

Tools for Selecting an EAP Provider: RFPs and Audits

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ABSTRACT. *This Research Note describes key tools – RFPs and Audits - that can be used in the vendor selection process when purchasing organizations are comparing employee assistance program providers.*

What Are EAPs? Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are employer-sponsored programs designed to alleviate and assist in eliminating a variety of workplace problems. EAPs typically provide screening, assessments, brief interventions, referrals to other services and case management with longitudinal follow-up for mental health concerns and substance abuse problems. The source of these employee problems can be either personal or work-related. Those who work for EAPs come from many different professions including social workers, psychologists, counselors, substance abuse specialists, occupational nurses, and others. In Canada, the services are called Employee and Family Assistance Programs (EFAPs).

EAP Vendor Selection Tools

After determining what is desired in an EAP, the next step is to conduct the selection process and evaluate one or more EAP provider companies. Two popular tools

to consider for this part of the selection process are using structured information gathering instruments and conducting an independent audit of the EAP provider or vendor.

Using an RFP to Compare EAPs

Various themes are included in a request for information (RFI) or request for proposal (RFP) for EAP services. Often this information is collected from several programs that are under consideration for purchase. The themes included in one sample RFP include the following:¹

- 24-Hour phone access, intervention, and intake
- Assessment and short-term counseling
- Workplace assistance
- Network development and management
- Data management and reporting
- Account management and communication
- Quality improvement and evaluation
- Staffing
- Fee proposal

See the end of this report for the specific questions.

Some of the difficulty in comparing providers and selecting an EAP vendor is that standardized client reporting and operational benchmarks are not required yet for the EAP industry.² Although certain aspects of this issue are addressed through the programs for certification of individuals (the Certified Employee Assistance Professional or CEAP) and for external providers and internal programs (from the Council of Accreditation), these remain *voluntary* elements and are not required standards. Thus, any company can claim that they are providing “employee assistance program” services and it is up to the purchaser to determine exactly what that means.

But help for this problem may be on the way. A research project to develop a standardized RFI tool is being conducted by the National Business Coalition on Health (NBCH) and The George Washington University. The goal for the project is to extend the kinds of questions asked of EAP vendors beyond the process and outcome metrics to also collect descriptive and program model information to enable purchasers to compare programs, populations, and services.³

There is also a related effort lead by the National Business Group on Health (NBGH). An employee assistance work group was created that included 25 members of the Business Group and many EAP professionals to discuss the strategic role of EAPs, develop metrics for measuring EAP effectiveness, and examine how companies currently use EAPs.⁴

Using an Audit to Evaluate An EAP

Some employers hire an outside consultant to conduct a formal audit of their EAP provider. This process typically involves the review of business documents and records, interviews with key staff and a site visit to the main operations of the EAP. Some of the EAP function examined in an audit conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide include the following:⁵

- Observation of intake functions
- Examination of physical space for counseling
- Review of reports, billings, utilization
- Assessment of client satisfaction surveys
- Evaluation of follow up and client outcomes
- Structured interviews of EAP staff

Hiring an expert third party to conduct an audit provides the purchaser with an unbiased and objective evaluation of the overall functioning and quality of the EAP. Audits also can suggest areas of improvement and ways to fine-tune the operations of the provider.

Interested readers are directed to the full version of the *2009 EASNA Purchasers Guide* for sample questions from a consultant audit (Appendix 4).

Conclusion

How to select the most appropriate provider or program for EA services involves many steps. Many purchasers find value in using structured information gathering tools such as the request for information and request for proposal questionnaires and using a formal audit of a provider of employee assistance services.

