

SITE VISIT QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW MATERIALS

ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY

A. Purpose of assessment

The POD process study will include a thorough assessment of implementation quality and fidelity to the program design. This assessment will be used to: (1) describe the fidelity with which staff implements the intervention in all eight sites; (2) assess the extent to which implementation at each site is consistent and the services available are uniform within and across all local sites; and (3) identify areas where additional resources could support the implementation. We will inform our assessment by: the statement of work for the implementation contractor which specifies the basic structure SSA intends to implement for POD; the implementation contractor's design report which will serve as the blueprint for the implementation of the demonstration; and the POD implementation manual developed by the implementation contractor for POD benefits counselors and VR agency staff to use as a resource. We will use these three sources as our benchmark against which to assess implementation quality. The assessment will consider overall implementation as well as variation in implementation across each state.

We will assess two main aspects of implementation: (1) delivery of work incentives counseling and other participant supports; and (2) reporting of monthly earnings and IRWE information to SSA and adjustment of DI benefits. Delivery of work incentives counseling will include onboarding of new treatment subjects; development of the benefits summary and work incentives plan; provision of ongoing work incentives counseling; and coordination of participant transitions back to current program rules at the end of their participation in POD. Reporting of monthly earnings and IRWE information to SSA will include: the collection and maintenance of participant earnings and impairment-related work expenses (IRWEs) information; processing of earnings records; adjustment of benefits under POD rules; and the annual reconciliation of benefits. We will assess specific measures under each category to determine the extent to which site staff are implementing them as planned, and if staff needs additional technical assistance to support implementation. For example, under provision of POD work incentives counseling, we will assess the frequency and intensity of counselors' contacts with treatment subjects in each site and the extent to which counselors connect participants to SSA work incentive programs and other resources.

B. Analysis

We will assess implementation quality and fidelity drawing on programmatic data the Implementation Contractor provides, and enrollment information we capture in Mathematica's SMS. To conduct the fidelity assessment, we will populate a set of tables organized by subject at three points in time to assess operations at each site and across all sites combined. Tables C.1a and C.1b are illustrative examples of the tables showing a partial list of measures. We will assess implementation using the full range of programmatic and enrollment data (e.g., using percentages or averages to assess the level of fidelity achieved) to identify which sites have higher and comparatively lower levels of fidelity on each set of measures. Demonstration sites with lower than average levels of fidelity on each set of measures may suggest a need for additional TA, training, or other resources.

Table C.1.a Illustrative example of fidelity assessment table: Indicators of implementation context and fidelity of work incentives counseling in YYYY

	Fidelity Measure	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7	Site 8	All Sites Combined
<i>Onboarding of new treatment subjects</i>										
Average amount of time to first WIC contact attempt	x									
Percent of subjects reached by a WIC	x									
Percent of subjects reached by a WIC who opt out of counseling services	x									
<i>Develop benefits summary and analyses and work incentives plan</i>										
Percent of clients with benefits planning query before BS&A	x									
Percent of all clients with a BS&A	x									
Percent of employed clients with a BS&A										
Percent of clients with an employment goal with a BS&A										
Percent of non-working clients without employment goals with a BS&A										
Percent of all clients with a WIP	x									
Percent of employed clients with a WIP										
Percent of clients with an employment goal with a WIP										
Percent of non-working clients without employment goals with a WIP										
Average duration between WIP delivery and next contact										
<i>Deliver ongoing work incentives counseling</i>										
Average number of contacts per WIC client last quarter	x									
Average number of e-mail contacts per client										
Average number of phone or in-person contacts per client										
Average number of employment-related referrals last quarter	x									
Average number of referrals to EN										
Average number of referrals to VR										

Average number of referrals to AJC										
Percent with benefit suspense who received counseling within one month of initial suspense	x									

AJC = American Job Center; BS&A = Benefits Summary and Analysis; EN = Employment Network; WIC = work incentives counselor; WIP = work incentives plan; VR = vocational rehabilitation

Table C.1.b Illustrative example of fidelity assessment table: Indicators of implementation context and fidelity of reporting monthly earnings to SSA in July YYYY

