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assessment protocol

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

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ASSESSMENT PROTOCOL

Prepared for

The Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention

The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration

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FOREWORD

One of the best ways citizens can ensure high quality services for youth is by being involved. By visiting courts, detention facilities, group homes and other programs, laymen and professionals alike can determine whether their community is doing its best for its youth. This booklet was designed to help people make those visits productive.

This is an assessment protocol. It is a "how-to" manual for anyone who wants to visit a youth service program and monitor how that program does its job. The booklet describes homework that needs to be done in advance of a visit; steps to take while on site; -- and what to do after the visit. This manual is a companion to another booklet, Program Assessment, which details specific items of information which a team of assessors might want to examine.

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act calls for a general improvement in our nation's juvenile justice system. This assessment protocol is one tool to be used in gaining improvement. Though the booklet can be used by anyone, it is especially hoped that those outside the system will use it -- parents, friends of youth in trouble, and other community residents. Only by making the problems of the juvenile justice system known and discussed can we hope to solve them.

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a monitoring protocol. According to Webster, a protocol is the etiquette or ceremony observed by diplomats or heads of state. With reference to monitoring, protocol refers to the relations between the monitor (one who must be a true diplomat) and the staff of the organiization being monitored. This booklet has been written to explain approaches to monitoring or program assessment. (The terms are used interchangeably). The strategies discussed should help any group - researchers, citizen advocates or others - organize and execute an effective, worthwhile assessment venture.

Monitoring has come to mean different things, depending on the agency or person conducting it. For the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and other federal agencies, "monitoring" often refers specifically to data collection around key articles of legislation to ascertain whether states are in compliance with the law. In its more common usage, "monitoring" means keeping tabs on the progress of specified activities to see if and to what degree a program is fulfilling its obligations. Under any definition, monitoring permits judgments to be made on a program's managerial and operational efficiency, its effectiveness, its acceptability by clients, and suitability to their needs and the needs of the community and its adequacy to meet the magnitude of the problem it expects to solve.

This booklet has been written in response to the needs of citizen's advocacy groups, policy makers and others who are interested in monitoring juvenile programs to judge the quality of care given youth who are served by those programs. Those programs could include a juvenile detention facility, a group home, emergency shelter facility, or a youth drop-in center. A companion document, Program Monitoring, details many specific items a monitor may wish to look at when assessing a program. Along with this Protocol, citizens and others should be able to assess the services given their youth and help ensure they are of the highest quality possible.

This booklet is divided into three main sections. Topics covered include:

- Planning for monitoring: Defining the scope of the effort, becoming familiar with the program to be monitored, and preparing the team who will actually do the monitoring,
- Conducting the monitoring: Contacting the program, initial and subsequent on-site visits, data gathering techniques, and
- Use of the monitoring information: What to do with the new insights gained through monitoring.

PLANNING FOR MONITORING

The success or failure of a monitoring effort depends on how thoroughly it is planned for in advance. Both the users of the information and the uses to which it will be put must be factored into the plan. That is, specific problems, issues or conditions must be identified which can focus the monitoring effort. The focus may be as broad as monitoring all program activities as they relate to program objectives. Or, the focus may be as limited as monitoring finances of a single department within an agency.

Defining the Scope of Work

The focus of the monitoring should reflect a specific information need of the user. Without compelling reason to do program monitoring, and there are many, the effort can turn into an exercise in bureaucratic paper shuffling. This tendency is too often apparent with regard to programs that are required to submit reams of records on every aspect of their operations to their funding source. Too often, those monitors are overburdened with work and unable to sift through the information; thus it collects dust on the shelf. With proper attention to what monitoring should accomplish -- by both the monitor and the monitored -- this can be avoided.

The planning decisions which must be made to initiate a monitoring effort are straightforward. They include:

- What functions or activities of the monitored organization will be watched. The scope can be as broad as all program activities or as narrow as monitoring commitment rates of a specific type of offender to a certain institution.

