Evidence Guide for Business Services

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Contents

Introduction

Welcome to the *Evidence Guide for Disability Employment Service Organisations*.

This Guide has been written for people working in business services – from support staff, to managers, to Board members. It has three main aims:

- to explain the basic principles of evidence/data collection
- to assist with identification of evidence requirements (internal and external)
- to provide some good practice examples.

Business services collect, interpret and store all kinds of 'evidence'. This includes evidence about clients for the Disability Maintenance Instrument (DMI), evidence about internal systems for quality assurance, or evidence about a client for their work assessment.

What's in it?

The Guide is essentially a series of questions and answers about evidence. There are six questions that break up the Guide into clear topic areas, making it easier to find information.

- What is evidence?
- Why do you need to collect evidence?
- What evidence do you need to collect?
- How do you collect evidence?
- How do you use evidence?
- How do you store evidence?

The Guide cover some of the key issues about collecting, using and storing evidence. In the answers you'll find facts, advice and examples.

You may like to follow up some of the resources listed at the end of the Guide, to extend your knowledge and understanding.

How should I use the information?

Remember that this is a *Guide only*.

Business services differ in size, structure, location and clients. So the way each one manages evidence is different. However, a key aim of this Guide is to provide basic and practical information – a 'this is what you need to know and here are some examples of what you could do' resource, as opposed to 'this is what you *must* do'.

The examples given throughout the Guide may help set up and/or review the systems in your organisation, so that you approach evidence requirements in a practical and more streamlined way. Even if you only take away one idea that helps you do what you do even better, it's worth it.

What is ‘evidence’?

Example:

The business service you work for is being audited against the 12 Disability Services Standards. Standard 11 is 'Staff recruitment, employment and training'. The first Key Performance Indicator (KPI 11.1) for this standard is:

- The service provider identifies the skills and competencies of each staff member.

When the auditor walks in the door, how would your business service 'prove' to the auditor that it identifies the skills and competencies of each staff member?

In this scenario, it wouldn't be enough to simply 'tell' the auditor that your organisation identifies the skills and competencies of each staff member. You would have to produce **evidence**.

Evidence is 'proof'. It's anything that's used to support a claim. What sort of proof could your organisation produce to support KPI 11.1?

The Quality Assurance Handbook for Disability Employment Services (Version 2, May 2003) gives examples of the types of evidence a business service could use to support each of the 12 Disability Services Standards and their KPIs. For KPI 11.1, the suggested examples of evidence include:

- documented job descriptions which include clear statements of the skills and competencies required for the position
- records of reviews and updates of job descriptions
- that staff can accurately describe, in their own terms, the skill/competency requirements of their job
- staff feedback on the relevance and comprehensiveness of their job description
- that staff can describe how they are involved in reviewing skill/competency requirements.

Evidence can come in many forms. It can be 'official' documents, such as job descriptions – but it can also be observations, such as staff feedback. However, it's important to note that not everything can be used as evidence – evidence must meet certain requirements. Let's take the following as an example.

Example:

One of the assessment items in the DMI asks the following:

Over the past three months, what level of assistance has this service provided to enable the worker to maintain friendly and cooperative relationships with others?

For this assessment item, some appropriate sources of evidence to determine a client's level of assistance would be:

- notes from the work supervisor about assistance given
- observing the client on a number of occasions in the workplace, or
- the client's work assessment (if completed in the previous three months).

These sources provide evidence that is objective and documented, and has been recorded in the client's work environment.

On the other hand some sources of information may not provide valuable evidence. For example, comments from client's parents on this assessment item would not be a good source of evidence. The parents may not know what assistance is provided in the workplace and they may not be objective – so the data they provide is potentially unreliable 'hearsay'.

The basic principles of evidence are covered in more detail later in the Guide.

Types of evidence

Evidence can be described and categorised in many different ways. One of the most common ways is to describe it as:

- quantitative

  or
- qualitative.