	Fidelity Measure	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7	Site 8	All Sites Combined
<i>Earnings Reporting</i>										
Percent of all treatment subjects known to have earnings over the POD threshold in July YYYY										
Percent of treatment subjects known to have earnings over POD threshold who reported earnings timely for July YYYY	x									
Percent of treatment subjects who reported IRWEs in July YYYY that were not approved	x									
Percent of treatment subjects who reported IRWEs in July YYYY that were approved	x									
Percent of treatment subjects known to have a higher IRWE threshold who reported timely for July YYYY	x									
<i>Reporting Mode for Reports Made in July YYYY</i>										
Percent reported electronically										
Percent reported by mail or fax										
Percent reported in person										
<i>Earnings Record Processing</i>										
Average processing time for earnings records stuated as "Complete" in July YYYY	x									
Percent of submitted earnings records submitted in July YYYY requiring follow-up	x									
Percent of records reviewed in July YYYY that fail QC review	x									
Average time to complete records that failed QC review in July YYYY	x									

Percent of treatment subjects known to be over the POD threshold with complete records submitted to SSA timely for July YYYY	x										
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IRWE = impairment related work expese; QC = quality control; POD = Promoting Opportunity Demonstration; SSA = Social Security Administration;

RESEARCH TOPICS BY ROUND OF PROCESS DATA COLLECTION

Table C.2. Research topics by round of data collection

	Round 1 (Winter 2017/2018): Early implementation	Round 2 (Fall 2018): Recruitment and RA	Round 3 (Fall 2019): One year after RA	Round 4 (Winter 2020/2021): Two years after RA
Program environment	I		U	U
Planning and early implementation	I			
POD outreach efforts	I	U		
POD recruitment, enrollment, and RA	I	U		
Development of the POD infrastructure	I	U		
Data systems and use of the MIS	I	U	U	U
Operations and fidelity to the program design	I	U	U	U
POD service delivery	I	U	U	U
Administration, coordination, and inter-agency relationships	I	U	U	U
POD participation patterns and experience ^a	I	U	U	U
Successes and challenges	I	U	U	U
Outcomes and lessons learned			I	U

I = initial data collection. U = updated information

POD = Promoting Opportunity Demonstration; RA = random assignment.

^a Information about participant experiences will draw from interviews conducted with POD treatment subjects in Rounds 2 and 3 and MIS data.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS BY EVALUATION FOCUS AND DATA SOURCE

Table C.3. Research questions addressing each evaluation focus, by respondent

	VR agency director	POD work incentives counselor	VR/WIPA agency staff	SSA payment center staff	Implementation contractor staff	TA providers	POD treatment subjects
Program environment							
How do the general employment environment and other state features affect benefit offset use?	X	X	X		X	X	X
How prevalent is engagement in the Ticket to Work (TTW) Program, and how are ENs structured?	X	X	X	X			X
How did state VR agencies previously serve beneficiaries before POD, and did this change during the demonstration period?	X	X	X				X
Has POD implementation affected the operation of other state or local entities?	X		X				
Planning and early implementation							
What types of training did staff receive to implement the demonstration?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
What types of other resources and materials did staff receive to implement POD?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Have implementation activities been carried out as intended?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
What aspects of implementation could benefit from additional training and technical assistance?	X	X	X	X	X	X	

	VR agency director	POD work incentives counselor	VR/WIPA agency staff	SSA payment center staff	Implementation contractor staff	TA providers	POD treatment subjects
What aspects of early program implementation have been successful?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
What aspects of early program implementation did not proceed as expected?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
POD recruitment, enrollment, and RA							
Outreach and recruitment							
What types of information did DI beneficiaries receive about POD?	X	X	X				X
How successful were outreach efforts in helping beneficiaries understand POD?		X			X	X	X
What strategies were used to inform DI beneficiaries about POD?		X			X	X	
How did outreach and enrollment differ for concurrent beneficiaries (those who receive SSI and DI)?	X	X			X	X	X
What efforts were made to inform stakeholders about the demonstration?	X	X			X	X	
Has the targeted and/or broad outreach been effective in reaching potential participants?	X	X	X		X		
What challenges were encountered during recruitment?	X	X				X	
What aspects of the recruitment strategy were successful?	X	X				X	
Enrollment							

