Advisor Instruction Guide

COUNCIL *for* PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

MSA Military School Age Credential

Contents

Advisor Materials Checklist

THE ADVISOR'S MATERIALS CONSIST OF:

- ☐ *Advisor Instruction Guide.* This guide contains detailed guidance for the advisor and a checklist of activities the advisor must complete to fulfill their responsibilities.
- ☐ *Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument.* The official form the advisor records observations of the candidate's consistent behavior working with youth and families.
- ☐ *Tally of Youth Family Questionnaires.* This is used to record the number of Youth Family Questionnaires distributed and collected.
- ☐ *Letter to Youth Families and Youth Family Questionnaires*. The Youth Family Questionnaire asks families/guardians to express their views about the candidate's work.
- ☐ *Assessment Evaluation Form*
- ☐ *Military School-Age Assessment System and Competency Standards Book*

Preface

Thank you for making a commitment to fulfill a challenging and important role as an advisor to a candidate aspiring to earn the Military School-Age Associate (MSA) Credential.

The Council for Professional Recognition (Council) evaluates/assesses professionals who work with youth and their families. The purpose of the assessment is to identify individuals who have the necessary skills and knowledge to work competently with youth in the Department of Defense programs. Unlike other forms of certification, the MSA credential requires no paper-and-pencil exams. Rather, candidates have a chance to demonstrate, on the job, their ability to meet the needs of youth and families daily.

The MSA credential is modeled after the Child Development Associate® (CDA) Credential™. These credentials differ from other forms of credentialing in several ways:

- First, the assessment is based on performance. A youth professional who wants to earn the credential is observed several times by other members of the Local Assessment Team (advisor, Family/Community Representative, and Military School-Age Representative) while working with a group of youth.
- Second, the candidate is a full participant in the assessment. The candidate prepares a professional portfolio to demonstrate their knowledge and skill; collects a file of resources to be used throughout their career with youth; and participates as a member of the Local Assessment Team.
- Third, a Family/Community Representative participates in the assessment. Families have the opportunity to express their views about the candidate by completing a Youth Family Questionnaire. The Family/Community Representative summarizes the families' opinions and brings their voice to the assessment. The Family/Community Representative also observes and evaluates the candidate.
- Finally, the team approach to assessment guarantees that judgment of competence will be based on a well-rounded picture of the candidate's performance drawn from team members' observations, the MSA Representative's interview with the candidate, the professional portfolio, and the Youth Family Questionnaires.

As a professional in the field of youth development and out-of-school programs, you have experience and knowledge that can be very helpful to a person who has chosen to work with youth. The quality of the relationship you develop with the candidate will undoubtedly be important to the individual's growth as a youth professional. The information you collect about the candidate's work over a period of time will make a major contribution towards the Local Assessment Team's evaluation of the candidate's competence.

If you have not done so already, please take some time to review the Military School-Age Assessment System and Competency Standards Book. The book contains an overview of the Military School-Age credentialing program, a description of the assessment system, team member eligibility requirements, information collection responsibilities, and the Competency Standards for youth professionals. Ensure you have met the eligibility requirements to serve as an advisor before beginning your work with the candidate.

Thank you for joining this team. We know that the time and effort required to fulfill the responsibilities of a Military School-Age advisor are significant. Your contribution is tremendously important to the professional evaluation of the candidate and to the future of our youth. This section gives guidance for completing the advisor's information collection responsibilities, including developing a professional relationship with the candidate, preparing for observations, completing information collection and observation guidelines, giving feedback to the candidate, assisting the candidate in professional portfolio preparation, and completing the Assessment Request Form.

Read all the materials and discuss your responsibilities and any questions you may have with the candidate or the Family/Community Representative. Additionally, if you have questions after reading these materials, STOP and contact the Council's customer service toll-free hotline, 800-424-4310 or email msa@cdacouncil.org.