References

- [1] Adapted from Chestnut Global Partners, 2007.
- [2] Employee Assistance Professionals Association. (2006). *EAPA standards and professional guidelines for employee assistance programs – Addendum: Toward the standardization of employee assistance measures*. Arlington, VA: EAPA.
- [3] National Business Coalition on Health. (2008). *Enhancing the eValue8 request for information to improve employee assistance program performance benchmarks* (Press Release). Washington, DC: Author.
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- [5] Adapted from Routledge, S. (2008, June). *Strutting your stuff: An auditor’s view of employee assistance best practices*. Presentation for EAPA Learning Center Webinar Series. Arlington, VA: EAPA.

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Sample RFP Questions for EAP

Adapted from Chestnut Global Partners, 2007.

The following formal sample request for proposal (RFP) can be used for review or serve as a template for conducting an in-depth interview or review. Please note that this sample is comprehensive in scope and may be adapted to fit individual and organizational needs.

RFP Part I: 24-Hour Telephone Access, Intervention, and Intake

1. Describe your telephone access and intake system, including how you handle calls after regular business hours and on weekends. What is your average speed of answer (ASA) for telephone intake? What is your call abandonment rate?
2. What are the role and the qualifications of the person who answers the initial call?
3. Can your access system provide 24-hour telephone crisis counseling, emergency triage, and schedule routine appointments? How is this accomplished?
4. What are your typical timeframes for scheduling routine, urgent, and crisis appointments?
5. Describe what would happen if one of our employees accessed the EAP at 3:00 a.m. with symptoms of suicidal ideation requesting to meet with an EAP clinician immediately.
6. Under what circumstances would you provide telephone counseling or intervention in lieu of face-to-face services? When is telephone counseling considered a replacement, rather than a supplement, to in-person counseling?
2. What type of personal and behavioral health problems do your EAP clinicians handle? Also, describe any specialized EAP counseling services you offer (e.g., financial, credit, career, legal).
3. What percentage of EAP cases is handled within your EAP (e.g., a six session model), and what percentage is given referrals beyond the EAP for long-term counseling or specialized care? What is your average number of sessions provided per case in a six session model (or the number of sessions in your model)?
4. What are the qualifications of EAP clinicians who conduct assessment and short-term counseling?
5. How do you determine that a referral beyond the EAP is indicated? What is the EAP clinician's role in facilitating appropriate referrals? How do you match clients with referral resources?
6. How do you review and monitor the progress of referrals beyond the EAP?
7. Discuss your EAP's role in helping an employee return to work following an extended episode of intensive treatment.
8. How does your EAP interface with insurance benefits and managed care requirements when referrals beyond the EAP are made?
9. List any treatment programs, facilities, or practices in which your EAP (or parent organization) has a vested financial interest. What referral policies do you have in place to prevent inappropriate steering of clients to these affiliated agents and programs? Under what conditions, if any, can EAP clinicians refer to themselves for ongoing counseling beyond the EAP?

RFP Part II: Clinical Assessment and Short-Term Counseling

1. Describe your process for providing in-person clinical assessment and short-term counseling (generally, up to six sessions per episode of care).
10. Provide historical data across all EAP accounts, for at least a one-year period, which specifies: (a) the number of referrals made beyond your EAP to internal, affiliated agents/programs; and (b) the number of referrals made beyond the EAP to external, non-affiliated referral resources.

RFP Part III: Workplace Assistance

1. Describe your ability to offer consultation to supervisors attempting to manage employees with job performance problems caused by unresolved personal or behavioral/medical problems.
2. Describe your training program for teaching managers/supervisors on how to conduct job performance-based EAP referrals for marginally performing employees.
3. Provide historical data across all EAP accounts, for at least a one-year period, which specifies: (a) the percentage of self-referrals to the EAP and (b) the percentage of supervisory or company referrals to the EAP.
4. Do you offer workshops to employers that help prevent or mitigate the occurrence of behavioral and organizational health problems? If so, list examples of workshops you can provide.
5. What organizational consultation services can you provide which fall within the role and expertise of an EAP and support the human resource development efforts of companies? Does this consultation include expertise in helping to design policies and programs to address substance abuse, harassment, or aggression in the workplace?
6. Indicate your experience and services for handling critical incidents and violence in the workplace.