	VR agency director	POD work incentives counselor	VR/WIPA agency staff	SSA payment center staff	Implementation contractor staff	TA providers	POD treatment subjects
What factors affected enrollment/take-up rates?	X	X					
What were beneficiaries' experiences with enrollment?	.	X					X
Random assignment							
How have withdrawals affected the balance achieved through random assignment?	X				X		
Development of the POD infrastructure							
What aspects of implementation activities need correction?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
To what extent are discovered issues systematic in nature?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
How have discovered issues affected operations? Service delivery? Offset use?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
What aspects of the state-level activities need TA?	X	X	X		X	X	
Data systems and use of the MIS							
What data are captured in the implementer's management information system (MIS)?	X	X			X		
What supporting functionality does the implementer's MIS have for program operations and monitoring?	X				X	X	
What data are transferred to SSA to facilitate administration of the interventions?	X			X	X		

	VR agency director	POD work incentive counselors	VR/WIPA agency staff	SSA payment center staff	Implementation contractor staff	TA providers	POD treatment subjects
Are the staff using the project's MIS as designed?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
What specific modifications to the system and/or training are needed for accurate data collection?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Operations and fidelity to the program design							
Has the implementation contractor clearly defined and correctly provided the intervention?	X	X			X	X	
What aspects of SSA operations need support?	X	X		X	X	X	
What aspects of coordination with state VR agencies need support?	X	X	X		X	X	
What aspects of Implementation activities need correction?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
What strategies are used to maintain the integrity of random assignment?	X	X	X		X	X	
Is the integrity of random assignment being maintained?		X			X	X	X
Was POD implemented with fidelity to the program design?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
POD service delivery							
What are beneficiaries' experiences with POD counselors?		X		X		X	X

	VR agency director	POD work incentives counselor	VR/WIPA agency staff	SSA payment center staff	Implementation contractor staff	TA providers	POD treatment subjects
How do state VR agencies collect earnings and IRWE information from individuals assigned to a treatment group?		X	X		X		X
What role do state VR agencies play in making adjustments to benefit payments?	X	X	X		X		
How timely are benefit adjustments?				X	X		X
What are the major reasons for benefit adjustment delays, if any?	X	X		X	X		
How prevalent are improper payments?				X	X		X
How does monthly earnings reporting differ for concurrent beneficiaries?	X	X	X	X	X		
Are monthly earnings and IRWEs reported on time?	X	X	X	X	X		X
Administration, coordination, and inter-agency relationships							
What is the organizational and management structure of the state entities implementing POD?	X	X	X			X	
How do the organizations implementing POD communicate and coordinate with one another?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What specific gaps or weaknesses exist in the partnerships?	X	X	X	X	X	X	
POD participation patterns and experience							
Do beneficiaries favorably perceive the interventions?		X			X		X

	VR agency director	POD work incentives counselor	VR/WIPA agency staff	SSA payment center staff	Implementation contractor staff	TA providers	POD treatment subjects
What are most prevalent reasons for volunteering or not volunteering?	X	X			X		X
What are the events causing POD withdrawals, if applicable?	X	X			X		X
What are the participants' reasons for withdrawing?	X	X			X		X
Successes and challenges							
What aspects of planning and early implementation were successful? Less successful?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What are the administrative (i.e., implementation, operations, or systems) successes/challenges in providing the intervention?	X	X		X	X	X	
What facilitated timely earnings and IRWE reporting?	X	X		X	X	X	X
What are the obstacles preventing timely earnings and IRWE reporting?	X	X		X	X	X	X
What facilitated benefit offset use?		X		X	X		X
What are the obstacles preventing benefit offset use, if any?		X		X	X		X

