

Qualitative Interview – Program Staff

The study team will conduct one-on-one qualitative interviews either in-person site visits, or virtual site visits with each participating site these visits, trained qualitative researchers will interview human services program staff. The study team will audio record and transcribe the interviews. The table below provides information about the number of people who will be interviewed by role, as well as a maximum amount of time allocated for each interview.

Interviewee Role	Sample	Maximum Time of Interview
Program Staff	Up to 9 per site (108 total)	90 minutes

The guide that follows provides the universe of potential questions that may be asked to Program Staff to facilitate conversations. These guides are not interview scripts and, therefore, do not contain introductory information to be read to the interviewee or directions or guidance for the interviewer. The study team will add this information to the guides when we prepare the interview scripts.

As described in the Human Services Programs in Rural Contexts study design, the study team will tailor interview scripts to each site according to considerations of the interviewee role, the local context, and data saturation and in relation to quantitative and other qualitative data as they become available. Each interview script will select from the universe of questions provided in the attached guides and include only the questions that best meet the priorities/requirements for the given interview. For example, the study team will not ask a respondent all the questions included in the attached guide. Rather, the study team will ask the questions that are most relevant given the interviewee’s position, the context of the site where the interviewee works, the degree of saturation achieved for that question across sites, and any available pertinent quantitative or qualitative data.

We may change specific wording to account for local context and to improve question comprehension and/or precision, as well as in response to Institutional Review Board review. These changes will not affect participant burden. The study team will determine question order for each individual script after the questions have been selected. Interviews will not last any longer than the maximum time allocated for each interview, and the study team will train and provide interviewers with algorithms for prioritizing questions to ensure that questions are completed in the allocated time.

ACF Site Visit Master Guide – Program Staff

Oral Informed Consent

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today as a part of the study being conducted by 2M Research Services and the Urban Institute (the 2M-Urban Team) for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF). We are speaking with human services leadership, staff, and partners to collect data around the challenges and unique opportunities of administering human service programs in rural contexts. We hope to capture information to develop a rich description of human services programs in rural communities and provide ACF opportunities for strengthening the capacity of human services programs to promote the economic and social wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities in rural contexts. This information will be used by ACF to provide critical insight into how rural communities have adopted innovative strategies for addressing needs and how these strategies may be replicated in other areas. ACF will also use the information collected to understand technical assistance needs and ways to address those needs.

During this interview, we would like to discuss your experiences with human services programs, the challenges you face administering human services programs in rural communities, and any lessons learned. Our discussion should last approximately (90) minutes. There are no right or wrong answers – we just want to hear about your experiences. You can refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may stop at any time. There will be no negative consequences if you choose to stop or if you choose not to participate at all.

All information will be kept private and treated in a secure manner and will not be disclosed, unless otherwise compelled by law. The information collected by the 2M-Urban Team will be aggregated and summarized for reporting to ACF and the public. Information about your program and comments from other staff and stakeholders will be aggregated within your site. All analyses will be conducted using a de-identified data file: your identity will not be shared, and the information shared will not be linked to you.

There are no risks to those who participate. Your responses will be reported in aggregate in a case summary that is specific to your community. The benefit of participating in this study is that your organization's experiences will help ACF better understand the challenges and unique opportunities of providing human services in rural communities.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it has a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # for this collection of information is 0970-0XXX and the expiration date is XX/XX/XXXX.

If you have questions about this study after this interview, please email Dr. Dallas Elgin, the study's project director, at delgin@2mresearch.com, or your primary point of contact.

Before we begin, we would like to have your permission to audio record our discussion so that we can ensure our notes are accurate and complete. The audio recordings will be deleted once the project is complete, in September 2022.

Can we audio record this conversation?

- Yes
- No

Do you have any other questions before we begin?

Introduction

- 1) Would you start by telling us a little bit about yourself and your role in (your organization)?
 - a. How long have you been working in this role?
- 2) As you know, this work focuses on understanding the delivery of human services programs in rural areas. What characteristics or information do you think would be helpful for us to understand about the area your organization serves?
 - a. What characteristics or information do you think would be helpful for us to understand about the people you serve?
- 3) What geographic areas (e.g., county, city, group of cities/towns) does your program serve?
 - a. How was this determined?
 - b. How do you define the area you serve? (e.g., service area, community)
- 4) Would you tell us a little bit about your program and the services you provide?
 - a. What are the requirements to receive services from your program?
- 5) From your experience, what makes implementing this program in [your community] different or unique from implementing it in [Urban area in same state]?
 - a. What should an organization be more aware of or conscientious of? (e.g., distance to access services, other client priorities, attitudes toward human services agencies or programs or the act of receiving services)

Participant Needs - Social Wellbeing

- 6) What are the most significant social wellbeing needs of the people and families you serve?
 - a. What are the main ways your organization/program is working to address these issues?
- 7) What social wellbeing needs are not being met by the human services programs offered in your community?
 - a. Why do you think the human services programs in your community are unable to meet these needs?
- 8) Are these needs being met by other programs or organizations in your community?
 - a. What are a few of the key organizations that are meeting these needs?
 - b. Are there any gaps remaining when it comes to meeting these community needs?

