

3/1/2018

NATIONAL FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY EVALUATION

PHA Staff Interviews (on-site)

[Protocol 1_PHA Staff Interviews_On-Site_Supervisors]

NOTE TO INTERVIEWERS: FOR THIS INTERVIEW, BE SURE TO HAVE ON HAND A COPY OF:

- Updated "Staff List" Table
- Updated PCC/Partners list

Try to have site complete the tables ahead of the call.

Introduction

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1.5 hours per response for this Government agency staff interview. HUD may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection information unless that collection displays a valid OMB control number 2528-0296, expiring xx-xx-xxxx.

The information requested under this collection is protected and held private in accordance with 42 U.S.C. 1306, 20 CFR 401 and 402, 5 U.S.C.552 (Freedom of Information Act), 5 U.S.C. 552a (Privacy Act of 1974) and OMB Circular No. A-130.

[Note to interviewers: Please read the following script.]

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. Our goal today is to learn more about certain aspects of the FSS program so that we can more accurately describe the way the program operates.

Our discussion here should last about 90 minutes.

I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. If you need to leave for any reason, feel free to excuse yourself. If you do leave partway through, we will use only the information you shared up to that point.

We will be taking notes so we can later recall your perspectives more accurately. In addition, so we can stay focused on the conversation, we would like to record today's discussion. If at any point you would like me to pause or turn off the recorder, please let me know. If we use quotes

from this conversation in any reports, we would not use your name but may refer to your position, which, due to the limited number of sites in the study, may mean it could potentially be traced back to you.

Do you have any questions before we continue?

General Program & Staffing

1. How many clients are currently [or as of xx date?] enrolled in your FSS program (total number, not the number in the FSS study)?
2. How many mandatory slots do you currently have?
3. What is your annual grant funding amount (most recent)?
4. Are you looking to grow your program, maintain or reduce? Explain.
5. For sites that have incentives, stipends, or other funding for participants (not including escrow) – We are interested in how those funds are allocated. For each category of funds:
 - a) What is the source of this funding?
 - b) What is the general purpose or goal of this funding?
 - c) How much was allocated in 2016 (calendar year)? 2017 (calendar year to date)?
 - d) How is it determined which participants receive funding and how much they receive? Who makes this determination?
 - e) For each source -- how many participants benefitted in 2016? 2017?
 - f) What were the funds used for? [*Can create a grid to compile responses that clearly denotes, source, # participants, amount of funds received, and use of funds.*]
6. [Review the staffing table completed before the site visit. Confirm the number of FSS staff who have case management/case coordination functions and that we have the following data for each staff person]:
 - Name
 - Total hours worked per week
 - Hours spent on FSS per week
 - % of salary and benefits that are paid out of FSS funding? % paid from other Housing Authority funds?
 - Total FSS caseload; Of total, how many are HCV? How many are PH?
 - Do FSS staff also have HCV responsibilities? If yes, for how many FSS clients? How many non-FSS clients?
7. Besides yourself – are there other supervisory staff working on FSS? For all supervisors (including yourself):
 - Hours worked per week
 - hours spent on FSS per week
 - % of salary/benefits that are paid out of FSS funding? % paid from other Housing Authority funds?
 - Role with regard to FSS/FSS staff

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8. Do any FSS case managers or supervisors also work with clients in the Homeownership program (i.e. are they involved with mortgage counseling, meeting with lenders, and other activities beyond homeownership preparation that FSS case managers often work on with clients)? If yes, how many? Are these cases included in FSS caseloads?
9. Are there any other staff whose salaries are at least partially paid out of FSS funds? What are their responsibilities?
 - Hours worked per week
 - % of salary/benefits that are paid out of FSS funding? Paid from other Housing Authority funds?

Update Policies

10. When was your Action Plan last updated? If revised within the last two years, what changes were made?
11. Has HUD issued any new guidance that has affected your program in 2017 or is likely to affect your program in the near future? Explain. Are there new performance metrics?
12. Have there been any changes in your Housing Authority's budget that affect the FSS Program? Or is your program largely unaffected by budgetary issues your PHA may or may not be experiencing?
13. Does your Housing Authority currently operate a Homeownership program? If so, is participation in FSS a precondition for the homeownership program? Has that always been the case? Are there other ways that the Homeownership program intersects with FSS?
14. Does your Housing Authority work with local workforce development organizations? Please describe.
15. Are interim escrow disbursements permitted? If yes,
 - a. Are there limits on the percentage of the balance that can be disbursed?
 - b. Are there limits on the number of disbursements?
 - c. Are there any other restrictions?
 - d. How would you describe your approach to using interim escrow disbursements?

[If responses represent a policy change (see IR Table 9) – ask why the changes were made.]

16. Is there a requirement about how many months participants must be employed prior to the contract end date in order to graduate? If so, are exceptions ever made? [If response represents a policy change (see IR Table 9) – ask why the changes were made.]

