

Appendix J: DRS In-Depth Interview: Program Managers

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Evaluation of the Head Start Designation Renewal System

Small Group In-Depth Interview Guide for Head Start Managers

(90 minutes)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you 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.

As part of a research study funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, we are visiting 15 Head Start grantees from across the country. The goal of these visits is to learn about grantees' perceptions of the Head Start Designation Renewal System, or DRS. 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.

During our visit to your program, we will be meeting with program leaders and members of your policy council and governing body to get different perspectives. 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.

There are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of the interview is to learn about your understanding of 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. Let's start by having each of you introduce yourself. Please tell us your role in this Head Start program, how long you have been in your role, and what you see as your most important responsibility.

2. What do you see as the key strengths of this Head Start program?

3. Our conversation today will center on your perceptions and experiences with the Head Start Designation Renewal System, or DRS. As you may know, Head Start programs that meet certain conditions are now required to compete for renewed funding. Are you familiar with this new approach to Head Start grants?
 - a) *If yes*, How did you first learn about the DRS?
 - b) *If some nos*, Maybe those of you who are familiar with the DRS could give a brief explanation of it to your colleagues?
 - c) What did you think of the DRS when you first heard about it?
 - d) Have your impressions changed at all over time? How so?
 - e) What are your primary sources of information for learning about and understanding the DRS?

4. If you had to explain what the DRS is to someone who is not familiar with it, what would you tell them?
 - a) Are there aspects of the DRS that you find confusing or would like to know more about?

5. Now thinking (more) specifically about the DRS conditions, what do you think of those 7 conditions?

(Clarify if necessary: The 7 conditions that OHS uses to identify grantees eligible for noncompetitive five-year grants and to identify grantees that will have to compete for ongoing funding. If needed: The conditions include deficiencies on monitoring reviews, CLASS scores, certain audit findings, licensing status, and others.)

 - a) Are there certain conditions you see as more problematic than others for your program?
 - b) *If yes*, Which conditions and why?
 - c) *If no*, Is that because you view all the conditions as problematic (explain how) or because you don't view any of them as problematic?

(Interviewer note: We are interested in "problematic in whatever way the respondent defines it, whether in terms of areas their program may have difficult

meeting or in terms of being invalid or unreliable measures of quality in general, or some other definition.)

6. One goal of the DRS is to identify high quality programs that are eligible for non-competitive five-year grant awards. Are there aspects of your program quality that you feel are not well-captured by the DRS? Aspects of your program quality that you feel are well-captured by the DRS?
7. I want to change topics just a little bit now. Can you tell me about how you see the DRS affecting your work and your program? (*Probe for both effects on individual roles and program*)
 - a) *Optional probe:* What kinds of positive effects, if any, has the DRS had on your work or your program?
 - b) *If probe a is asked:* What kinds of negative effects, if any, has the DRS had on your work or your program?
 - c) How, if at all, has the DRS affected the work of the staff you supervise such as teachers and family service workers?
8. How, if at all, has the DRS affected relationships with community partners?
9. Grantees may have different perspectives on the DRS depending on how their program has performed in the past or how concerned they are about being designated for competition. Where do you think your program fits?
 - a) *Probe if not covered by response:* How concerned are you that your program might meet one of the conditions for competition?
10. Some communities we've seen have a large number of early care and education providers that could potentially apply for available Head Start funding. In other communities, few eligible providers or organizations exist. What are your thoughts on your community? (*Probe: Are there other organizations in your area that you think might apply for Head Start funding if it becomes available? What do you think of these providers/organizations?*)
11. Thinking back to before the DRS was implemented to now, what kinds of changes, if any, have been made in this program in response to the DRS? *Optional probe: Have*

you made any changes to your classroom operations or staffing, management, or governance activities as a result of the DRS? Tell me about those changes.

- a) Can you provide a few specific examples of the changes made? (*Probe: professional development, attention to specific performance standards, other service delivery changes, management approach/activities, governance activities, community partnerships, working with consultants*)
 - b) Are you aware of any other changes planned for the near future that are in response to the DRS? What changes, and why?
 - c) How, if at all, do you think these changes are related to your program quality?
12. Tell us about the types of training or technical assistance your program has received during the past few years since the DRS was implemented. (*Probe type of T/TA provider, content and recipient of T/TA, occurrence and frequency, cost*)
13. From your perspective, what kinds of resources or support does the program need to improve or maintain program quality?
14. Those are almost all of my questions. Before we wrap up, I want to ask you about two things. Overall, for the broader Head Start community, what do each of you think is the most problematic aspect of the DRS and what do you think is the most beneficial? (*Probe for both beneficial and problematic aspects*).

I don't have any additional questions for you. 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.