

GUIDE: Stepping Stones to Success

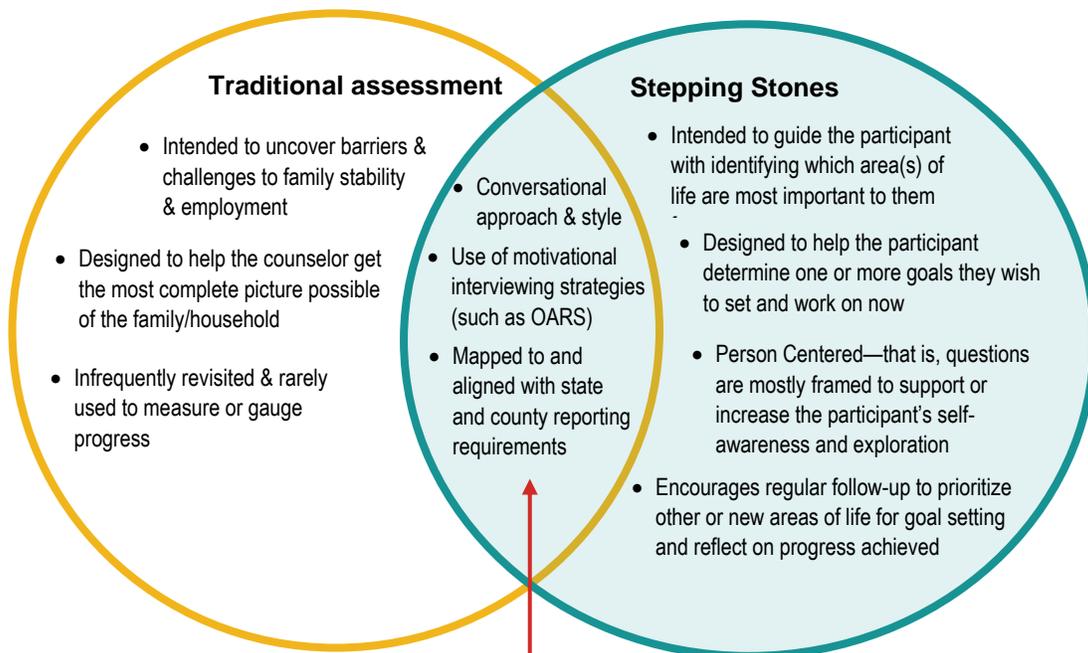
How to use this guide:

This guide is intended to support you in facilitating a meaningful conversation with the participant. It is *not* meant to be an exhaustive assessment or checklist of questions. Please use your discretion to focus the conversation with the participant appropriately and avoid a “back-and-forth” interview-style process with Stepping Stones. ▲

Stepping Stones to Success is an **alternate approach and tool** for conducting initial and ongoing “assessments” with participants in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). Whereas most assessment approaches and tools are designed to gather a detailed picture of the participant’s life and relevant history, Stepping Stones to Success is primarily focused on:

- ✓ Prioritizing life areas that are most important and meaningful to the participant
- ✓ Leading into goal setting and employment plan development with the participant

This is a fundamental and significant shift, because the purpose is NOT to gather information from or about the participant, but rather it is to evoke the participant’s motivation and to support them with prioritizing where to start. There are some areas of overlap in how you may be accustomed to conducting assessments—for example, using a conversational style and motivational interviewing techniques. Nevertheless, Stepping Stones requires a mindset and skill shift—see the Venn diagram below.



Important similarities between these approaches. Stepping Stones expects these characteristics *plus* those described in the right-hand circle.

Verbally introducing Stepping Stones to Success to a participant

SAY: Stepping Stones is a tool to help you explore different areas of your life and reflect on what is most important and meaningful for you right now. It is also meant to help you prioritize where you would like to set a goal and move forward.

- Share an electronic or physical copy of Stepping Stones with the customer

SAY: Looking at the areas on the left side of the page, what comes to mind? Which area stands out to you? Why?

- Use **OARS** techniques to draw out the participant's thoughts and motivations.
- Invite the participant to jot down their thoughts or reflections on any given life area under the column that best describes how they're feeling about that area right now. For example, the participant might say, "My car is on the fritz...that's going to be an expensive problem soon!" You might respond with, "Oh, that must be worrying! How would you label that situation using the phrases at the top of the page?" The participant might say, "It's not a focus right now, but I'm sure it will be soon." The participant could simply write "car trouble" in the box under the *Not a focus area for me right now* column on the *Transportation* row of Stepping Stones.
- Depending on the participant's situation, consider asking whether any other areas stick out to them and, if they do, why.
- If the participant raises something that does not fall into one of the pre-defined areas, encourage them to note it in the *Other things important to me* row.
- If the participant names more than two areas of importance, encourage them to note all of the areas they care about on the page. Then, invite them to reflect on which one or two areas rises to the top—which area is *most* important?
- Note that you two will revisit this conversation (and the tool) periodically. If the participant highlighted multiple areas, invite them to consider with you when the best time might be to revisit (and reprioritize) areas they wish to work on. You might explain that you will start with only one or two so as to give focus on your work.