Developing a Relationship with the Candidate

The MSA Advisor's role is to help facilitate the candidate's growth and development. It is important that you develop a supportive relationship with the individual, one that encourages mutual trust, respect, and honesty. Such a relationship will enable the candidate to benefit personally and professionally. At the same time, remember that the candidate is in charge of the assessment and try to guide the candidate in a way that promotes their independence.

As the MSA Advisor, you are the only Local Assessment Team (LAT) member who will have the opportunity to work closely with the candidate over an extended period of time, a minimum of 12 weeks and often longer. During this time, you will wear the different hats of observer, master teacher, facilitator, and assessor. Your knowledge and experience in youth development, out-of-school programs, and your observations of the candidate's performance will qualify you to give a unique perspective of the Local Assessment Team's evaluation of the candidate's competence.

Completing Information Collection

Your documentation of the candidate's performance on the Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument will help inform the MSA Representative when providing the final recommendation to the Council for a final decision to award the MSA credential or support the candidate through additional professional development. This observation instrument must contain evidence of the candidate's consistent behavior during all your observations and be current at the time of the verification visit.

The purpose of current information is to ensure that at the final stage of the assessment, the verification visit, all team members share relevant information about the candidate's work with the same group of youth and families. This gives team members a common frame of reference for their evaluation of the candidate's work.

When you have completed the Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument, notify the candidate. They will then ask you to complete and sign your portion of the Assessment Request Form. This form is not a statement of the candidate's competence; your signature indicates only that you have completed your responsibilities. As the MSA Advisor, you may recommend a candidate who feels ready for the Verification Visit to postpone the assessment request if significant improvement in skills is needed. Usually, the candidate agrees and seeks to improve performance before scheduling the final assessment. However, there may be instances when a candidate is satisfied with their performance and insists on proceeding. As long as you have completed your tasks (including feedback), you are to sign the *Assessment Request*

Form. You will have time during the verification visit to discuss your evaluation of the candidate with the MSA Representative.

When the Council receives the Assessment Request Form, it assigns a Military School-Age Representative to the team, who conducts the Verification Visit. In addition to reviewing documentation, observing, and interviewing the candidate, they will review/discuss your documentation. The MSA Representative will contact you to coordinate sharing of your documentation and may schedule the time to follow up with you.

Observation Guidelines

You are required to observe the Candidate on at least two separate visits and complete the Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument. At least three weeks must elapse between each of your observations. All observations must be dated within six months prior to the date the candidate submits the Assessment Request Form. Additional observations may be needed to ensure all functional areas have been observed. At least one of the observations must be in the same facility/location where the MSA Representative will observe.

It requires practice and preparation to make accurate, informative, and objective observations. Below are some suggestions for preparing and conducting your observations of the candidate:

- Check with the candidate at least one day before the visit to be sure you agree on the time. Also make arrangements with the candidate to discuss your observations and strategies for growth following the observation.
- Read the Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument so you know how to locate items while you are observing. Please follow all observation instructions and procedures included in the Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument.
- Give the candidate and the youth a chance to feel comfortable with your presence and take the first 10 to 15 minutes to get settled before starting to record observations. Ask the candidate to tell you the ages of the youth present so that you can include the ages in your recordings.
- Observe quietly without interrupting. Wait until later to have discussions with the candidate. Be honest and objective in you observation.

Giving Feedback to the Candidate

The time between observations can be very productive for the candidate. It allows the individual to examine their performance, to work on your recommendations and suggestions, and to improve and acquire skills.

The feedback you give the candidate after each observation is critical to the learning process. In scheduling your observations, you should always allow for some time after the observation for you and the candidate to discuss the observation in an evaluative way. At this time, you can help the candidate: evaluate performance the day of the observation; assess growth since the last observation; and develop plans to improve work in certain areas. Try to make clear, concrete suggestions for the candidate's further growth after each observation session.

Advisor Responsibilities for Information Collection

One important element in good advising is being a **good listener**. Encourage the candidate to talk about their work and clarify thoughts and feelings. Offer your own background and experience as a resource while helping the candidate recognize and depend upon their own growing abilities and knowledge.