Quantitative evidence is evidence that is measured or counted. Some examples include:

- the business service's budget shows a 5% increase in funding
- a client's file notes show they were late for work twice in the previous month
- the client's DMI score put them in the Level 2 category of funding.

Qualitative evidence is evidence that describes or explains. Some examples include:

- a client's case notes include descriptions of their medical needs
- a professional's assessment report outlines the adjustments required for a client to enable them to use a piece of machinery
- a workplace supervisor discusses with the manager that they've observed a client having difficulty moving objects.

Quantitative evidence is not ‘better’ than qualitative evidence, or vice versa. The best type of evidence to use is determined by the purpose – what do you want to ‘prove’ or show?

Example:

If the organisation wants to know *how much* was spent on outside contractors last week, then quantitative data would be appropriate (ie a dollar figure). But if the organisation wanted to know *what* work the outside contractors had performed in the past week, then qualitative evidence would be appropriate (eg invoices describing work undertaken).

Why do you need to collect evidence?

Evidence is a crucial part of everyday operations in business services. It is the basis for many important decisions. For example, evidence is used:

- for the DMI – which directly determines the amount of funding your organisation receives
- to assess your organisation against the 12 Disability Services Standards – which determines whether or not you receive/retain accreditation
- to assess the needs of clients – which determines the adjustments made, support provided etc so the client can fulfill their working requirements
- to determine pro-rata wages for a client
- to review and modify policies and procedures within the organisation – which impacts on efficiency and compliance.

Could any of the above assessments or decisions be made accurately if there wasn't reliable evidence supporting them? How successfully could your organisation run on 'guess work' and 'hunches'? Evidence can have a big impact on the organisation and your clients. That's why all staff need to understand the importance of evidence, and their responsibilities. For example:

- keeping accurate and up-to-date records, as required
- using appropriate workplace documents/forms
- following policies and procedures.

Audits

To put it simply, an audit is a 'check'. It's a close examination of processes, claims or records to determine if requirements are being met. Here is an example.

Example:

The 12 Disability Services Standards have 26 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) attached to them. Business services must comply with these Standards and KPIs to receive/retain accreditation. The only way FaCSIA can determine if an organisation complies is to go in and 'check' – in other words, conduct an audit. During the audit, the organisation must show evidence that they are complying with the requirements of each KPI.

If there's no evidence, there's no way of checking, therefore there can't be an audit.

Audits are not always conducted by an external body, like FaCSIA. Your service may also conduct internal audits, to check that systems and records are meeting your requirements. Audits can check for compliance, but they are also useful for identifying gaps and areas needing improvement.

So that you are well prepared for internal or external audits, it's important you:

- understand what evidence is
- collect evidence to support your claims
- store this evidence securely
- can retrieve the evidence easily if required.

What evidence do you need to collect?

Evidence should always have a purpose – there must be a *reason* why it's being collected. For example, you may need evidence to:

- support financial claims in your budget
- demonstrate compliance with a required process, such as the Disability Services Standards
- support a decision or assessment you've made, such as the DMI, a workplace assessment, or a wage assessment.

Collecting evidence that has no purpose wastes time and resources. It also increases the risk of breaching client rights.

Example:

Business services sometimes collect personal information about clients and their needs, such as toileting needs, so they can receive appropriate support in the workplace. This has to be carefully balanced with a client's right to privacy and dignity. Organisations should only collect evidence that's required, and nothing more.

There are two types of evidence requirements:

- internal
- external.

Internal requirements include all evidence or information that's collected for the organisation's own use. Examples may include general administration information, day-to-day operational information, training assessments, and equipment adjustment data.

External requirements include all evidence or information that's collected to meet requirements coming from outside the organisation. Examples include the evidence required to show compliance with the 12 Disability Services Standards, and evidence for the DMI.

You should be very clear about what evidence you need to collect, for both internal and external requirements. It's important for two reasons:

- you can ensure there are systems and procedures in place to effectively capture **all** evidence required
- evidence is collected as efficiently as possible – in other words, there's no unnecessary doubling up, or evidence or information collected that's not relevant or required.