	VR agency director	POD work incentives counselor	VR/WIPA agency staff	SSA payment center staff	Implementation contractor staff	TA providers	POD treatment subjects
Outcomes and lessons learned							
How does POD change the participant's use of other government programs or income supports?	X	X	X			X	X
What lessons learned can be shared with other sites gearing up to implement a similar program?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

INTERVIEW TOPICS FOR STAFF INTERVIEWS: ROUNDS 1-4

The process study team will interview a variety of respondents to gather information about implementation of POD in each of the eight demonstration sites. The team will conduct two rounds of in-person site visits to each of the POD sites in the first and third rounds of data collection to observe implementation activities and gather information at the start of recruitment and one year after the last POD participant is enrolled. We will conduct in-person visits when key respondents are working centrally on site at the VR agency. However, in states that rely more on telecommuting staff, such as WIPAs who employ staff who typically work at home, we will conduct interviews by telephone to collect information from the geographically dispersed key informants to make data collection less costly. The team will conduct two rounds of ‘virtual’ telephonic site visits in the second and fourth rounds, corresponding with random assignment and two years after enrollment of the last participant.

We organized the topic areas for the staff interviews described above by evaluation focus area, and provide a list of topics we will cover during the in-person and ‘virtual’ telephonic site visits with eight POD sites for the POD process study. We summarized the topics in Table C.4. Not all topics are applicable to all POD sites or respondents. For example, we will focus on program administration and management practices during the discussions with program managers, and we will focus on participant engagement and service delivery during discussions with POD work incentives counseling staff. Before each round of data collection, the task leader will create semi-structured interview guides from the interview topics that are relevant to that site visit round and key respondent. For each round of data collection, the team will develop an interview guide tailored to each respondent (between 5-6 interview guides total per round) which builds on information obtained during early program implementation.

Table C.4. Staff interview topics addressing each research question, by evaluation focus

Interview topics	
I. Respondent background and experience	
General background information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History and mission of the organization/agency Respondent's tenure and role in organization/agency Respondent's role in and time spent on POD Other staff within organization/agency working on POD (number, roles, FTE, and qualifications) How POD fits within organization/agency's overall structure
II. Program environment^a—community context and the counterfactual	
A. Local environment	
How do the general employment environment, state policies, and other state features affect benefit offset use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implications of the economy on the labor market over past year Employment opportunities available to people with disabilities Implications of political climate on service environment over past year State/local policies and features (i.e., public transit) that assist or hinder people with disabilities in securing employment Description of geographic region/service area (size and distribution of population) Demographic characteristics of those living in service area Characteristics of people with disabilities living in the service area
B. Service environment	
How prevalent is engagement in the Ticket to Work (TTW) Program, and how are ENs structured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-existing services available through the local Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) providers for DI beneficiaries (before POD)
How did state VR agencies previously serve beneficiaries before POD, and did this change during the demonstration period?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-existing services available through the local VR agency for adults with disabilities in general and for DI beneficiaries (before POD) Changes in VR services during the demonstration period Successes implementing POD through VR agency Challenges encountered implementing POD during the demonstration period

Interview topics

C. Planning and early implementation

What types of training did staff receive to implement the demonstration?	Training received and still needed Technical assistance received and areas where TA is still needed Assessment of training and TA materials
What types of other resources and materials did staff receive to implement POD?	Types of TA resources made available to organization/agency Assessment of training and TA resources; which have been especially effective and helpful
What pre-implementation activities were carried out to design and plan for implementation of POD?	Organizations/agencies involved in initial planning process and nature of involvement Inter-agency and other agreements and contracts that were developed Major steps in the planning process Development of operational policies and procedures for SSA offices, VR agencies, and POD benefits counselors Manuals and other materials developed in preparation for the demonstration
Have implementation activities been carried out as intended?	Assessment of planning and early implementation period, and whether start-up was implemented as planned
What aspects of implementation could benefit from additional training and technical assistance?	Aspects of implementation that could benefit from additional TA Types of training and TA still needed
What aspects of early program implementation have been successful?	Aspects of implementation that functioned well during demonstration start-up Factors that contributed to these outcomes
What aspects of early program implementation did not proceed as expected?	Challenges encountered during demonstration start-up Aspects of implementation that did not proceed as planned Efforts to address issues and solutions that were least effective/most effective