- For whom the monitoring is to be done. Monitoring can be done as part of a citizen's action initiative; it can be done in response to a legislative or administrative mandate; or it can be done by program managers for themselves. Defining the target audience will help to shape the substance, extent and detail of the information gathered.

- How the data are to be collected. There are a variety of techniques for information gathering. These include ongoing recordkeeping by the program itself (by completing forms left by the monitor), on-site information gathering by outside monitors through interviews and analyses of records, or telephone interviews.

- Who will do the monitoring. The monitoring can be done by almost anyone, so long as he is trained in the procedure and is a person who can maintain the objectivity needed to accurately portray the activities of the monitored agency. Possible monitors would include program staff, consultants, government workers, or a citizen interest group.

- When and how often the monitoring is to be conducted. Data collection can be a weekly activity or an annual activity. The timing and frequency are best determined on the basis of when the information is needed for the programmatic or management decisions it will influence.

- Where the material is located. This is a function of what data will be gathered and the place of the most easy access.

These decisions - where, what, how and others - are the technical aspects of planning for monitoring. Equally important are the political aspects of planning. Monitoring by outsiders may be threatening to the program under scrutiny. Program staff may fear losing funds, being expelled from the premises, or having clients removed to other facilities. These fears may be well- or ill-founded. Still, the fears of program staff can be a serious impediment to the success of the monitoring effort. If the monitors are armed with support -- of political leaders, of citizens, of a funding source, or others -- the likelihood that the effort will be successful is greatly enhanced.

Securing Community Support

Community or political support is essential to a successful monitoring effort. This support can ensure that the findings of the effort will be seriously considered and, more important, implemented. Some monitoring efforts have credibility to begin with and no campaign for supporters is necessary. These would include: monitoring which arises out of publicized abuses in the juvenile justice system -- for example, a rape or murder in the juvenile detention facility; monitoring or inspections of programs which are initiated at the inauguration of a new local government; monitoring which is part of a larger citizen's advocacy effort by a well-established community organization. However, a group just organizing to monitor juvenile programs may have to actively seek local support. Some steps they can take include:

- Identifying potential sources of support. What leaders or organizations in the community are likely to support the monitoring activities? These people can be approached directly (call on them for a discussion of the problem) or indirectly (influence them through public pronouncements, the media, etc.) depending on which approach is most feasible and is most effective, given the community.

- Seeking the endorsement of community leaders. Once supporters for the monitoring have been identified, they must be approached to endorse the effort. Such endorsement can come in a number of different forms. For example, a political leader can openly support the cause and put the resources of his office behind it. Or a leader can advocate for the monitoring effort in the media. Some support can be less visible. A political leader may decide that he endorses the effort, but cannot do so publically (for example, he may be responsible for some of the problems a program faces and feels he must publically stand behind the program). However, in giving his tacit support he will ensure that the monitors meet with no official resistance.

- Keeping supporters informed. People in a community who have supported the monitoring effort and thus cleared the way deserve the courtesy of being kept informed of the progress of that effort. This helps to keep these people actively concerned about the program being monitored. It also helps to keep supporters aware of juvenile justice issues in general -- issues on which they may be asked to take a stand in the future.

The issue of whom a group needs as backers of a monitoring effort must be decided by the planners themselves. Monitoring efforts will differ -- local community and program dynamics will be the main determinants of what kind of support is needed. The main point is that political or community support is important, and how it is to be secured must be planned for in advance.

Basic Monitoring Steps

The planning which precedes the monitoring effort should address seven basic steps of the process. These steps are fundamental, and the tasks contained in each can be as simple or as complex as is necessitated by the scope of the monitoring.

1) Set objectives. The objectives state the purpose of the monitoring effort -- what is to be learned and how monitoring is to accomplish this. Some examples are:

    - To determine whether a program is following federal affirmative action guidelines, or

    - To assess the quality of care received by children in county shelter care facilities.