Streamlining the process

Business services collect and store lots of information to meet internal and external requirements. For example, in a client's file there may be:

- employment plans
- behaviour management plans
- DMI assessments
- training plans and assessments
- professional reports
- pro-rata wage assessment and pay slips.

All of these documents will contain recorded data that may be of use as evidence. But it's important not to consider each one in isolation. The evidence in one document may meet a number of internal or external requirements. In other words, one piece of evidence can be used for a number of purposes. Look at the example that follows.

Example:

A client has a behaviour management plan. The information in the plan is used as evidence for:

- KPI2.3 of the 12 Disability Services Standards, *Services are delivered to meet each individual's employment goals through pathways and plans that do not have any unnecessary restrictions or constraints*.

  It is evidence that the organisation has:

  - management strategies in place to support people with behavioural support needs
  - given consideration to cultural/linguistic issues (the client is from a non-English speaking background), and their plan clearly identifies cultural issues that may have an impact on the plan.
- the Social and Behavioural Assistance domain of the client's DMI assessment. In particular, it provides evidence for the following assessment items:

  Over the past 3 months, what level of assistance has this service provided to enable the worker to:

  - (d) control anger and frustration appropriately
  - (f) maintain a positive outlook and mood most of the time
  - (h) display emotions appropriate to the situation
  - (j) address attitudinal barriers, for example, difficulty in dealing with authority figures and difficulty accepting direction.

This is a good example of streamlining information. One piece of evidence is used to support a number of evidence requirements. This means efficiencies for the organisation, in terms of time and resources and you should streamline evidence collection and use, wherever possible. To assist this process, conduct a mapping exercise. This will identify current streamlining, as well as opportunities for additional streamlining. A mapping exercise will also produce a handy document for audits (it should be clear where evidence to meet audit requirements is located).

A mapping exercise is a four step process:

Identify what evidence you have already collected → **List evidence requirements (internal and external)** → **Match requirements with evidence (streamlining opportunities)** → **Identify further streamlining opportunities**

In a 'real' mapping exercise, you would map *all* the evidence you collect against *all* internal and external requirements. However, the following table is a snapshot of what a mapping exercise focused on the Disability Services Standards and DMI could look like.

Evidence	Internal and external requirements	Match evidence with requirements	Further opportunities

Client training records	• ***Disability Services Standards***
	• ***DMI***
		Disability Services Standards
		• KPI 10.1 (Training and support programs / activities; employment outcomes)
		DMI
		• Workplace Environment Domain:
		  › (e) training the worker in the use of adaptive equipment and technology
		• Other Assistance Domain:
		  › (d) providing recognised pre-vocational training
		  › (g) English language and/ or literacy training for the worker
			There is no recorded client feedback on the training they receive (KPI 10.1 – Consumer perceptions). Response: The trainer will collect feedback at the end of all training sessions, by using a simple questionnaire. The questionnaire will be signed by the client or their advocate, and placed in the client's training records.

NOTE: Training records could contain relevant evidence for all of the Domains (if training has been conducted in previous 3 months).

How do you collect evidence?

There are many different methods you can use to collect evidence. You can:

- observe
- interview
- use workplace documents and forms
- assess or 'test'.

No single method is better than any other. However, it is important that you choose the method that will work best to provide the evidence you need to collect. In other words, the type of evidence you need will determine the method you use. Here is an example.

Example 1:

You want to know if a client is able to set up and arrange their own work environment, equipment and materials. A work supervisor or assessor observing the client in the workplace actually doing this task and recording their observation would be a good way to collect evidence.

Example 2:

You need to know when clients start and finish work, so management implements an attendance sheet that clients or supervisors use to sign in and out each day.

So how do you choose which method to use? First of all, you need to be very clear about what evidence you need. Do you need evidence or information about a client's communication abilities? The budgets for a project? Or the amount of training a client has had in using assistive technology?