17. Are there requirements in terms of the number of hours per week someone must be employed to graduate? If so, are exceptions ever made? If response represents a policy change (see IR Table 9) – ask why the changes were made.]
18. Are there requirements about the wage rate/earnings? If response indicates that the earnings must be “sustainable” (or something analogous) -- how is this determined? Who makes the determination? Is there leeway or exceptions? [If response represents a change (see IR Table 9) – ask why the changes were made.]
19. Does a participant’s field of employment have to match the goal on the ITSP, if a field was specified, in order for the participant to graduate? If yes, who makes this determination? How are “grey areas” dealt with?
20. How close to the contract end date are clients able to make changes to their goals on the ITSP?
21. Are there other requirements for graduation (other than being off of public assistance – i.e. attendance at workshops)? Describe.
22. Is there a policy that calls for terminating/exiting from FSS participants who do not respond to case managers’ attempts to reach them? What is the policy? How strictly is the policy enforced? [compare with numbers from MIS and ask follow-up questions if don’t align]
23. We are interested in earnings reporting requirements and what this means for escrow accrual. When are households required to report increases in earnings/ income? Do earnings increases go into effect/change rent payments immediately or at the next annual recertification (i.e., when does TTP change and escrow credited)? Are there different rules for FSS participants compared to other HCV participants?

Program Approach

24. Is there anything about your FSS program that you have been working to change during the last year? Why were you trying to make this change? Was there a policy change or practice that you adopted to make this happen?
25. Are the clients who make progress towards their goals the same ones who are likely to graduate? Explain.
26. What would you rank as the top three factors that influence how much progress participants make towards achieving their goals? Which are the least important factors?
 - a. Local job market
 - b. Case managers’ skills in motivating clients
 - c. Participants’ internal motivation and drive to succeed

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- d. Quality of the external services that exist in this community
 - e. Participants' job skills and education levels
 - f. Local housing market
 - g. Escrow incentive
27. Do you think getting a job or a higher paying job is something that should be achieved before participants start working on other goals? a. Why or why not?
a. If yes, is it because of the opportunity to earn escrow? Or, is there some other reason?]
28. Are case managers expected to spend more time working with unemployed clients? Explain.
a. If yes, what are the main strategies for helping this group?
b. Do many participants get jobs and then lose them? Are there specific strategies for working with this group?
29. Do employed participants typically want to find a new job? Is this a priority for them (i.e., are they currently working on this as one of their FSS goals)? Are there specific strategies for working with this group?
30. Do case managers often have disabled individuals on their caseloads? If these individuals are generally unable to work, what kinds of goals do they typically have? What are case managers' approaches to working with them?
31. In what ways do you hold participants accountable?
32. How do you define "self-sufficiency"?
33. How do you define "success" in FSS?
34. Do you have any recommendations for improvements or enhancements that could be made to FSS? Are there changes you would like to see? These could be changes in HUD guidance as well as how you operate the program.
35. What aspects of your FSS program work best? Do you think these best practice strategies could be replicated at other PHAs in your region?
36. Have you thought of anything your program could do to attract more people into the program and retain their participation throughout the five years of the program?
37. HUD recognizes that FSS has high dropout rates and very low graduation rates. Do you have any strategies in place to curb these trends in early exits and low graduation rates?

Case Management

38. What is the minimum frequency that case managers are required to contact participants? Does this contact typically occur by written update, in-person, phone, or email? Do these requirements differ at different stages of program engagement – for example, Year 1 and Year 4? [*Walk through IR Tables 8 and 9 and ask to describe changes*]
39. Are clients required to have any face-to-face meetings with their case managers? How many are required per year (what is the minimum)? How many face-to-face meetings would case managers like to have with clients? Does this vary by type of client (i.e. working v. not working)? [If response represents a policy change (see IR Table 8) – ask why the changes were made.]
40. Are there other participation requirements (e.g., workshops)? [confirm participation requirements; are these required to graduate?]
41. Have the caseload sizes changed over the past year? (*compare numbers in pre-visit questionnaire to previous numbers*). If they have changed – what is the reason? Have caseloads per manager changed? What are the implications of these changes?
42. Do you have staff meetings? How often? What is discussed? Do you discuss program improvements or changes? What kinds of topics, policies or procedures have been discussed recently?
43. Do you have case conferences or other types of meetings to discuss how participants are faring or to get input on strategies for particular participants (or participants in specific circumstances)? Describe.
44. Do you try to reach everyone on the caseload with about the same frequency, or do you customize the support and attention to meet individuals' needs? Explain your approach.
45. How closely do supervisors hold case managers to the expected schedule of contacts? How is this assessed? How do supervisors know whether case managers are successful in making contacts?
46. How do you identify clients who are not making progress? How is “progress” defined? How do you motivate clients to get back on track? Does your approach vary for those who are working versus not working?