RFP Part IV: Network Development and Management

1. Describe your current network of EAP affiliates and other contracted providers and the method used to develop the network.
2. List the criteria for EAP clinicians to be included in the network. How are credentials verified?
3. List all active EAP affiliates within (geographical location). How long have these contractual relationships existed? If one of your members preferred to receive EAP counseling in Denver, for

example, how would that member access an EAP affiliate in Denver?

4. List the office locations that your EAP (or parent organization) owns and operates. List the locations that your EAP contracts with network affiliates and provide a geo-access table if available.

RFP Part V: Data Management and Reporting

1. Provide sample copies of standard EAP utilization reports prepared for client companies and examples of ad-hoc reports. Is there a charge for requesting ad-hoc reports?
2. Describe your EAP information system, database, and reporting capabilities.

RFP Part VI: Account Management and Communication

1. What are the name, credentials, and experience of the individual who would be responsible for coordinating and implementing your EAP?
2. What is your plan for EAP promotion and employee communications? Provide examples of printed communication, if available. Explain if your fee includes the printing and production of these materials.
3. How would you effectively service "one account" with a multi-location employer? What experience does your EAP have in servicing a multi-location account? Provide a list of multi-location employers with contact information for references.

RFP Part VII: Quality Improvement and Evaluation

1. Describe quality measures for maintaining and improving customer friendly service.
2. Specify EAP-related quality indicators that your program is capable of measuring and monitoring. Do you have a formal quality management structure and program? If yes, describe.
3. Provide any return-on-investment (ROI) data your program has analyzed for other employers. How

- would you work with an organization to measure the effectiveness of your services?
4. Identify any external audits that have been conducted on your EAP. What was the outcome of these audits? What is your policy about third-party external auditors reviewing the business or clinical practices of your EAP? [NOTE: See next Appendix for an example of external audit questions.]
 5. What professional standards, if any, does your EAP adhere to?
 6. How do you typically evaluate the success of your EAP?
 8. Enclose verification of professional liability insurance.
 9. Describe any service enhancements your EAP is able to provide (e.g. online education, work-life benefits, gate keeping models, etc.)
 10. Do you have a dedicated website for the EAP? What content does it contain (e.g., emotional, wellness and work-life educational information; children and eldercare resource search capability; online health and wellness training materials; self assessments and screening tools).
 11. Describe the legal consultation benefits offered with the EAP.

RFP Part VIII: Staffing, Vendor Information and Other Services

1. Describe the roles and responsibilities of various EAP staff that would be involved in servicing and managing your EAP.
2. Provide an organizational chart for those staff involved in EAP, either full- or part-time.
3. What are the minimum qualifications for "face-to-face" EAP assessments and counseling?
4. How and when did your EAP originate? Briefly describe the ownership structure and organization of your company.
5. Provide a list of EAP accounts where your firm is the primary contractor, the number of employees in each account, and terminated EAP accounts. Note reason(s) for termination.
6. Provide letters of reference from at least five client company liaisons. Include name, position, telephone number, and nature of relationship.
7. What is your average EAP utilization rate across all active accounts, as defined as the percentage of employees and families members where one or more members are seen by an EAP clinician one or more times?

12. Describe the financial consultation benefits offered with the EAP.
13. Describe the work-life benefits offered with the EAP.
14. Describe the wellness and health promotion activities offered by the EAP.

RFP Part IX: Fee Proposal

1. Propose a capitated rate based upon a "per employee per year" (PEPY) fee that includes: (a) one to six session model on a per incident basis; (b) serving eligible dependents of the employee; (c) covering the cost of promotional materials and mailing; (d) annual supervisory training, quarterly organizational workshops, consultation, and critical incident response when requested; and (e) all account management and administrative services, including quarterly and ad-hoc reports.
2. Itemize the full range of services that will be provided for this capitated rate.
3. Describe other type of pricing options considered by your business.