III. POD Recruitment, enrollment, and RA

A. Outreach and recruitment

What types of information did DI beneficiaries receive about POD?	Process for enrolling POD participants Strategies used to inform SSDI beneficiaries about POD Efforts to respond to questions from individuals assigned to treatment groups
What strategies were used to inform SSDI beneficiaries about POD?	Strategies and methods used to recruit POD participants, and level of effort required Information made available to SSDI beneficiaries through SSA field offices, local WIPA providers, and other entities

Interview topics	
How did outreach and enrollment differ for concurrent beneficiaries (those who receive SSI and DI)?	Aspects of outreach and enrollment that are different for concurrent beneficiaries
What efforts were made to inform stakeholders and service providers about the demonstration?	Strategies to inform stakeholders about POD Stakeholders' reactions and response to demonstration
Which outreach methods been effective in reaching potential participants?	SSDI beneficiaries' motivations to participate in POD POD participants' understanding of POD offset rules Incentives used to attract POD participants
What challenges were encountered during recruitment?	Recruitment challenges encountered Reasons why SSDI beneficiaries refused to participate in POD
What aspects of the recruitment strategy were successful?	Recruitment successes Aspects of recruitment approach that enticed SSDI beneficiaries to participate in POD
B. Enrollment	
What factors affected enrollment/take-up rates?	Information conveyed to volunteers before and after random assignment How information varies by treatment group, state, and disability type
Did prospective enrollees complete baseline surveys properly?	Assessment of quality and completeness of baseline surveys completed by volunteers.
Did prospective enrollees complete informed consent form properly?	Assessment of quality and completeness of informed consent forms completed by volunteers.
IV. Development of the POD infrastructure	
What aspects of implementation activities need correction?	Extent to which the demonstration was implemented as planned, overall and for each participant group Consistency of project activities and services with project design Implementation activities that are disrupting other functions
To what extent are discovered issues systematic in nature?	Frequency of discovered issues across sites Consistency of discovered issues over time
How have discovered issues affected operations? Service delivery? Offset use?	Changes to operations, service delivery, and offset use that resulted from discovered issues Extent to which issues disrupted operations, service delivery, and offset use Ability of site to address issues without disrupting operations, service delivery, and offset use

Interview topics	
What aspects of the state-level activities need TA?	TA needs related to communication with participants, collection and coordination of earnings and IRWEs, work incentives counseling, MIS, sample crossover and contamination. Consistency of TA needs across sites
V. Data systems and use of the MIS	
What data are captured in the implementer's management information system (MIS)?	Data elements in RAPTER and Implementation Contractor's MIS How data are used to support benefit adjustments under POD offset How data are used to support end of year reconciliation process
What functionality is the implementer's MIS equipped with to support program operations and monitoring?	Functions and utility of RAPTER, Implementation Contractor's MIS, and data entry processes Processes used to track and monitor site operations
What data are transferred to SSA to facilitate administration of the POD offset?	Data transfers between sites and SSA to support administration of the POD offset Process for adjusting the benefits based on earnings and IRWE information
Are the staff using the project's MIS as designed?	Collection of participants' earnings and IRWE information Degree to which site staff utilize MIS consistently across sites Training and technical assistance received
What specific modifications to the system and/or training are needed for accurate data collection?	Program adjustments made in response to formative evaluation findings Training and technical assistance still needed
VI. Operations and fidelity to the program design	
Has the implementation contractor clearly defined and correctly provided the intervention?	Extent to which sites adhere to the program design Consistency of program implementation across sites Extent to which benefits counselors and VR agencies use the POD manual Use of technical assistance to correct implementation issues
What aspects of SSA operations need support?	Aspects of SSA operations that need support, as they relate to adjustment of benefits based on earnings Other aspects of SSA operations that need support Staffing capacity and changes in staffing during the demonstration
What aspects of coordination with state VR agencies need support?	Aspects of coordination related to SSA operations Aspects of coordination related to benefits counselors Aspects of coordination related to implementation and evaluation contractors