Example questions

- What's the most important thing on your mind today?
- Which of these areas are you most interested in focusing on?
- In which of these areas would you most like to see some change? Tell me more about that...
- What one thing would you like to be different about your situation? How would that be meaningful to you?

SAY: Focusing on this area of your life, let's start to get more specific about the change you would like to see. You might think of a big change, or a few smaller changes. Whatever comes to mind is great!

- Invite the participant to begin working through the goal setting process with you.
- Repeat this process for each change the participant chooses to focus on.

Completing the Stepping Stones tool

Remember: the purpose of Stepping Stones is *not* to gather a lot of information from the participant; rather, the purpose is to springboard into goal setting based on what is most important and motivating to them. Nevertheless, as you discuss the life areas on Stepping Stones, you will naturally learn about the participant, and **the tool itself can be a useful way for the participant to capture their own reflections.** The tool intentionally includes lots of blank, open space to jot down reflections or potential changes the participant would like to consider. The column headers provide a simple way to gauge where the participant is at in a given life area.

Consistent with state guidelines for completing an initial Employability Measure assessment **within 90 days**, you should aim to have touched on each of the life areas represented on Stepping Stones with the participant during this window of time. This may be a very simple acknowledgement that some areas are fine, other areas are not of interest or focus at the moment, and yet other areas are priorities for goal setting. Below is an example of what a Stepping Stones worksheet might look like at the 90-day mark of working with participant, likely after two or more conversations about their priorities and goals. **This is just an example.**

Example:

Notice that Martine's Stepping Stones includes her own, hand-written reflections based on two 1-hour conversations she had with her EGC. During the first conversation, Martine identified three areas she really wanted to work on first – housing, financial, and employment. She also noted during the first conversation that she needed child care assistance right away and that she was interested in career exploration and training support. In a second, follow-up conversation, Martine and her EGC reviewed the other life areas that did not rise to the top and briefly discussed where she was at in each of those areas. This document was filed in Martine's case file to be reviewed soon.

Ramsey County Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
Stepping Stones to Success MY NAME **Martine S.** DATE **9 / 7 / 21** CASE # **95484130**

		I'M DOING WELL IN THIS AREA	NOT A FOCUS AREA FOR ME RIGHT NOW	I'M READY TO EXPLORE THIS AREA	I'M MOTIVATED AND READY TO WORK ON THIS
FAMILY/ HOUSEHOLD	Relationships ▶ I want to work on my relationships with the people in my household	My family is my rock!			
	Children ▶ I want to work on supporting my child/ren's development, learning, and wellness	Ida & Reyna are why I'm doing this			
	Childcare and dependent care ▶ I want dependable and good quality care for members of my household			I need care now!	
WELL-BEING	Physical health ▶ I want to work on my health		It's fine		
	Mental and emotional health ▶ I want to work on my mental and emotional wellbeing		Good days & bad days, but I'm fine		
	Social and cultural supports ▶ I want to work on my social relationships that support and reflect my culture and identity	Love my girlfriends			
STABILITY	Housing ▶ I want to work on finding housing that better meets the needs of my family				Move to a safer neighborhood
	Transportation ▶ I want to work on finding transportation that meets my entire family's needs		Car works fine		
	Legal ▶ I want to work on accessing legal supports or services	No issues			
	Financial ▶ I want to work on my financial goals				I want to be able to save a little bit
CAREER GROWTH & PATHWAY	Education ▶ I want to work on my education goals		Might need some classes? Not sure...		
	Career Exploration ▶ I want to work on finding a career that is right for me			Need some help finding the right job	
	Training ▶ I want to work on identifying and completing specific training to achieve my career goals			Probably?	
	Employment ▶ I want to work on moving my career goals forward				I don't want to work two jobs anymore!
OTHER THINGS IMPORTANT TO ME:					