2) Specify indicators of progress toward the monitoring objectives. If the objective is affirmative action, then an indicator may be X number of women and minorities hired (as a percentage of total staff). If the objective relates to quality-of-care, the indicator may be a specified number of counseling or treatment hours per week. These indicators should be written in a quantifiable way or a qualitative way which permits comparisons to be made.

3) Once indicators are specified, the development of monitoring tools is possible. These tools are usually forms to be filled out by program staff or monitors who are conducting interviews or revising program records. In addition to developing data gathering tools, a procedure for collecting the data should be spelled out. This would detail the actual method or approach to be taken, such as when to gather what information from whom and then what to do with the information once gathered.

4) The fourth step is to actually gather the information according to the procedure specified above.

5) The methodology specified in Step 3 should indicate the analytic techniques to use in organizing and interpreting the information. The analysis should be based on sound and accepted methods and should recognize the limits of drawing conclusions about program impact on the basis of limited monitoring data.

6) The distribution for the monitoring report will be determined by the principal audience for the effort -- that is, the user of the information. Above all, the report should be completed in a timely fashion (when the information can be acted on) and should fully explain the methodology used and the data gathered.

7) The purpose of the monitoring is to track an event or activity for compliance purposes or to identify potential strengths and weaknesses of an organization. Thus, it is important that the conclusions or recommendations to flow from the effort be articulated in a way that the user of the information can ascertain the degree to which the monitoring purposes has been achieved and can act on the results.

The steps above constitute the framework of the monitoring study. To ensure that the study is executed according to plan, the monitoring team itself must be adequately prepared for the work it is to do.

Preparing the Monitoring Team

Preparing the individuals who will do the actual monitoring is essential for a well-managed effort. Preparing the monitor involves: (1) selecting the people to actually collect and analyze the data; (2) organizing the individuals for the task to be done and training them to handle the monitoring environment -- the program, its staff, and the facility. Thoroughness at this stage will ensure that the monitors feel confident of their ability to do their job responsibly and efficiently.

Selecting Monitors

Monitoring can be done by volunteers or professionals. In selecting the individuals to do the task, the following requirements should be kept in mind:

- The monitor should be willing to make a commitment to the effort -- to stay with it from start to finish. Training new monitors midway along in the effort can be difficult and time consuming; continuity of the effort is severely disrupted.

- The monitor should understand the dynamics affecting human service programs: the budget constraints under which they operate, the laws and regulations which guide the program, and the political environment in which they function. If a potential monitor is not familiar with this environment, he should be willing and able to learn.

- The monitor should possess the tact and diplomacy necessary to work with the monitored agency. During the data collection period, the monitor is often a stranger to the program he will observe. He must show the courtesy which would be required of any outsider coming into an organization for purposes of conducting business

Organizing the Monitors

The monitoring can be done by individuals or by teams. The individual approach has merit if a single, clearly defined problem is to be studied and if the work is not extensive. The team approach has many benefits and may be preferred strategy for most monitoring endeavors. Some of the advantages of the team approach are that:

- A team can gather more information, more quickly than can a single person.

- The different members bring various skills, expertise, and perspectives which strengthen the effort.

- A single person is apt to have subjective impressions of a program. With a team, these impressions are either verified, which increases the accuracy of the information, or dismissed, or they are flagged for further investigation.

- With a team, more than one person becomes familiar with the monitored program. Thus, if one member is unable to work on a given day, there are back-up people who can fill in.

- Team members can be supportive of each other in terms of sharing lessons, experiences, and frustrations.

The Team Leader

To run a team effectively, one member must be designated as the team leader who is the overall director of the monitoring effort. His responsibility is to: manage the effort, act as a monitor and thus be fully aware of the procedures and problems encountered, act as the principal contact to the monitored agency or program, provide background information and psychological support to team members. In short, the team leader is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the monitoring effort.