STRATEGIES FOR GROWTH

You are required to make at least one recommendation under "strategies for growth" in each of the 13 Functional Areas. You may make the recommendations after your first, second, or after all observations are complete. Write in the date of each recommendation. Be as specific as possible. It is important to give the candidate concrete examples and references to improve their skills and knowledge. Brainstorm with the candidate and discuss different ways to use activities, materials, techniques, or routines to meet the needs of the youth and their families.

You should record your recommendations on the *Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument* under *"strategies for growth."*

USEFUL RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide more opportunities for youth to develop their expressive language through creative writing and drama, asking older youth to read to the younger children/youth (07/10/2022).

This is the kind of suggestion that helps the candidate begin to improve their performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS THAT ARE NOT AS USEFUL

Encourage youth to routinely verbalize their thoughts and feelings.

This is an important goal for a candidate, but the statement does not suggest ways to accomplish it (e.g., *how the candidate could promote such expression*).

Youth Family Questionnaires

As the MSA Advisor, you will help the candidate distribute and collect Youth Family Questionnaires to families of youth in the candidate's care. Questionnaires must be completed three months prior to the submission of the Application for Assessment. You will be responsible for tracking the number of surveys submitted and returned and ensure all questionnaires are given to the Family/Community Representative. A minimum of 20 surveys must be distributed to families. In programs with less than 20 families, all families must be surveyed. The advisor and candidate work to collect most questionnaires distributed–more than 50% of the total number of questionnaires distributed.

PREPARE THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Only one questionnaire is given to **each family** whose youth are in the candidate's care. Prepare the questionnaires this way:

Advisor Responsibilities for Information Collection

- Print the candidate's name on each printed letter and questionnaire.
- Fill in the date when the questionnaire should be returned to you.
- Use the program roster to keep track of the questionnaires. Applying a numbering system is useful as families are not required to sign the questionnaire.

As the questionnaires are returned, you can match the number with the respondent's name and then check the name on your list. ***The numbering system is used only to help you keep track of which families have not returned a questionnaire so you can follow up.***

DISTRIBUTE/COLLECT THE QUESTIONNAIRES

You and the candidate must decide how to distribute the questionnaires to each family. There are many ways to do this:

1. **Group meeting.** Distribute and collect the questionnaires at a scheduled family meeting. You can explain the questionnaire to families in person and answer their questions.
2. **Visit the program during arrival/departure times.** Introduce yourself to the families and explain what you are doing. Explain it is very important they fill out the questionnaire. The best way to ensure families will complete the questionnaire is to ask them to take a few minutes to fill it out on the spot. If they do not have time, you may give them the questionnaire and ask that they return it to you as quickly as possible.
3. **Emailing families.** If you have access to the family's email addresses, you may send the questionnaires electronically. Be sure to follow your local guidance on email communication.

Your goal is to collect as many questionnaires as possible. Keep track of those you distribute and, if all the questionnaires are not completed, explain why on the *Tally of Youth Family Questionnaires.* You are required to make at least one follow-up attempt to get information from each family that does not respond initially. Try a different method of contacting the family in your follow-up attempt.

If family members have difficulty understanding the questionnaire, you may go over each question with them. Whenever possible, they should fill out the forms themselves, so they feel free to express their own opinions.

Families must not be overlooked because they do not speak or have difficulty reading and writing English. In such cases, an individual interview in which you read the questions and write down the families' answers will work best. An individual interview with a translator is also a possibility.

COMPLETE THE TALLY OF YOUTH FAMILY QUESTIONNAIRES

After the questionnaires have been returned, you must complete the *Tally of Youth Family Questionnaires.* Do not fill out the tally until the candidate is ready to send in the *Assessment Request Form* If you complete it too soon, you will have to change it when new families return their questionnaires.