When you're clear about what you need, then you can decide what method is going to give you the 'best' evidence – evidence that 'proves' or shows something, without a doubt. This means evidence that is:

- authentic
- valid
- reliable
- current.

Authentic

Authentic means the evidence is 'real' and factual – it comes from an appropriate source. For example, evidence about how a client performs in the workplace should come from the workplace itself. The workplace is the 'real' source.

Valid

Valid means the evidence is directly related to what you need. For example, if you need evidence about a client's ability to travel independently to and from work, you must focus your evidence gathering on that type of travel. You don't need evidence about the client travelling in other situations, or their ability to travel on all forms of transport.

Reliable

Reliable means the evidence can be relied on. For example, let's say you need evidence on a client's need for adaptive technology. An assessment by a professional in the field would be considered 'reliable' evidence, as would case notes and workplace supervisor observations.

It's worth mentioning here that the reliability of evidence is strengthened when it comes from a variety of sources. This enables you to confirm or question facts. In the above example, the combined data from the professional's report, client case notes and supervisor observations would provide a more reliable bank of evidence about client needs than if only one source of evidence was used. If all sources are telling you the same thing, you know you have reliable, solid evidence on which to base your decisions or claims. If there are inconsistencies or questions about the facts, you know you need to look at the evidence again, or seek out more evidence.

Current

Current means the evidence is up-to-date, or from the time period that you require. For example, the DMI requires evidence over a period of at least three weeks prior to its completion. All evidence must come from that time period, otherwise it is not valid.

Example:

A business service is collecting evidence to complete a client's DMI assessment. In the Physical Assistance and Personal Care domain, there is an assessment item that asks the following question.

During the past three months, what level of assistance has this service provided to enable the worker to:

- (f) maintain work pace without tiring.

The organisation needs to collect evidence that is authentic, valid, reliable and current. Which of these would be the better method to use?

Option 1 – The manager interviews the client in their office after work one night, and asks them if they were able to keep pace during the day.

Option 2 – The client's work supervisor records on an official form, over the period of a week, any assistance the client receives to maintain work pace. An occupational therapist also observes the client in the workplace, as part of an ongoing workplace assessment.

In this scenario, Option 2 describes the method that's going to collect better evidence. Why? In Option 2, the evidence will be:

- authentic – observations are of the client, in the workplace
- valid – focuses on recording any assistance the client receives
- reliable – the work supervisor and the occupational therapist will have the skills and experience to identify when the client tires, and what assistance they need. Individually, you'd expect that the evidence they collect would be reliable. However, bringing together evidence from two sources strengthens the overall reliability of the data
- current – if the evidence is collected within three months prior to the DMI being completed, it meets the DMI's requirements.

Option 1 is not the best way of collecting evidence for two main reasons. The evidence is not:

- valid – it focuses on collecting information about 'keeping pace', rather than the assistance the client receives to keep pace
- reliable – the client may not be able to give objective evidence, particularly in an interview situation with a superior. They may not want to admit they need assistance to keep pace. The reliability of the evidence would also be open to question, as it is only coming from one source.

Your responsibilities

You may be required to record information as part of your day-to-day job requirements. This information could include, for example:

- client case notes
- training information
- administration records, such as leave and attendance.

Remember that any information you are required to collect is important, and can be used as evidence by the organisation. So, your information should be recorded:

- in the required format
- objectively
- clearly and accurately
- within the correct timeframe
- according to the policies and procedures of the organisation
- in line with the organisation's obligations under the Funding Agreement.

The rights of clients

If you are collecting information about clients, you must explain to the client (or their advocate) what you are doing and why. This is a requirement of the Commonwealth's Privacy Act 1988. In addition, any information about clients should be treated as private and confidential. It is not for public disclosure or display.

Your workplace will have policies and procedures about maintaining client confidentiality, and collecting and storing client information. Make sure you know your responsibilities in these matters – it's important for you and for clients.