The team leader is responsible for dividing up the work to be done and making assignments. After it has been decided what information must be gathered and from whom, task assignments can be made. The division of labor can be based on the approach taken -- one person to do the interviewing, another to copy information from records, and still another to observe conditions. Or, the tasks can be allocated by units or divisions within the organization -- one person to do management staff and functions, another to monitor treatment staff, and another to oversee support functions. The way in which responsiblity is divided among team members should emanate from the kind of information to be gathered and from the organization of the agency being monitored. A rule of thumb is to pick the most common sense approach. Despite the way in which tasks are allocated, it is important that there be consistency. Team members should not rotate among tasks so often that they are unable to establish rapport with agency staff and fully learn the activities which they are monitoring.

One of the benefits of the team approach is that there can be "back-up" monitors to substitute for others in the event of an illness or other problem. Back-ups or understudies should be designated by the manager of the monitoring effort and the team leader should ensure that the understudies are informed of the progress of the monitoring effort.

Finally, the team leader is responsible for coordinating the activities of the team members. Especially with small teams, this responsibility is often forgotten. However, it is very easy for team members to forget to communicate and share their information and experiences with each other.

One vehicle for coordinating the overall effort is the team meeting. At team meetings the members of the monitoring group gather to share information, discuss problems, and plan for future on-site work or report writing. The meetings should be held on a regular basis throughout the monitoring period.

Before the actual on-site work occurs, the monitoring team should convene to discuss the whole effort. Topics of discussion should include:

- The objectives of the monitoring effort
- The performance indicators
- The data collection forms and procedures
- Data sources
- Report writing requirements
- Background of the program or organization to be monitored -- its history, activities, staff, etc.

If interviews are to be conducted, the forms or questionnaries should be gone over in depth. The implicit and explicit intent of each question should be discussed so that interviewers can appreciate the nuances of the responses they receive.

In preparing monitors to gather information out of records and files, the team leader should have blank copies of the records kept by the program. The monitors can review these and be more familiar with what they will face when on-site.

The preparation which occurs prior to the data gathering phase enables each person to become fully acquainted with the task at hand. This preparation inspires confidence needed to carry out the task; it also provides a vehicle for identifying and rectifying problems before they arise.

Preparation for the Program Environment

In addition to organizing the team and briefing its members on the technical aspects of monitoring, planners should prepare the team for possible reactions they may confront when they first visit the program.

The program environment -- the staff, clients, facility -- can be difficult and hostile. Great care should be taken to prepare monitors who are unfamiliar with the program for problems they might encounter on-site. Problems can stem from:

- A confusion on the part of the program as to what monitoring is and why it is being done.
- A perception on the part of the program that the monitoring will be used to cut off funding, redirect

the program's focus, suggest personnel changes, and even recommend termination of the program.

- A general distrust of outsiders who have not been close to the program and who may not appreciate the difficulties the program may feel.

Thus, the monitors must anticipate criticism (legitimate or otherwise) and be prepared for possible hostility and be able to deal with both in a way which will not damage relations with program staff.

The manual, Skills for Impact*, developed by Benjamin Broox McIntyre for the Association of Junior Leagues, Inc., identifies possible receptions that advocates might expect when visiting organizations. These receptions appear equally valid for the outside monitor. The monitoring team should discuss this list of possible receptions in advance and determine what the most likely situation is that they will face and how they will deal with that reception.

- cooperation -- when the program staff are helpful to the monitors and relationships are good. This is the hoped-for response.

- disregard -- when staff do not return phone calls, are unavailable for meetings, or are impatient with the time monitors must take for data collection. Disregard is one of the most difficult reactions to counter, and often requires a call or letter to the program director from a known and respected supporter or organizer of the monitoring activity requesting or requiring the program staff's cooperation.

- runaround -- when data collectors are shunted from one person to another, preventing the efficient execution of their responsibilities. The best weapon to be armed with in this situation is a thorough knowledge of the program. Thus, a monitor would know how to evaluate suggestions and guidance from program staff.

