for career advancement	29
Establishing relationships with potential employers of unemployed clients	27
Helping clients arrange for vocational training after they become employed	23
Secondary assessment	15
Helping clients with job retention	14
Helping clients with job search	9
Initial assessment	6
Helping clients arrange for child care services	3
Helping clients arrange for social services	3
Helping clients arrange for vocational training prior to (or during) job search	3
Helping clients arrange for GED, adult basic education, or ESL classes	3
Helping clients arrange for transportation	2
Reviewing client job logs and education/training attendance	0

NOTE: Providers were asked to identify up to three of the listed services that they least adequately provided during the previous year. For this table, their responses were weighted by their caseloads on June 30, 1999.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor survey of providers (August 1999).

Specialized employment services become more important as easier-to-employ clients leave welfare.

Human services directors and employment services providers both indicated that trying to bring sanctioned clients back into compliance is one of the least adequately provided services. Job counselors usually try to telephone sanctioned clients or mail them letters, but many have not tried more intensive strategies --such as visiting sanctioned clients in their homes--or have not been satisfied with the results of their efforts. Chapter 5 discusses sanctions in more detail.

Human services directors from 40 counties that served 29 percent of MFIP clients said that services for the hardest-to-employ clients are “sometimes, rarely or never” provided adequately. With the five-year lifetime limit on cash assistance, there is an increasing urgency to help clients with the greatest barriers to employment. Unfortunately, the national literature does not provide much insight into how to improve these services.⁴⁹ Table 4.13 lists some strategies currently used by Minnesota providers to assist the hardest-to-employ clients.

⁴⁹ Fredrica D. Kramer, *The Hard-to-Place: Understanding the Population and Strategies to Serve Them* (Welfare Information Network, March 1998), 17; <http://www.welfareinfo.org/hardto.htm>; accessed February 24, 1999. The report says: “Since state programs are only beginning to address the complex set of personal and family-centered issues, or those deriving from barriers such as extremely low skill levels or substance abuse, the pool from which to draw ‘best practices’ is relatively small.” In addition, see Holcomb, Pavetti, Ratcliffe, and Riedinger, *Building an Employment Focused Welfare System: Work First and Other Strategies in Five States: Executive Summary Report* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, June 1998), 37. This report says: “States that are interested in identifying effective or promising strategies to deal with the harder-to-serve have relatively little experience or research on which to draw.”

Table 4.13: Examples of Strategies to Assist Hard-to-Employ Clients

- Having staff who only work with the hardest-to-employ clients (which in some cases can be funded by the federal Welfare-to-Work program).
- Training staff to identify and work with hard-to-employ clients.
- Referring clients to specialists and other agencies for supplemental services (e.g., assessment, treatment, and housing).
- Referring clients to subsidized or sheltered work programs.
- Providing mentors, interpreters, housing coordinators, and social workers.
- Having monthly meetings between job counselors, financial workers, and others to discuss cases.
- Screening clients for eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor review of county local service plans for 1999-2001 and interviews with provider staff.

Statewide, county human services directors and employment services providers both rated development of job opportunities for clients as one of the services needing improvement. Job development is an important component of job search. For example, clients from areas with high poverty and unemployment may lack the network of employed friends and acquaintances that many people use to find jobs. Job counselors can fill this gap by tracking down job leads, building relationships with prospective employers, and bringing employers into their offices. Table 4.14 shows the extent to which providers told us they have undertaken various job development tasks.

Assistance with job retention and career advancement has also been lacking, according to many county human services directors and employment services providers we surveyed.⁵⁰ As an increasing percentage of MFIP clients become

Table 4.14: Percentage of Providers that Said They Conducted Various Job Development Services in the Previous Three Months

Service	Percentage of Providers
Informed at least four employers about individual MFIP clients who might meet the employers' needs	84%
Sponsored a job fair	47
Sponsored a meeting (other than a job fair) attended by provider staff and representatives of four or more employers	40

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor survey of providers (August 1999), N=95 to 97.

⁵⁰ In our survey of employment services providers (August 1999), providers that served 43 percent of MFIP clients also reported that job counselors "sometimes, rarely, or never" devote enough time to job retention activities to meet client needs.

employed, job retention and career advancement become more important. Transitioning to the workforce can be very difficult for clients with little or no work experience. For example, some clients have limited experience interacting with a supervisor or getting their children to day care and themselves to work. Other clients have difficulty finding a better job or asking for a raise or more hours of work. Table 4.15 lists some of the strategies that providers use to help clients keep and advance in their jobs.