Conversation starters by life area

Life area	Possible topics of interest in this area	Example questions to draw out the participant's reflections and motivation
Relationships	Doing something fun with my kids, safety concerns with partner/spouse, family counseling, couples counseling	<i>In thinking about your family, what are you most excited or hopeful about? Thinking about your immediate family, your significant other and children, what challenges do they face that interferes with your ability to work?</i>
Children	Parent/teacher conferences, extracurricular activities, reading to my child, accessing programs that my child is interested in, parenting classes, advocating for my child	<i>In thinking about your child(ren), what would you like to be different about their situation(s)? What supports or resources do you need to best care for your children?</i>
Mental and emotional health	Self-care, counseling, de-stressing, mental health services	<i>What helps you reduce your stress? How can you do more of that? What are the primary factors that contribute to your stress? What might you do to decrease one of these?</i>
Social and cultural support	Community support as defined by the parent/participant; engaging with organizations, churches, community centers	<i>What groups or organizations, such as a church, do you belong to that give you a boost when you need it? What groups or organizations might you join to get additional support? What would you need to do that?</i>
Childcare and dependent care	In addition to day care, this might include caregiving for someone who is ill, Meals on Wheels for an elderly parent, hospice, caring for a child or family member with a disability, and/or seeking community services for family members	<i>What additional supports or resources could help your children thrive? On a scale of 1 (not at all comfortable) to 10 (extremely comfortable), how comfortable are you with someone besides yourself watching your children? If you were to go to work, what kind of child care arrangement would make you feel most comfortable? What options do you have available to you right now for child care?</i>
Housing	Apartment, house, homelessness, shelter, utilities, lease, eviction, safety	<i>How does your housing situation support you in other areas of your life? What would you like to be different, if anything, about your housing?</i>
Transportation	Gas assistance, bus passes, bicycles, car repairs, obtaining more reliable transportation options, Medicaid transportation, figuring out a ride share system with my neighbor or friend	<i>What is your primary mode of transportation right now? What about your family's transportation needs? On a scale of 1 (not at all reliable) to 10 (always reliable), how would you rate the reliability of your transportation right now? What transportation challenges might you need to address in order to improve your ability to work (for example, car repairs, car insurance, pay off outstanding fines, get a driver's license)?</i>
Legal	Driver's license, marriage license, social security card, child support orders, parking tickets, legal aid, applying for Social Security and needing a lawyer specializing in SSI/SSDI appeals, parole, probation, divorce, restraining order, safety considerations, adoption, etc.	<i>What, if any, legal matters would allow you to move forward with your goals if they were resolved? Thinking about your current legal status, are there things that might help your situation such as obtaining a driver's license, getting an ID, expungement of a criminal record, paying off a fine, or getting more help with communicating about your situation?</i>

<i>Life area</i>	<i>Possible topics of interest in this area</i>	<i>Example questions to draw out the participant's reflections and motivation</i>
Financial	Banking systems, credit unions, credit report, financial literacy, understanding local cost of living, revolving loans for microenterprises, and earned income tax credit	<p><i>On a scale of 1 (not at all knowledgeable) to 10 (extremely knowledgeable), how much do you know about managing finances? For example, have you had courses on financial literacy?</i></p> <p><i>What specifically would make you feel financially secure?</i></p> <p><i>What does it take for you to live in your community?</i></p>
Education	Literacy classes, Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, High School/GED, tutoring services for a child, college or university classes, small business development classes, music, dance, art, language, cooking, etc.	<p><i>What educational activities do you want or need?</i></p> <p><i>What are you really good at?</i></p> <p><i>What education activities do you want your child to access? Do they want or need tutoring?</i></p> <p><i>How would you describe your learning style, for example, do you learn best in a classroom, in a real-world setting, in a nontraditional classroom, or some other way?</i></p>
Career Exploration	Classes, interest inventories, looking at local labor market information, identifying careers/jobs/employment of interest	<p><i>What do you want to do for work? What skills do you have? What skills would you like to build?</i></p> <p><i>What types of work interests you most? How would you describe a job designed just for your talents?</i></p>
Training	CDL, CNA, safe food handling, computer programming, child care certifications/licensing, any short-term training that will support someone in being promoted/hired	<p><i>What training do you need to get a job or to advance in your career?</i></p> <p><i>What resources or supports do you need to do well in training?</i></p>
Employment	Targeted job search, promotions, employment change, etc.	<p><i>What types of jobs interest you most (for example, retail, customer service, hospitality, or clerical)? Least?</i></p> <p><i>When you think of work as rewarding, what does that look like? Can you describe that for me?</i></p> <p>If previously employed:</p> <p><i>Can you think of a time when you didn't like a job? Tell me about it. What didn't you like?</i></p> <p><i>What have you learned from your previous jobs? What do you like in a work environment (for example, regular work hours, daytime/nighttime shift, interactive with other coworkers and/or customers)? What don't you like?</i></p>