- delay tactics -- when the program staff say they are in a crunch and will be for months to come. Delays in the monitoring schedule which result from true demands on the program should be respected and taken into account in planning for monitoring. Delay tactics which result in an effort taking six months which should take one month may have to be countered by the intervention of one in authority.

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*Developed by Benjamin Broox McIntyre for the Association of Junior Leagues, Inc., Institute of Government, University of Georgia, September, 1977. This is an excellent reference for any monitoring effort and should be made available to participants.

- <u>threat and intimidation</u> -- when monitors are abused or frightened in the hopes that they will cease their investigation. Relationships between the monitors and the program should never be reduced to this level. This may happen, though, and the support of proper authorities should be enlisted. It is the team leader's responsibility, also, to ensure that no individual monitor confronts such hostility. If so, the team leader should intervene for the monitor and straighten out the problem.

- <u>covert cooperation</u> -- when the program directors oppose the monitoring, but staff within the organization endorse it and covertly furnish the monitors with important data. This is a most delicate situation. If all monitors can garner is covert support from the program being assessed, then the effort becomes less monitoring <u>per se</u>, more of an undercover investigation. Thus, the rules and procedures of inquiry, as described later in this booklet, do not necessarily apply. This is not to discourage such investigations -- only to indicate that they must be planned and executed differently.

- <u>co-optation and exploitation</u> -- when staff of the program attempt to turn monitors into advocates for the program's own purpose. Ideally, the purposes of the monitors and the program under scrutiny are the same -- improvement in the quality of services given youth. If this is not the case, monitors can arm themselves by making their monitoring objective clear and known, and not deviating from the original purpose.

The program environment -- to an outsider -- can be frightening; it is unknown. However, anticipating that environment and being well prepared for both the technical aspects of monitoring and the human relations involved, will contribute greatly to offsetting the concerns of monitoring team members. Such anticipation, planning, and preparation will help to ensure that the effort goes as smoothly as possible, and is a positive endeavor for all concerned.

In summary, there are some basic rules to follow prior to implementing program monitoring.

- Be well acquainted with the organization being monitored -- its mission, structure, policies, and programs. That way, monitors will be better able to discern when there is a problem in terms of getting inaccurate or misleading information.

- Adhere to the previously set protocol and plan for the monitoring. Ensure that all participants -- the monitors, the program staff and community supporters know the plan to be followed and make adjustments in that plan with the full understanding of those involved.

- Maintain a professional posture at all times. This means that monitors should be as knowledgeable and objective as possible, that they should maintain an open mind, and be frank and honest with the monitored program about what they are doing.

CONDUCTING THE MONITORING

The planning has been done -- now it is time to begin executing the monitoring design; to collect, analyze and interpret the information as called for in the study. In this section we discuss the mechanics of actual monitoring. Two principal steps are:

(1) initiating contact with the program,

(2) on-site monitoring -- entry into the program, data gathering, and the exit meeting.

Initiating Contact with the Program

The team leader should know who to contact at the program for the monitoring. In most cases, this will be the director of the program. There are some situations where it may be someone other than the director -- for example, the Chairman of the Board or the chief counselor depending on the scope and purpose of the monitoring. If it is someone other than the director, protocol usually dictates that a courtesy call be placed to the director in addition to the main contact.

This initial contact is crucial. It can be done by phone or in person. If the monitoring task is large, an on-site visit might be useful to meet staff. The objectives of the initial contact are to:

- Explain the purpose of the monitoring, who the monitoring team is, and the nature of the effort.
- Elicit support and cooperation from the monitored agency.
- Reach agreement on the logistics of the monitoring (where and when it is to take place, primarily).

It is possible that this first call may elicit a negative response. The team leader should anticipate confusion or even hostility. Some of the concerns of program staff being monitored might be:

- Why are you doing this?
- Is this an investigation? An evaluation?
- By what authority are you reviewing the program?
- What qualifies you to assess my program?
- Are you going to require time of my very busy staff?