Interview topics	
What strategies are used to maintain the integrity of random assignment?	Efforts made to keep the treatment and control groups from sharing knowledge about the demonstration Procedures in place to maintain the integrity of the random assignment process
Was POD implemented with fidelity to the program design?	Extent to which POD was implemented as planned, overall and for each group Extent to which POD operations or services changed, and reasons for change(s)
VII. POD service delivery	
Has the implementation contractor clearly defined and correctly provided the intervention?	Role of Implementation Contractor in making benefit adjustments How sites support participants to understand relevant SSA notices and file reconsiderations/appeals/waivers of overpayments
How do state VR agencies collect earnings and IRWE information from individuals assigned to a treatment group?	Process for collecting earnings and IRWE information from individuals in treatment groups
What role do state VR agencies play in making adjustments to benefit payments?	Role of state VR agencies in making benefit adjustments
How quickly are benefit payments adjusted for offset use?	Processing time for implementation contractor to process submitted earnings and IRWE information and transmit to SSA Processing time for SSA to apply benefit offset after receipt of earnings records over POD threshold
What are the major reasons for benefit adjustment delays, if any?	Major reasons for benefit adjustment delays, if any
How does monthly earnings reporting differ for concurrent beneficiaries?	Process for collecting earnings and IRWE information from concurrent beneficiaries in treatment groups Process for adjusting benefits based on earnings for concurrent beneficiaries
Are monthly earnings and IRWEs reported on time?	Incidence and frequency of monthly earnings and IRWE reporting Effect of outreach efforts or reminders on monthly earnings reporting
VIII. Administration, coordination, and inter-agency relationships	
What is the organizational and management structure of the state entities implementing POD?	Roles of partner organizations/agencies in implementing POD Overall organization/agency and management structure of state entities implementing POD Formal and informal agreements between organizations/agencies involved in implementing POD
How do the organizations implementing POD communicate and coordinate with one another?	Nature of communication and collaboration between organizations/agencies involved in implementing POD How inter-agency relationships have changed over time

Interview topics

What specific gaps or weaknesses exist in the partnerships?

Gaps and weaknesses in demonstration partnerships
Successful aspects of demonstration partnerships

Interview topics

IX. Successes and challenges

<p>What aspects of planning and early implementation were successful? Less successful?</p>	<p>Specific successes during the planning and start-up phases of implementing POD Factors that contributed to success during planning and early implementation Specific areas in which technical assistance or support was needed Solutions that were most/least effective</p>
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<p>What are the administrative (i.e., implementation, operations, or systems) successes/challenges in providing the intervention?</p>	<p>Specific successes/challenges encountered in implementing POD Features of the site or individuals that promoted these successes How challenges were addressed Success in addressing challenges</p>
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<p>What facilitated timely earnings and IRWE reporting?</p>	<p>Facilitators of timely earnings and IRWE reporting Ability to replicate facilitators in other sites</p>
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<p>What are the obstacles preventing timely earnings and IRWE reporting?</p>	<p>Obstacles preventing timely earnings and IRWE reporting How obstacles were addressed Success in addressing obstacles</p>
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<p>What facilitated benefit offset use?</p>	<p>Facilitators of benefit offset use Ability to replicate facilitators in other sites</p>
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<p>What are the obstacles preventing benefit offset use, if any?</p>	<p>Obstacles preventing benefit offset use How obstacles were addressed Success in addressing obstacles</p>
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X. Outcomes and lessons learned

<p>How does POD change the participant's use of other government programs or income supports?</p>	<p>Increase or decrease in POD participant use of other government programs or income supports Which programs/supports, and how participant use changed Unexpected consequences of participating in POD Factors that contributed to these consequences</p>
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<p>What lessons learned can be shared with other sites gearing up to implement a similar program?</p>	<p>Promising practices in the implementation of POD, both overall and at each site Extent to which practices are replicable in other sites Lessons learned through the implementation of POD Extent to which these lessons apply to other sites</p>
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^aSome of this information will be gathered prior to the site visit.