Staffing

We found that:

- **Job counselors have had difficulty providing clients with a lot of individual attention because of high caseloads and paperwork.**

Although we did not conduct a formal survey of caseloads, during our site visits and review of each county's Local Service Unit Plan for MFIP, we found that caseloads have sometimes exceeded 100 cases per counselor. In addition, job counselors reported that the large amount of paperwork required to document client activities and initiate sanctions takes a lot of resources away from directly helping clients. The median provider reported that its counselors spent about 50 percent of their time in face-to-face meetings with clients.⁵¹ Even when counselors work directly with clients, tasks not directly related to finding jobs can take a disproportionate amount of time (especially helping clients with housing

Staff caseloads have been large, but new funds authorized last year should help.

Table 4.15: Examples of Job Retention and Career Advancement Strategies

- Develop a job transition and retention plan for each client starting employment.
- Contact employed clients periodically.
- Offer evening office hours and job clubs.
- Provide 24-hour help lines or staff pager numbers.
- Offer workshops on retention and advancement skills.
- Provide transportation services to employed clients.
- Provide mentors.
- Intervene with clients and employers as problems arise.
- Visit clients in their homes.
- Mail job leads to clients.
- Encourage part-time training simultaneously with employment.

SOURCE: Office of the Legislative Auditor review of county local service plans for 1999-2001 and interviews with provider staff.

⁵¹ Office of the Legislature Auditor survey of providers (August 1999), N=97.

and child care issues and working with non-compliant clients). For example, in our statewide survey, 46 percent of providers said that child care issues consume too much of their employment services staff's time.⁵²



Job counselors work with MFIP participants to help them obtain information on job openings.

The MFIP employment services manual recommends that counselors meet at least weekly with their clients who are in job search.⁵³ In our survey, 78 percent of providers reported that they usually meet this standard for clients in full-time job search, and 46 percent reportedly meet it for clients that are combining job search and education.⁵⁴ However, during our file reviews, we came across many cases where meetings occurred far less frequently than weekly. For example,

- An MFIP client enrolled with a provider during March of 1998. Until May of 1999, the only real contact with the client was four job club sessions, and the case file did not specify if the client received any individual attention during these sessions.
- A client enrolled with a provider during April of 1998. Until the client went into sanction a year later, the client only had another three face-to-face meetings with her job counselor.

⁵² *Ibid.*, N=98. Twenty percent of respondents said “don’t know” or neither agreed nor disagreed with a statement that child care issues consume too much time.

⁵³ DHS, *Statewide MFIP Employment Services Manual*, policy 4.3.30.

⁵⁴ Office of the Legislature Auditor survey of providers (August 1999), N=97 and 96, respectively.

- During August of 1998, a client was put on a provider's waiting list. The client first met with her job counselor during March of 1999. Until the client received a sanction in June, she only had three other face-to-face meetings with her job counselor.

The 1999 Legislature increased the funding for employment and training services by 30 percent to reduce caseloads for job counselors.⁵⁵ According to the Governor's proposal (which was slightly smaller than what was enacted), the administration wanted job counselors to serve only 50 or 60 clients at a time, which was typical during STRIDE and the MFIP field trials.⁵⁶ The additional funding should help job counselors work more directly with clients and improve the services discussed in the previous section.

Client Choice

At times, clients' choice of providers has been limited.

Although ten counties have multiple providers, choice has at times been constrained by (1) the minimal information made available to clients about providers, and (2) caps on the number of clients that particular providers can accept. For example:

- When a provider's caseload has exceeded a certain level, Hennepin County has "closed" the provider to new clients. For instance, about half of the county's providers were not available to new clients in May 1999. In addition, the county has given new MFIP clients a list that contains very brief descriptions of each provider's services – such as "core employment activities."⁵⁷
- During the first year of MFIP, Ramsey County assigned clients to providers (and gave them the option to change), rather than giving clients an "up-front" choice.
- Koochiching and Aitkin counties have restricted the number of clients that one of their two providers can serve by capping the amount of MFIP funds that this provider can use.

⁵⁵ DHS, *Bulletin 99-7-2: 1999 Legislative Changes to MFIP, FSET, and MFAP* (St. Paul, July 1, 1999), 13.

⁵⁶ The Department of Finance, *Health and Human Services: Minnesota Biennial Budget 2000-01* (St. Paul, January 1999), C-259.

⁵⁷ See Hennepin County form that clients use to choose a provider (May 28, 1999) and a list of MFIP employment services providers that Hennepin County gives its clients (undated). The list also contains each provider's address, telephone number, office hours, nearby bus routes, language specialties, percentage of clients employed, and average beginning wage.