Monitors should anticipate questions like these and formulate responses before placing the initial call. The monitor's demeanor should be pleasant, informative, non-threatening, and professional. Monitors should not sound as if they have already concluded that the program is a failure and wastes public money. Good will and an attitude of "we're in this together" will contribute greatly to a relationship of cooperation.

During the initial call, monitors should try to identify information which the program might have that can be sent in advance of the first site visit. This would include such material as information brochures, budgets, organization charts, annual reports, program descriptions, and blank forms used by staff in program or client management. Getting this material ahead of time will reduce some of the work which must be done on-site and it will allow monitors to become familiar with the program. However, in getting this information, the monitoring team should be careful to avoid being a nuisance to the program and burdening the program staff.

Following the initial call, a confirmation letter should be sent reiterating the nature and purpose of the monitoring, the dates of the site visit, and what will be done on-site. This procedure of confirming information and reiterating the purpose of the monitoring effort should become routine to help offset any confusion on the part of the monitored program.

On-Site Monitoring

There are many different approaches which can be taken with monitoring. Personal visits, telephone surveys, and the use of the mail in data gathering are all avenues which are available. In this section, the focus is with on-site monitoring because it poses some of the (potentially) most difficult problems of data gathering. The three steps in the process are:

- Program entry -- the first face-to-face contact with the monitored program
- Data gathering -- the ongoing process of interviewing, analyzing records, observing program activity
- The exit meeting -- the final meeting with the project director during which the entire effort is discussed.

Each step is discussed, in full, below.

Entry to the Program

The entry or initial meeting of monitors and program staff is crucial: it is at this time that everyone becomes acquainted with each other and the process of building trust and mutual expectations either begins or fails. Also, the meeting is important for establishing a mutual understanding of what monitoring is, and, specifically, what it means in the effort at hand. How the initial meeting is run will vary according to the style of the team leader and the receptivity of program staff. However, there are certain steps which should be taken in any initial meeting:

a) Introduce each monitor -- who he is, his particular background and interests, and his role as a member of the monitoring team.

b) Confirm the understandings reached when the program was first contacted.

c) Explain how the monitoring will be conducted. Give the program staff an overview of the monitoring objectives and the procedures which will be followed.

d) Establish a mutually convenient timetable. To increase the receptivity of the monitored agency, every effort must be made to conduct site visits at times which are convenient and do not conflict with the programs' business. That is, monitors should avoid burdening staff at times of peak client activity, such as morning intake hours, meals, and other such times.

e) Identify information sources. Monitors should know the names of people, and the location of their work stations, with whom they will have to work in gathering information. Also, the location of files, statistical reports, financial records, and other written materials should be identified. Barriers to getting this material should be discovered (such as locked files) and the procedure for gaining access to the material clarified. The team leader should inquire of the project director whether there is any special protocol which should be observed with any of the people from whom information is being sought.

f) Get the name of a contact person (such as an administrative assistant) who can be used for collecting material and holding it until the monitors' return. By designating one person as a "contact", the monitors can lessen the burden of their demands on the project director and other senior staff. This is not to say that this contact person will actually gather the information; rather his desk be one place where others can leave materials for the monitor to pick up.

g) The monitoring team should provide the program staff at the entry interview with copies of questionnaires, guides, etc., which will be used in the data collection. This helps to demystify the monitoring process and should lead to a better cooperation from the program staff.

h) Answer questions and concerns. The monitors should answer each question as well as possible; where the answer is not known, some provision should be made for finding out and getting back to the program with the answer.

Common courtesy and basic professionalism demand that these steps be taken with any initial interview. However, there is a subtler, perhaps more important reason for following the steps laid for the above. By anticipating the concerns and reactions of the monitored program staff, the team gains more control over the situation. Instead of appearing secretive and defensive, monitors act confident, sure, and friendly. The trust that is built up here may go far to discourage staff from interfering with the monitoring process, questioning every move and motive, and impeding the progress which must be made in the short time allotted to do the job. The ground rules are laid and understood, and the staff will feel less burdened. The monitoring effort will be seen in its most positive and constructive light.

