October 27, 2026

WIOA POLICY 4.5
CASE NOTE GUIDELINES

I. POLICY

1. Under 20 CFR 683.300(a), staff are required to maintain complete, timely, and accurate records that support customer intake, such as eligibility, goals, steps, and services developed in the Universal Career Plan, outcomes, and follow-up.

2. Case notes serve as the official record of customer interactions, services provided, progress made, decisions regarding service delivery, and accurate documentation supporting the results of continuous career planning in detail.

3. They should clearly reflect successes, challenges, outcomes, service dates, coordination with other programs, and secondhand information from teachers/instructors, employers, family members, or partners, with sources and dates documented. All facts related to the Universal Career Plan must be recorded promptly. Derogatory or speculative comments must be avoided.

4. To ensure completeness, case notes should follow the helpful acronym for structuring notes – SAR.

5. SAR Model (Situation, Action, Result) stands for:

    a. Situation: What support, resources, or assistance would help the customer successfully reach their goals?

    b. Action: What services, referrals, guidance, or activities were provided to support the customer?

    c. Results: What progress was made, what changed, or what outcomes are expected because of the support provided?

6. Not every case note will have a situation, action, and result, but the case notes should all fit into a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

4.5.1 General Standards for Case Notes

1. All staff providing WIOA Title I services must maintain high-quality case notes that are:

    a. Clear: Understandable to someone unfamiliar with the customer's case.

    b. Concise: Focused only on actions and outcomes, relevant, and necessary information.

    c. Accurate and factual: Objective and free from personal opinions or assumptions.

    d. Relevant: Directly connected to the customer's goals, participation, or services.

    e. Timely: Documented as soon as possible, within five (5) business days of the interaction or service.

2. Case notes should tell the customer's story by documenting the observations, progress, challenges, services provided, and next steps toward achieving employment or educational goals in every phase of the customer journey.

4.5.2 Case Note Writing Guidelines

1. Case notes must be written in a professional, respectful, and neutral tone. Staff should:

    a. Use clear language and proper grammar.

    b. Avoid slang, jargon, and unnecessary abbreviations.

    c. Use positive, service-oriented language such as "assisted," "discussed," "encouraged," or "provided feedback."

    d. Avoid negative or judgmental wording.

    e. Write in the third person whenever possible.

2. Notes should describe facts and observed behaviors rather than personal opinions. Any opinion related to service decisions must be clearly identified as professional judgment.

4.5.3 Timeliness and Frequency

1. Case notes must be entered into IWDS 2.0 within five (5) business days of the service or contact. Delays are permitted only when operational barriers prevent timely entry, including system outages, staff unavailability, customer emergencies, or technical upload issues. All delayed entries must include an explanation in the case note when feasible. If documentation is entered after the five (5) business day requirement, staff must explain the reason for the delay in entry beyond the five (5) business day rule within the case note.

2. Active customers must have meaningful two-way contact documented at least every thirty (30) calendar days. Uploading documents alone does not count as customer engagement. Notes must demonstrate active case management through discussions about goals, progress, barriers, services, or next steps.

3. Supervisors and Career Planners are responsible for reviewing reports regularly to ensure compliance with documentation standards.

4. Career Planners are advised to work with the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Office of Employment and Training (OET) program and grant managers regarding the documentation of services that are associated with the administration of non-formula WIOA grants.

4.5.4 Case Notes Associated with Assessments or Services

1. Case notes entered at any point during the customer's journey will be carried over into and housed in the Case Note section on the left part of the Customer Profile page. This allows Career Planners, supervisors, and monitors to easily locate and read through case notes associated with the customer.

2. Some case notes will be required and will be noted with a red asterisk, while others are optional.

3. These case notes will be contained under the bar associated with the appropriate phase of the customer's journey.

    a. Intake: Case notes related to the intake phase, such as the Getting Started Assessment.

    b. Career Plan: Case notes associated with services such as Customer Contact, Service Needs, and Training Progress.

c. Outcomes: Case notes connected to Customer Outcomes, such as employment, education, credentials, and measurable skill gains.

d. Follow-Up: Case notes linked to follow-up can be found under Transition.

e. Other: File Maintenance

4.5.5 Additional Case Notes

1. It is a best practice to enter a case note when a situation arises that is worth noting, such as a newly discovered need for support, guidance given, or progress made toward a goal.

2. When entering case notes from the Case Note section on the left part of the Customer Profile page, a complete case note includes the following sections:

   a. Category – See the Category and Subcategories of Case Notes section of this policy.

   b. Sub-Category – See the Category and Subcategories of Case Notes section of this policy.

   c. Contact Date – The date the interaction took place.

   d. Confidential – Yes/No. See the Confidentiality and Legal Requirements section of this policy.

   e. Subject – A brief description of the service or purpose of the interaction.

   f. Sub-Program – WIOA programs, such as adult, dislocated worker, or youth, will be a drop-down if the customer is co-enrolled.

   g. Case Note – Enter the case note following the SAR method and guidance in this policy.

4.5.6 Category and Subcategories of Case Notes

1. Case notes will be displayed in IWDS 2.0 on the Case Note section on the customer's page according to the stage of service delivery. Case Note categories and subcategories include:

   a. Customer Contact
      1) Successful Two-Way Communication
      2) Outreach – Response Not Required
      3) Outreach – Pending Response

4) Unsuccessful Communication
5) Other Communication (Non-WIOA)

b. Customer Outcome Information
   1) Employment Verification
   2) Educational Verification
   3) Credential Documentation
   4) MSG Documentation

c. File Maintenance

d. Training Progress
   1) Training Successful Two-Way Communication
   2) Progress Update Only

e. Transition from Active Services (WIOA Exit)

4.5.7 Confidentiality and Legal Requirements

1. Case notes are considered official records and can be treated as legal documents. They should be written with the understanding that they may be reviewed during audits, monitoring, or legal proceedings.

2. Staff must:

   a. Protect confidential information by marking the case note as confidential.

   b. Avoid including sensitive medical or mental health details.

   c. Refer generally to challenges or disabilities without naming specific diagnoses.

   d. Follow all organizational confidentiality policies and applicable laws, including the Freedom of Information Act.

3. Case notes will be stored in IWDS 2.0, which is a secure, password-protected system, and only limited users will have access to case notes marked as confidential.

4.5.8 Compliance and Oversight

1. Supervisors must review case notes regularly to ensure they are accurate, complete, timely, and consistent with service records. Failure to comply may result in corrective action, retraining, or additional monitoring.

2. Proper documentation protects both the organization and staff while ensuring customers receive consistent, effective services.

II. INQUIRIES

Inquiries should be directed to the appropriate OET Regional Manager, Kristi Chevali at Kristen.I.Chevali@Illinois.gov for the Northern Region, Ruth Whitis at Ruth.Whitis@illinois.gov for the Central Region, or Bryan Ellis at Bryan.Ellis@Illinois.gov for the Southern Region.

III. ATTACHMENTS

None

Sincerely,



Julio Rodriguez, Deputy Director
Office of Employment and Training

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