

Best Practices: College Consulting

Purpose of the IECA Member Competencies

IECA is an organization which has always placed high expectations and a great deal of trust in the hands of its members. Reflecting IECA's focus on excellence, this document serves as a guide for both new and experienced Independent Educational Consultants. The use of the word guide here is intentional; the Education & Training Committee does not suggest that IECA begin to police or evaluate its members. As leaders in the profession, IECA members should continually assess their own skills to be sure they are offering the highest level of service to students and their families and seek ongoing professional development towards that end.

Our profession is complex. In addition to an ever-changing body of knowledge, Independent Educational Consultants (IECs) must be empathetic individuals who have the ability to work effectively with children, their families, and with other professionals.

For new IECs, the competencies begin to define standards of excellence that an IECA member consultant strives to meet. They can guide work with a mentor, the choice of courses taken at a university, and the identification of other professional training the new IEC needs in order to meet the needs of students and their families. For experienced IECs, they can serve as a tool for self-assessment, as individuals think about areas they might identify for the ongoing professional development that separates IECA members from others.

Development of the Competencies

The development of the competencies began with a question: What skill set does a highly qualified IEC possess? IECA is recognized as the nation's leading professional organization for those Independent Educational Consultants working in private practice, yet no widely accepted standard existed which defined those skills. IECA members serving on IECA's Standing Committees (School, College, Therapeutic, and Learning Disabilities) worked over the course of a year to seek input from all IECA members and develop the standards for each particular specialty area. The IECA Education and Training Committee facilitated this process and compiled the initial document in June 2009.

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Assessing a Student

1. Obtain and evaluate relevant records and data such as transcripts, test scores, high school profile, and psychoeducational reports.
2. Use intake procedures that insure the IEC gets to know and understand the unique characteristics of each client.
3. Use interest inventories and assessment tools, i.e., "Do What You Are" and/or "Strong Interest Inventory," as appropriate.
4. Consult with other professionals, i.e. teachers, school counselor, therapist, to gain a greater understanding of the student's records and needs as indicated.
5. Understand standardized tests and measurements, in particular, the design and use of the SAT and ACT.
6. Understand the stages of adolescent development as they relate to the college process.
7. Understand the scope and sequence of the curriculum in the high schools clients attend.
8. Understand the role that finances and affordability play.

Working with a Family

1. Remain cognizant of the fact that the child is the client and that all actions must reflect the best interest of the child.
2. Seek to empower the student to take charge of the college application process.
3. Strive to present the college application process as one that seeks the best matches for the student, and does not focus solely on "getting in."
4. Strive always to bring clarity and objective advice to the process and to minimize the stress.
5. Use parents as a resource to get to know the child and respect the insights they provide.
6. Understand and respect parents' and families' experience, history, values, religion, goals, and financial parameters in order to factor them into the college application and decision-making process.
7. Be clear in explaining that the ultimate decision for college admission rests outside of the IEC's scope of influence and that results cannot be guaranteed.
8. Clarify mutual expectations, delineating what the IEC

will do as well as what the student and the family are expected to do, either in preliminary discussions and/or in the contract.

9. Help parents and students understand the scope and sequence of the college admissions process.
10. Help students and families build a realistic college list based on all relevant factors.
11. Explain that each college formulates its own admissions and financial aid processes and that there can be substantial differences from school to school.
12. Educate families and students about college ranking systems and media coverage in order to bring balance to decision-making and to put this information in perspective.
13. Help students evaluate all appropriate options, including alternatives such as a gap year, post-graduate year or deferred admission when making their final college decision.
14. Help families understand the financial aid process, need vs. merit aid, leveraging, enrollment management, factors included in the cost of attendance, and ways to assess their own affordability.
15. Discuss the process of transition from high school to college with students and parents.

Working with High Schools and Colleges

1. Work as individuals and as an association to build collaborative relationships with colleges.
2. Respect the preferences of each college admission office and other administrative offices concerning the level of direct contact the administrators welcome from Independent Educational Consultants.
3. Be knowledgeable about the admission and financial aid policies, social climate, and academic programs at a broad range of colleges and universities.
4. Be familiar with and adhere to the Code of Conduct for IECA Members on College, School, and Program Tours (found on the IECA website).
5. Be familiar with the guidelines and policies of the student's high school, as well as those to which the colleges and universities abide, regarding applications, testing, admissions practices, scholarships, financial aid, and other elements of the process, i.e. NACAC Statement of Principles of Good Practice.

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Professional Ethics

1. Be familiar with and adhere to the Ethics Guidelines stated in the IECA Principles of Good Practice.
2. Maintain respectful and professional standards while safeguarding the confidentiality of clients at all times, including in use of the IECA TalkList
3. Remain objective and avoid allowing personal biases to affect advice.
4. Do not accept offers of commissions for referrals to tutors, test preparation, and other services.
5. Although there is no legal requirement to do so, IECs should be familiar with the ethics and procedures for reporting child abuse in their legal jurisdiction.
6. Do not discriminate against clients and potential clients with respect to race, nationality, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation.
7. Refer all clients whose needs are beyond the limits of one's professional expertise to other professionals.
8. Develop and use a client contract or letter of agreement with full delineation of services, clear disclosure and disclaimers, including a release if consultation with other professionals is indicated.
9. IECs do not write students' college essays.
10. Do not use negative, derogatory, or demeaning comments or language when speaking of or to another IEC, school counselor, or college admissions officer.

Establishing a Professional Office

1. Establish an effective system of ongoing communication with parents and, if appropriate, colleges and programs.
2. Maintain a professional office setting.
3. Maintain thorough, accurate and confidential records that document the IEC's work.
4. Establish an efficient and professional system for gathering, maintaining and distributing information.
5. Develop a marketing plan that reflects the highest level of professional ethics.

Professional Development

1. Be aware of issues and trends in college admissions and higher education.
2. Maintain contact with, and/or membership in, other professional associations involved with higher education.
3. Maintain and share with clients accurate information for a range of colleges and universities about: accreditation status; standardized test requirements; admission plans (RD, EA, ED, REA, rolling, open); sports, sports divisions, recruitment, and NCAA regulations; academic programs; social climate; scholarships; financial aid; learning support, among other criteria.
4. Develop a process for assessing and recommending an appropriate list of colleges based on the student's profile.
5. Conduct visits to a broad range of colleges on an ongoing basis. IECA Guidelines suggest that 20% of an IEC's time should be spent visiting colleges.
6. Develop a network of specialists in other fields, e.g. psychologists, social workers, advocates, financial advisors, and financial aid experts, in order to make appropriate referrals.
7. Work to continuously expand or update knowledge in areas such as (but not limited to) learning disabilities, adolescent development, higher education legislation and policies, student life, college financing.
8. Maintain current reference materials to use as a resource in making informed recommendations.
9. Seek advice from other IECs who have had recent experience with a particular college or university.
10. Understand the limits of one's expertise and competence, and seek professional input or assistance when necessary.