

We know that monitoring reviews can be nerve-wracking for grantees, and it can be a lot of work to prepare for a review. To ensure your review runs smoothly, consider these eight tips to help you prepare and put forth your very best!



1. Keep Documentation Organized and Up to Date

Throughout the 5-year grant cycle, grantees should keep all documentation current and organized. This will be helpful as you prepare for either a Focus Area 1 or Focus Area 2 review, which both include a document review. During the document review, the monitoring team will review documents located in HSES, such as your most recent grant application(s) and community assessment, etc., to gain a preliminary understanding of your program. Keeping information up to date will ensure the Review Team has the necessary documentation to prepare for an efficient and effective review. You should work closely with your Monitoring Event Coordinator (MEC) and Review Lead to gain a full understanding of which documents they would like to look at before the review.



2. Actively Participate in the Planning Process

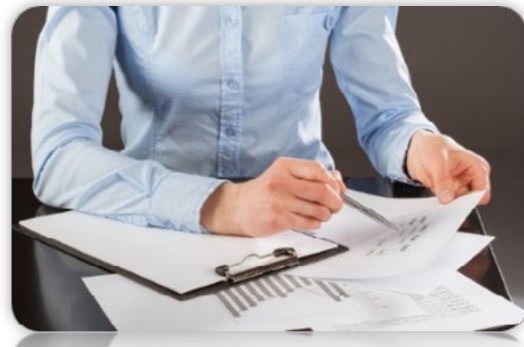


Your Review Lead will contact you prior to the review to plan and answer any questions you may have. Work closely with your Review Lead, sharing any pertinent information the monitoring team may need to know about your program. The MEC may also be in touch and help to coordinate elements of the reviews, so don't be surprised to hear from them during the planning process. Actively participating in the planning process ensures minimal surprises during the review week and is particularly important for the Focus Area reviews. For example, during the Focus Area 1 review, you will have the opportunity to determine when each area of the protocol

will be discussed, which staff members will participate, and when the discussions will occur based on staff availability. During the Focus Area 2 planning call, you might discuss the order of the classroom exploration schedule based on teacher or center director availability or geography. Actively participating in the planning process helps to minimize disruptions to the daily operations and ensures you have the information needed to adequately prepare your staff for a monitoring review.

3. Prepare Staff for Discussions with the Review Team

In the Focus Area reviews, we are now referring to interviews as discussions. We understand these discussions can make some program staff nervous, especially if they do not know what to expect. You should take the time to prepare for discussions by reviewing the protocol for the review you are experiencing to help prepare staff for what to expect. Remind staff that there are no questions the Review Team must ask, so they should be prepared for open-ended discussion. Helping staff gain clarity on the purpose of the discussion and the intent of the questions will help ease their nerves. Staff should expect Reviewers to follow up on things that make them curious or that they would like to learn more about. This isn't a bad thing. Reviewers are trained to be curious and ask questions to learn more about the program. Work with your Review Lead or MEC to understand who should be a part, or needs to be a part, of each discussion. When preparing for discussions, consider any supporting documents that may help Reviewers better understand your services and systems, and make sure they are easily accessible. Keep in mind that if you hand a Reviewer a document with data or information, the Reviewer will want to know how you use that information in your program.



4. Use Daily Touchpoints to Connect



Your Review Lead will schedule daily touchpoints, opportunities for the program director to discuss any questions or changes in the schedule that may come up throughout the day. Directors should notify their staff about these daily touchpoints and encourage them to funnel these questions or feedback collected throughout the day to the Director. Reviewers are limited in how they can interact and what they can discuss with grantee personnel, so these daily touchpoints are a great opportunity to connect with the Review Team.

5. Operate as Usual

The Focus Area 1 review is conducted entirely off-site, so the Review Team will not see normal operations. However, during the Focus Area 2 review, the grantee should carry on as usual and avoid adjustments to the regular schedule. This gives Reviewers a chance to see the typical day-to-day functions of the programs and effectively monitor these activities. This is particularly important during the Focus Area 2 review, which includes center and classroom exploration. The purpose of the center and classroom exploration is to allow Reviewers to see your program and staff in action and better understand how your program provides quality services to children and families.



6. Ask Questions and Offer More Information

If something is not clear or you have any concerns, feel free to ask questions of the Reviewers during the review. Keep in mind that Reviewers are limited in what they will be able to share and may instruct you to direct certain questions to the Review Lead, who will discuss them with the Director during the daily touchpoint. Just like the new Head Start Program Performance Standards give autonomy and flexibility to grantees to implement the standards, monitoring shifts much of the responsibility to the grantee as well to explain their practices and choices. The Reviewers will work to make sure you are being heard clearly and will offer opportunities for grantee personnel to clarify information that is collected. Take these opportunities to clarify anything that needs to be addressed or offer more information as you see fit. If you think the Reviewers do not understand a process or situation, offer more information. Remember that Focus Area 1 and 2 reviews are intended to be conversational, and you are welcome to share any information you feel may benefit Reviewers. This will ensure the Review Team collects the right information so that the Office of Head Start can make informed decisions about your program.



7. Expect the Unexpected



Focus Area 1 and 2 reviews are designed to be more fluid, multifaceted, and conversational than past monitoring reviews. The outcome of this is to be able to better understand grantee progress over time. However, during the review keep in mind that Reviewers will not follow a script or checklist and, as a result, their questions may not follow the text of the protocol verbatim. It is the Reviewers' job to ask questions and be inquisitive about your program, and this may result in unexpected questions or exploration. If this occurs, don't be alarmed, as this is simply part of the enhanced monitoring process. As a grantee, you know your program better than

anyone, and Reviewers want to hear your story about how you designed and manage your program every day. Use this more conversational discussion format to highlight your program design and the results you are getting for children and families without the constraints of scripted questions.

8. Keep in Mind that the Protocols Are Not an Anchor

Although the Focus Area 1 and Focus Area 2 protocols clearly outline what Reviewers are looking for, Reviewers may not cover these topics in perfect chronology. We understand that your systems and service delivery are integrated, and the Focus Area protocols are designed to capture that integration. When the Review Team is on site for the Focus Area 2 review, they may ask questions that cross content areas, or address several topics, such as education, health, and family services, in a single discussion. Additionally, don't be alarmed if Reviewers do not ask specific questions to address all of the Focus Area 1 data collection prompts during the review. If Reviewers gather all of the necessary information on a specific topic during the document review and have no further questions, they may not address it during the off-site interview. However, if you feel there is something you would like to discuss about a particular topic, speak up, and the Reviewers will listen and make their thinking clearer.

