

## Appendix H: DRS In-Depth Interview: Program Directors

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### Evaluation of the Head Start Designation Renewal System

#### In-Depth Interview Guide Head Start Program Director

**(90 minutes)**

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you again for agreeing to meet with us today. I'm [INTERVIEWER NAME] and this is my colleague [ASSISTANT NAME], and we're researchers from the Urban Institute, a non-profit policy research organization in Washington, DC. We are (or are not the same individuals) you spoke with on the phone earlier this year (provide month). It is so nice to meet you in person.

As you know, the goal of this visit is to learn more about grantees' perceptions of the Head Start Designation Renewal System, or DRS. This visit is another component of the study funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to evaluate the DRS. In this phase of the research, we are visiting 15 of the Head Start grantees from across the country that we spoke to on the phone earlier this year. We will combine the information we gather across programs to understand how Head Start programs are responding to the DRS and what their strengths and needs are.

Our meeting with you today will last about 90 minutes. The structure will be rather open-ended, meaning we have a list of specific questions to cover but we welcome any responses you may have. We will be following up on some of the items we asked you about on the phone, and asking some new questions. During our visit to your program, we will also be talking to governing body, policy council, and other management staff of your program.

There are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of the interview is to learn about your interpretation and reactions to the DRS. You should answer based on what it means to you, your program, and your community.

*(Note to Researchers: Participants may mention sequestration. Sequestration and the DRS are not connected to each other, but obviously they are experiencing the effects at the same time. You should note all of what is said, but you should clarify that the DRS and sequestration are not part of the same initiative.)*

## INFORMED CONSENT

Before I begin my questions, I'd like to give you a copy of a consent form that describes our study procedures and your rights as a participant. If you agree to the study procedures, I'll ask you to sign and date your copy.

*[NOTES TO FACILITATORS: Give copy of consent form to participant. Participant must sign and return one copy and may keep the second copy.]*

- I'll point out that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any question and may stop the interview at any time. Participation in this study has no bearing on your Head Start grant.
- Everyone who works on this study has signed a *Staff Confidentiality Pledge* prohibiting disclosure of anything you say during the interview that would allow someone outside the research team, including government staff and officials, to identify you. The only exception is a researcher may be required by law to report suspicion of immediate harm to yourself, children, or others.
- Your name and other identifying information, such as the program's name and specific location, will be removed from the notes we take during the conversation.
- We value the time and information you will share with us today and want to make sure we accurately capture all the details. With your permission, we will audio record the session and take notes (written and/or on a laptop computer). Those notes will not include your name. The recording will serve as a back-up tool to ensure we capture all your comments in as close to your words as possible. Once the project is complete, all recordings will be destroyed. During the discussion, if you would like to stop the recording while you make a particular comment, please let us know and we will do so.

Before we get started, do you have any questions about the study, our study procedures, or the Urban Institute?

*[If anyone objects to recording the discussion, the researcher who is not leading the interview will need to take thorough notes.]*

1. To start, what are some of the key needs your program serves in your community and how has that evolved over time?
2. What do you see as the key strengths of your Head Start program?
3. What are some of the areas you are targeting for improvement?
4. As you know, late this year, or early next year, the Office of Head Start will announce the next cohort of grantees eligible for noncompetitive five year grants and the next cohort of grantees that will have their grants released for open competition. If your program is eligible for a noncompetitive five-year grant, do you think your organization will apply?
  - a) *If yes*, What is your sense of what will be involved in that application process?
  - b) What are your concerns, if any, about that process?
  - c) *If no*, Why not?
5. How likely do you think it is that your program will be in the group eligible for a non-competitive five-year grant? *Probe if needed*: Tell me more about your thinking.
  - a) Which DRS criterion or criteria are you most worried might cause your program to be designated for competition?
6. If your program is designated for competition, do you think your organization will apply?
  - a) *If yes*, What is your sense of what will be involved in that application process?
  - b) What are your concerns, if any, about that process?
  - c) *If no*, Why not?
7. As you know, the Office of Head Start released the DRS rules in Fall 2011. We would like to learn more about programmatic or administrative changes you have made since that time. We are especially interested in activities you did to help reduce the chance that your program would be designated for competition. *Interviewer, wait for response and after getting an overview, probe for specific types of activities.*
  - a) How about in relation to the CLASS assessment criteria? Have you taken any measures that you think might improve your scores on the CLASS? Describe.
  - b) How about fiscal controls? Have you made any changes to your fiscal processes?
  - c) Administrative structure?

- d) Your provisions and procedures for meeting Head Start Performance standards related to health and safety?
  - e) Record keeping practices?
  - f) Community partnerships or funding opportunities from sources other than Head Start?
  - g) Types of technical assistance or training you seek out?
  - h) Are there any other changes you have made in relation to the DRS, either in terms of administrative practices or in terms of making improvements to classroom quality?
8. The Office of Head Start triennial monitoring review plays a large part informing designation of programs under the DRS. Will you please talk about the steps you take to prepare for a monitoring review?
- a) What was different, if anything, between your preparation for this last review and the one you had before that?
9. One of the things we are interested in understanding is whether the DRS motivates grantees to work toward improving quality. You have talked about some of the changes you made since the DRS was implemented. I would also like to hear your thoughts on whether and how, overall, the DRS motivates grantees to improve quality. Will you share your opinion about that?
10. Most public policies like the DRS have both positive and negative implications for the organizations they target. What do you see as some of the positive/negative implications of the DRS for your program and for Head Start programs generally? (*Ask about positive if conversation has been generally negative and ask about negative if conversation has been generally positive.*)
11. Earlier, we talked briefly about your sense of whether your program might be designated for competition. If it was designated, do you think there would be a lot of other applicants?
- a) *If yes:* Please tell me about the organizations that you think would apply. *Probe for:* Strengths and weaknesses, number of organizations, types of organizations likely to compete.
  - b) *If no:* Why not?

12. Those are almost all my questions. Before we wrap up, though, I would like to hear your thoughts on the kinds of technical assistance and support that could help Head Start programs like yours better navigate the DRS process.

13. Finally, do you have any suggestions for the Office of Head Start for improving the DRS so that it can be an effective tool for supporting high quality in Head Start nationwide?

I don't have any additional questions for you.

14. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to tell me about the DRS?

This has been a really great discussion. Thank you very much for your time.