Quality and quantity

Quality and quantity are also important considerations when collecting evidence. How much information is enough information? What details do you need to include? Compare the following examples of case note entries, written by a client's work supervisor.

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Today Clara seemed uninterested in work. She seemed tired and a bit grumpy, and I eventually asked her what the problem was. She told me that she was feeling tired. I asked her if she was feeling sick, and she said no, she was tired because she watched TV late the night before. I had to give her four reminders about the task at hand throughout the day.	Clara tired today. Received four prompts to remain on task.	Clara tired today. (she had a late night watching TV) Uninterested in work. Received four prompts throughout day to remain on task.

Is Example 1 the best record and therefore a more reliable piece of evidence, because it is longer and the most descriptive? Not necessarily.

- Example 1 is a detailed description of Clara's day, but Example 3 records the same data in a more concise way. In both examples we know Clara was tired, why she was tired, and what actions were taken.
- Example 2, however, is too brief. It doesn't provide an explanation as to why Clara was tired, so it's missing an important piece of information.

As mentioned previously, you need to record information in appropriate formats and according to workplace policies and procedures. However, it's worth keeping in mind that more information does not necessarily mean you have 'better' evidence. Evidence is about facts – and facts can be recorded in a concise way. What's important is that:

- all of the relevant information is included
- it's easy to understand – someone else could pick it up and understand what's been recorded.

How do you use evidence?

At the start of this Guide, there was a discussion about why business services need evidence. Evidence is 'proof'. It's the basis on which decisions are made and business services, like any business, make decisions all the time.

If decisions are to be effective and informed, there are four important steps.

- Be clear about what you need the evidence for.
- Collect quality evidence.
- Look at the evidence – what is it telling you?
- Make the decision.

Be clear about what you need the evidence for

As discussed previously, this is the first and crucial step. Why do you need the evidence? Is it to make a decision about a client's training needs, or to monitor supplier prices, or make decisions about assessment items in a DMI?

Collect quality evidence

If you're going to make a good decision or a strong claim, you need it to be based on 'good' evidence. In other words, evidence that's:

- authentic
- valid
- reliable
- current.

Another important consideration is using evidence from a number of *different sources*. If you think of this in a legal context, a lawyer would never use only one witness in a courtroom trial. One witness alone may be open to the question of *reliability*. But a number of witnesses build a stronger story.

The same goes for using evidence to make decisions. Having more than one source of evidence to look at makes for a more informed decision. Consider the following example.

Example:

You're putting together a client's DMI, and you need to give a rating for the following assessment item in the Social and Behavioural Assistance domain.

Over the last three months, what level of assistance has this service provided to enable the worker to:

- (b) control anger and frustration appropriately?

To make an informed decision, you could check a number of sources of evidence, including:

- case notes
- training records
- behaviour management program
- incident reports.

Look at the evidence – what is it telling you?

When you have all of the evidence together, you need to look at it objectively, and determine what it is telling you. In other words, you determine the facts.

Being objective is important. This means you don't bring any bias or preconceptions with you when you look at the evidence. It's not about what you think you know, or what you think should happen – it's about determining the facts.

One of the advantages of using evidence from a number of different sources is that the likelihood of bias is reduced. Evidence from a number of sources also enables you to confirm or question facts. If all sources are telling you the same thing, you have solid evidence on which to base your decisions or claims. If there are inconsistencies or questions about the facts, you need to look at the evidence again, or seek out more evidence.

When you are looking at evidence, it's worthwhile discussing it with other colleagues (as appropriate). As mentioned above, it's important to collect evidence from a variety of sources to strengthen reliability. So, it makes sense that the interpretation of evidence should also be collectively agreed upon.

Make the decision

The final step is to make a decision, preferably collectively, based on the facts presented by the evidence. Consider the following example.

Example:

Disability Services Standard 11 is 'Staff recruitment, employment and training'.
KPI 11.1 is:

- The service provider identifies the skills and competencies of each staff member.