Graduation

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47. Does your FSS program encourage participants to use the full five years allowed? Explain.
48. HUD reports that the average program participation length in FSS is 3.5 years (and the longest is 7 years). In your experience, what contributes to this kind of variation in the period of participation? [Probes: more services? Enhanced job training? Earning an academic degree, which could take longer? Long-term financial planning or asset building? Buying a home? Concerns about public assistance time limits?]
49. When does preparation for graduation begin? What does it entail? What happens in years 4 and 5 that is specifically intended to keep participants on track to graduate?
50. Do you think the requirements to graduate are achievable? For whom? Explain.
 - a. If answer is no, why are they not achievable? [Probe: does this have to do with the types of goals that are set? The effort to reach goals?]
 - b. Why don't more participants graduate? What barriers – aside from disability or illness – prevent participants from reaching their goals?
 - c. Are there ways you help participants meet (or get around) the requirements?
 - d. Does your program have a goal of increasing the graduation rate? (Is this set as a benchmark in your Annual Report?) How will the program aim to increase the graduation rate?
51. When a client completes all their goals, do they have a choice to graduate early or stay in the program? Under what circumstances do you allow early graduations?
 - a. If they stay, do they have to add new goals?
 - b. If they have a choice to graduate early or stay in FSS - what would you encourage them to do?
52. How many people graduate in a typical year? How many extensions do you grant in a typical year? What were the reasons for some recent extensions?

Escrow

53. How well do you think staff explain how escrow is accrued and how the escrow account works? Do you think participants fully understand the escrow?
54. [In sites that allow interim disbursements,] Why do you think there aren't more interim disbursements?
Probe for the following reasons:
 - a. Clients don't qualify
 - b. Program philosophy – encourage clients to find other means to get resources so they could get a larger escrow check at graduation.
55. Do you have clients who accrue escrow but don't graduate, so they don't get the funds? [Probe on how this fits/doesn't fit with program philosophy.]

FSS Goal Setting

56. Is there an assumption that clients will work on their original goals over the 5 years and that generally their goals won't change? Or do you expect clients' goals to change over time?
57. Do you review clients' ITSPs and goals with the client on a regular basis? Describe this process.
 - a. If goals are reviewed regularly, how often?
 - b. Is there a special review in years 3, 4, or 5?
 - c. Is it left up to clients to request a change in their goals?
58. *Review MIS data on goals to determine if this is a site that sets year 1 goals.* Do you typically put due dates for when goals should be completed on the ITSP? What do you take into account when you set dates? Are these dates generally within 1 year or less, a couple of years, or at the 5-year mark? How much variation in dates is there across your caseload (i.e. does everyone have a similar pattern of short vs. long term goals or does it vary by individual?)
 - a. For sites that set year 1 goals – what do you see as the value of year 1 and short-term goals? Drawbacks?
 - b. For sites that set longer-term goals – What is the value of longer term goals? Drawbacks? Probe: Are goals too large to complete earlier? Giving clients “breathing room”?

The PCC and Referral Service Network

59. Have there been changes in the organizations on your PCC in the last year? (Review updates to the PCC table.) Please explain the changes -- who was added/dropped, and why?
60. How would you describe the role(s) of your PCC? Probe: information sharing for staff and/or clients, event planning/collaboration, coordinated service provision, providing input and guidance into program operations.
61. How many times a year does your PCC meet?
62. Are you satisfied overall with your PCC members' level of involvement? Please explain.
63. Aside from attending PCC meetings, describe alternative ways that PCC members and other service providers are involved with your FSS program?

64. Do you have clients that haven't followed up on referrals you make? How much of an issue is this for your FSS program? What do you think are the main reasons that clients don't receive services?
65. Have you made any changes to increase the number of clients who follow up with referrals?
66. What would you lose if the program did not have a PCC? What's the biggest value of the PCC?

Questions for Cost Analysis

67. How does [PHA] track FSS costs? Is there cost data from [PHA] that MDRC could have access to?
68. Does [PHA] spend their entire FSS grant amount each year for FSS activities?
69. Does [PHA] incur other FSS expenses that are not covered by the grant? If so, what types of expenses? Are these tracked in some way?
70. If we used information in Financial Assessment of Public Housing Agencies (FASS CFDA #14.896) as a data source for staff costs, would this be an accurate and complete recording of FSS staff costs? Are FSS staff costs being recorded under another CFDA? If so, which ones? (If they don't know codes I'll get them from someone else at the PHA).
71. If there are staff working only part-time on FSS, how is their FSS time tracked versus other work?
72. In general, does the amount of time that case managers spend with a specific FSS client vary over the 5-year FSS contract? If so please characterize how the amount of time varies over the 5-year period (e.g. a lot in the first year, not much in the middle, etc.) Depending on their answer, ask for breakdown of current caseload – how many clients on their caseload are in their first year? Second? And so on.
73. Is there any tracking of the amount of time case managers spend with specific clients?
74. Are there any in-kind contributions from other organizations (outside of the PHA) for the FSS program? [Examples: rent/space, holiday give-aways, gift cards/incentives]
75. Are there specific organizations that the FSS program contracts with or that are compensated by the PHA?
76. Does the [PHA] have an overhead or indirect cost rate that they typically use?

77. If we have additional questions about costs of the FSS program at [PHA] whom should we contact?

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