Participant Needs - Economic Wellbeing

- 9) What are the most significant economic wellbeing needs of the people and families you serve?
 - a. What are the main ways your organization/program is working to address these issues?
- 10) What economic wellbeing needs are not being met by the human services programs offered in your community?
 - a. Why do you think the human services programs in your community are unable to meet these needs?
- 11) Are these needs being met by other programs or organizations in your community?
 - a. What are a few of the key organizations that are meeting these needs?
 - b. What gaps in meeting these community needs remain?
- 12) Are there any other significant needs related to human services and human services programs in this community that we have not discussed?
- 13) How have these needs changed over time?
- 14) What resources and services exist in your community to address these needs?
- 15) When you think about the unmet needs of the population you serve, what do you believe is affecting those unmet needs? (e.g., inability to access services, not enough staff to reach potential participants, not enough funding to support everyone who needs services, political climate)
 - a. How have these influences changed over time? (e.g., changes in jobs/employment, changes in program funding)

Capacity Funding

- 16) How would you describe the funding that you receive to deliver this program?
 - a. Where does the funding come from?
 - b. Are there multiple funding streams that overlap or combine to fund delivery of your program?
 - c. How is funding for your program determined?
 - i. What are your thoughts on the “metrics” used to allocate funding, as it relates to your rural area?
 - d. Would you say the funding you receive is “sufficient” to meet the needs of your clients?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - e. What funding limitations exist that affect the ability to serve your clients? (e.g., not allowed to spend funding on something you believe would improve service delivery)
 - f. What flexibilities would you like to have with the funding to improve service delivery?

- 17) Most programs have a number of requirements regarding how funding can be used, including staffing requirements, reporting obligations, and others. These requirements are often broad, and not always tailored to the environment (e.g., rural vs. urban) where the program is being implemented. How do these requirements affect your ability to deliver services in a rural area?
- Does the structure or do the requirements of the federal program make your job more challenging in any ways? If yes, how?
 - How do you try to navigate the challenges these requirements create?
 - What recommendations do you have about how funding requirements could be changed to improve service delivery in your area?

Staff

- 18) How would you describe your program's staffing capacity to deliver this program?
- Do you have a sufficient number of staff to deliver all components of your program? Why? Why not?
 - Have you been able to recruit and hire staff with the experience or skills to implement program activities? If no, why? (e.g., salary limits, insufficient pool of qualified candidates available, location of the job)
 - What training have staff generally needed to complete their job duties?
 - Do you believe you have enough staff to cover the needs of program participants, given the geographic spread of participants? If not, why?
 - Do staff typically live in the community/geographic area you serve, or do they come from elsewhere? What effect does this have on service delivery?
 - What types of staffing-related resources or training do you need that would help you deliver services?

Technology

- 19) What types of technology does your program use to manage or deliver services? (e.g., cell phones, web-based communication, other)
- What are the key technology challenges that your organization or program has with delivering services?
 - What technology needs do you have that you believe would help you deliver services? (e.g., better broadband, better cellular reception, computers, webcams)

Physical Resources/Materials

- 20) What physical resources or materials does your program use to deliver services? (e.g., agency-owned/government-owned cars or transportation, printed materials in different languages, cell phones)
- What are the key physical resources or materials challenges that you have with delivering services?
 - What types of technology resources or materials do you need that would help you deliver services?

Partnerships

- 21) What role do community partners play in the delivery of program services?
- Who do you consider key partners?
 - How long have they been partners?
 - How were these partnerships established?
 - What types of partnership resources would help you deliver services?

Other

- 22) What other resources, that we may not have already talked about, affect your organization's capacity to deliver services? Please explain.
- 23) Thinking about the key elements of capacity we just discussed (e.g., funding, staffing, technology, physical resources/materials, and partnerships), which components are most important or critical to being able to successfully deliver your program services? Why?
- Unmet need is a multifaceted construct that considers the number of people eligible for services, relative to the actual number of people that receive or access services. When you think about the elements of capacity that we have talked about (funding, staffing, technology, physical resources/materials, partnerships) and the unmet need in your service area, which of these elements are most critical to being able to address the unmet needs in your service area?
 - How would you change these elements or what do you need in order to address the unmet need in your service area?
- 24) Which of these elements of capacity are the most challenging to address for your organization? Why?

Service Delivery

- 25) Would you please tell us a bit about how your program delivers services to your participants?
- How are participants identified or recruited?
 - How are services delivered? (e.g., in-home, onsite, virtual/video, in transit, multimode)
 - Do you work with any partners to deliver services?
 - Who are these partners?
 - What role do they play?
 - How long have these partnerships been in place?
 - Are there other "models" of service delivery that you use (e.g., integration of human services programs)?
 - Would you please describe what these models include?
 - How does this approach facilitate service delivery?
- 26) What are the unique characteristics of your community that affect your ability to provide services to your program participants?