If your evidence tells you that your organisation does this as per the Evidence Guidelines in the Quality Assurance Handbook for Disability Employment Services – Version 2, you are complying with the standards. However, if the evidence says you are not complying, your organisation needs to decide on changes that will ensure compliance. It may be that staff job descriptions need reviewing to include clear statements about the skills and competencies required for each position, or staff may need some training on the skills required for the positions.

What do you do with records of evidence?

All documented evidence needs to be kept in case it's needed later, for something like for an audit or a reassessment, or to review what progress the client has made.

Each business service will have their own systems for storing evidence. However, they will have one thing in common – the evidence will be stored *securely*. This is important for two reasons.

- It maintains client confidentiality. Evidence about a client is not for public display. It may contain sensitive information about the client and their needs.
- It adheres to official requirements. For example, KPI 4.1 of the 12 Disability Service Standards is:

  The service provider complies with the Information Privacy Principles of the Privacy Act 1988 in order to protect and respect the rights of individual service recipients. The service provider does not disclose personal information about service recipients without their informed consent.

According to the 'Evidence Guidelines' of the Quality Assurance Handbook – Version 2 (Department of Family and Community Services, 2003) evidence to support KPI 4.1 may include:

- observation during audit that personal information is stored securely (for example, client files securely bound, files stored in locked cabinets, no files left on desks)
- security of hard and electronic records.

The Quality Assurance Handbook – Version 2 states that organisations should have documented privacy and confidentiality policies that address, at a minimum, data collection, use/disclosure, security, quality and disposal (KPI 4.1). So, if you're unsure about how to store records of evidence, refer to the policies and procedures of your organisation. They should outline what to do.

Information management

A good information management system is vital for the smooth operation of a business service. Again, each organisation will have its own way of managing information, but the basic principles are the same. A good information management system means information should be:

- catalogued/recorded when it enters the system
- stored securely
- easily retrieved, if required
- maintained by authorised personnel.

Here is an example.

Example:

Walldale is a small business service, and manages its information using a simple, paper-based filing system. All files are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the administration office. The manager and the administration officer each have a key to the cabinet, and they are the only people who can access, add or remove files from the cabinet. Each file has a 'tracking sheet' in it, which keeps a record of the dates, times and names of documents that are entered or removed from the file

Useful resources

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, March 2006, Disability Maintenance Instrument Guidelines (Draft), http://www.workplace.gov.au (enter the term 'DMI' in the search box to access the document)

Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, November 2003, Quality Assurance Handbook – Version 2, Department of Family and Community Services, http://www.facsia.gov.au
(enter the title in the search box to access the document)

Summary of key points

- Evidence is important for business services. It's used to make many important decisions.
- When you're making a decision:
  - be clear about what you need evidence for
  - collect quality evidence
  - look at the evidence – what is it telling you
  - make the decision.
- Quantitative evidence relates to things that are measured or counted.
- Qualitative evidence relates to things that are described or explained.
- Evidence should always have a purpose, for example, it may be collected to meet internal or external requirements.
  - Examples of internal requirements include general administration, day-to-day forms.
  - Examples of external requirements include the DMI, and performance against the Disability Services Standards.
- Methods used to collect evidence can include:
  - observation
  - interview
  - workplace documents and forms
  - assessments or tests.
- The type of evidence required will determine the method used to collect it.
- Evidence needs to be:
  - authentic
  - valid
  - reliable
  - current.
- Collecting evidence from a variety of sources strengthens its reliability.
- If you are required to collect information, it should be recorded:
  - in the correct format
  - objectively
  - clearly and accurately
  - within the correct timeframe
  - according to the policies and procedures of the organisation
  - in line with obligations under the Funding Agreement.
- More is not always better. Evidence is about facts, and facts can be recorded in a concise way.
- Clients' rights to privacy, dignity and respect must be considered when collecting evidence.
- Evidence is confidential, and must be stored securely.