Advisor Responsibilities for Information Collection

Follow these steps when filling out the *Tally of Youth Family Questionnaires:*

1. Count the number of questionnaires you distributed, the number that were filled out and returned to you, and the number that were not returned. Record each of these numbers in the appropriate space on the tally form. If some questionnaires were not returned or were only partially filled out, explain why.
2. Check the method(s) you used to collect the questionnaires. Check each box that applies.
3. Fill in the dates you distributed and collected the questionnaires. Both of these dates must be within three months prior to the date the candidate submits the *Assessment Request Form.*

When you have completed the *Tally of Youth Family Questionnaires,* attach it to the top of the questionnaires and **provide all the information to the Family/Community Representative.**

Professional Portfolio Guidance

In addition to giving feedback on the candidate's performance with youth and their families, you may also offer guidance in preparing the Professional Portfolio. The candidate may share their materials that detail the portfolio requirements.

Youth professionals often say that the process of creating something is just as important as the product. This also applies to the professional portfolio preparation. This task provides the candidate with the opportunity to organize their thoughts about where they are in their work, in their own words. It requires them to self-assess and organize their knowledge and understanding of their work in relation to the 13 Functional Areas.

The professional portfolio must be the candidate's original work and should reflect their individual style. You can be most helpful by giving general suggestions for the content of the professional portfolio, providing direction to resources, and giving feedback on the candidate's written materials.

PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENTS

Training/Education Documentation	Candidate provides documentation of successful completion of Child and Youth Services DoD Foundation Level Training. Candidate includes college transcripts, certificates, etc.
Resource Collection	Candidate collects specific resources and materials they use in their work with youth and families.
Reflective Statements of Competence	Candidate prepares six written reflections on their teaching practices related to the six Competency Standards and some items of their Resource Collection.
Professional Philosophy Statement	Candidate summarizes their professional belief and values about youth development.

Advisor Responsibilities for Information Collection

Assessment Evaluation

Once you complete your documentation collection, it is time to complete the Assessment Evaluation Form, providing your final recommendation about the MSA candidate's performance. Once completed, you will provide all your assessment documentation to the MSA Representative. It may be necessary for the representative to set a time to discuss/share any information that may need further discussion before they consolidate all LAT assessment documentation.

Verification Visit

After receiving the Assessment Request Form, the Council will assign a Military School-Age Representative, who conducts the MSA Candidate's Verification Visit. In addition to reviewing the candidate's documentation, observing, and interviewing the candidate; they will review/discuss your documentation. The MSA Representative may call you to coordinate sharing of your documentation and may schedule the time to follow up with you.

AFTER THE VERIFICATION VISIT

Based on all the information presented by all team members, the MSA Representative then summarizes the evaluation of the candidate's performance. The MSA Representative presents the final Local Assessment Team recommendation to the Council as to whether the candidate receives the Military School-Age Credential or that the team recommends further training. The MSA Representative submits all the required documentation to the Council within 48 hours. The Council reviews the information and makes the final credentialing decision.

A FINAL NOTE

Thank you for contributing your time to this effort. We hope your participation will be a rewarding experience. If you are concerned or unsure about any aspect of your responsibilities, please contact the Council.

Advisor Checklist

- ☐ Read this guide carefully.
- ☐ Study the Competency Standards in the *Military School-Age Assessment System and Competency Standards Book.*
- ☐ Schedule two or more observations with the candidate. Each must be at least three weeks apart.
- ☐ Offer suggestions for growth and improvement after each observation.
- ☐ Record your observations on the *Advisor Assessment Observation Instrument.*
- ☐ Prepare *Youth Family Questionnaires.*
- ☐ Distribute and collect *Youth Family Questionnaires.*
- ☐ Fill out *Tally of Youth Family Questionnaires.*
- ☐ Submit *Youth Family Questionnaires* and *Tally of Questionnaires* to Family/Community Representative.
- ☐ Assist the candidate and the Family/Community Representative in completing their responsibilities if requested/needed.
- ☐ Notify the candidate that you have completed your information collection duties.
- ☐ Complete and sign your portion of the candidate's *Assessment Request Form.*
- ☐ Be prepared to share your information collection with the MSA Representative.