- a. Public transportation or transportation in general
 - b. Geographic spread of your service area or where participants are located
 - c. Stigma toward using human services programs
 - d. Political climate
 - e. Ease or difficulty of applying for services
 - f. Other priorities (e.g., jobs/unemployment, opioids, childcare, housing)
 - g. Others
- 27) What components of your service delivery approach do you believe work well, given the rural area and residents you serve?
- a. Why do you believe these approaches have been particularly effective?
- 28) What components of your service delivery approach have been more challenging or have not worked so well given the rural areas and residents you serve?
- a. Why do you believe these approaches have been more challenging or less effective?
- 29) In what ways have you had to adapt your service delivery to be able to reach and serve the people in your community? (e.g., adaptations to how participants are identified or recruited [recruitment and intake], how staff engage with participants [case management], curricula used, how data are collected and reported)
- a. Why were these adaptations necessary?
 - b. In what ways have you had to adapt your service delivery model to make it work with the capacity (e.g., funding, staffing, technology, physical resources/materials, and partnerships) your organization has to deliver services?
 - c. In what ways have these adaptations helped you reach and serve people in your program?
- 30) What are the most significant challenges or barriers that you and your organization face when delivering programs and services in your area?
- a. How have these challenges/barriers impacted your ability to deliver services?
 - b. Which of these challenges do you believe could be addressed with technical assistance?
- 31) What resources or factors exist in your service area that facilitate how you deliver human services in your area?
- a. Resources internal to your program – May include (but is not be limited to) having particular staff, resources, or the way your program or organization is “set up” to deliver services
 - b. Resources external to your program – May include transportation, smaller geographic spread of participants, existence of partners (like Community-Based Organizations [CBOs] or nonprofit organizations that provide complementary services or other things).
 - c. How have these factors/facilitators helped or improved service delivery?

- 32) What resources are absent or missing from your area that may impact how your program is implemented?
- a. Resources internal to your program – Not having enough staff, not having trained/qualified staff, not having enough program support from organizational leadership, competing programs within the same organization
 - b. Resources external to your program – No transportation, significant geographic spread of participants, distance from program office to participants, other community priorities

Technical Assistance

- 33) What types of technical assistance is your program currently receiving? (e.g., recruitment/intake, case management, curricula, data use, other)
- a. Who is providing the technical assistance?
 - b. How is technical assistance generally delivered?
 - i. Does this work well for you? Why/why not?
 - c. Has this technical assistance met the needs of your program and staff?
 - i. What technical assistance has been most helpful?
 - d. Is the technical assistance specific enough to be applied to the rural context within which your program is being delivered?
 - e. What technical assistance is still needed or would be helpful to your organization?
 - i. What is the best mechanism for delivering technical assistance? (e.g., in person, large trainings delivered regionally, virtual learning)

Data

- 34) What types of data does your program collect?
- a. Surveillance
 - b. Performance measures
 - c. Case management
 - d. Evaluation
 - e. Other?
- 35) How does the program use the data it collects?
- a. For program improvement
 - b. To support identification of funding
 - c. To submit to funding agencies as a condition of funding award
 - d. For evaluation purposes
 - e. Other?
- 36) How does your program collect and process the data it collects and reports?
- a. Who is responsible for collecting and reporting your program's data?
- 37) What are the challenges that your program faces in collecting program data?
- a. How have you been able to overcome those challenges?
- 38) What resources or technical assistance would be helpful to you to support your use of data?

Other Nonprofits (Not the funded organization)

- 39) In what ways are other nonprofits/CBOs addressing the needs of people who need support from human services programs but are not utilizing services for whatever reason?
- 40) In your community or service area, how do these other nonprofits/CBOs work with or communicate with human services programs to provide services?
 - a. What does this collaboration/coordination/communication look like?
- 41) In what program areas (e.g., child welfare, childcare, housing, parenting, education) do other nonprofits/CBOs play a role in addressing unmet needs in your community?
- 42) What recommendations do you have for improving the coordination and service delivery between human services programs and other nonprofit/CBO activities?

Lessons Learned

- 43) What would you describe as your key lessons learned about delivering human services programs in rural areas?
 - a. What strategies has your program used to improve your ability to deliver services and meet your client's needs?

Recommendations

- 44) Thinking about what we have discussed about how you and your organization deliver services, what recommendations do you have for improving service delivery in rural areas?
 - a. What resources/supports/assistance are needed or would be helpful to address unmet needs in your service area?
- 45) What changes or flexibilities would be helpful to improve your ability to reach and support the people that use your program/services?
 - a. These could be improvements in, for example, the way funding is provided or the way the application process works, the way funding needs to be used or allocated, staffing changes or flexibilities in the number of type of staff needed, changes to how program activities need to be delivered, type of data to be collected and reported, etc.
- 46) Thinking about unmet needs in your service area, what recommendations do you have to enable human services programs to better address unmet needs?
- 47) Rural areas have unique needs and face unique challenges when delivering human services programs and meeting the needs of people living in rural areas. What types of technical assistance would be helpful to improve your ability to provide services to your rural community/service area and clients?

- 48) How could Federal Government agencies, like OPRE-MCHB, make changes to the way programs or policies are designed and implemented, to improve your program's capacity to serve rural areas? (e.g., move away from award of funding on per capita basis, more resources for transportation, more staff)