Data Gathering

Data gathering can consist of three principal activities: interviewing staff and clients, collecting written information (from records, reports, etc.) and observing the program activities and its facilities. Prior to interviewing or data collection, the monitors should explain the process to any program personnel who may be involved -- especially to those not present at the entry interview. Although this may appear to be repetitious, it is essential to assure that all staff fully understand what is happening.

Interviewing

In interviewing, there are three factors which must be kept in mind. These are:

- Interviewing protocol
- Tone and manner of the interview
- Ways to ask questions.

The protocol for interviewing is similar to the protocol for monitoring in general. The purpose and procedures for monitoring must be explained to each person who will be questioned. There should be an understanding established with the program director that the staff can speak openly and frankly and that sensitive feelings and observations will not be used against them. Questions relating to personnel and clients especially, should be considered privileged. The monitors may want to give each respondent a copy of the survey instrument at the start of the interview so that the respondent can follow along. At the end of the interview, the monitor should review his notes to see if they make sense, if the shorthand and abbreviations are adequate to interpret the answers later on, and if any clarification is necessary. The monitor may want to summarize any answers which are unclear, complex, or controversial to ensure that the interpretation is correct. Finally, at the close of the interview, the monitor should thank the respondent and, if necessary, confirm the time and place of any future interviews.

The tone of the interview should be friendly and non-threatening and the monitor should conduct himself in a professional and objective manner. Above all, the monitor should guard against a posture or tone of voice which appears judgemental or evaluative. As an outsider to a program, it is difficult to know all the reasons for the behavior and activities of the staff. Making judgements prematurely and with insufficient understanding is offensive, and staff are totally within their rights to refuse to accede to the requests of arrogant monitors.

During the questioning, each monitor should determine what he may be taking for granted. If a monitor assumes too much, he may miss some essential information. Also, individual biases may be reflected in the way in which questions are asked. Each question should be reviewed and monitors should see if they have any predispositions of which they should be conscious, to ensure total objectivity.

The language which monitors use as interviewers can shape the kinds of responses which are received. Questions should be clear and concise, in good taste and comprised of familiar, everyday terms. One example of a good question is:

> How does intake work?

This question is specific, it is in good grammar; it uses everyday terms which are well known to service-oriented program staff, and it allows for clarification by the respondent. Unless a yes-no response is required, questions which draw out the respondent and make him elaborate are good, for they allow the person interviewed to set the answer in a total context.

Monitors should avoid words or phrases which are slang, folksy, erudite, or stuffy, or which employ acronyms. Also, questions which presuppose a response are to be avoided. Some poorly worded questions are listed below:

- Isn't your annual report just a puff piece to turn on the community? (Too much slang -- loaded question)

- Have you developed any correlation coefficients to ascertain whether regression equations would produce accurate predictions? (too technical)

- Isn't it true that the project director is sloppy in his work and insensitive to the needs of the staff?(presumes the answer)

- For Part C funds, doesn't OJJDP and LEAA require the SPA to go through A-95 clearance procedures to be in compliance with M.4100? (too much bureaucratic shorthand)

Below are some specific guidelines to follow in asking questions.

(1) Make the questions directive and specific. Avoid sweeping generalizations and ambiguous questions.

"What does a client do here?" (Wrong)

"Explain to me, in detail, the steps a client goes through when he first enters the program." (Right)

(2) If a detailed response is required, avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or no.

"Are the hours of operation too limited?" (Wrong)

"Explain the rationale behind the hours of operation." (Right)

(3) Monitors are at the program to gather information -- do not offer solutions in asking questions.

"Wouldn't hiring a bookkeeper solve the problems of poor recordkeeping?" (Wrong)

"What are specific problems with financial recordkeeping?" (Right)

(4) Be objective. Monitors should not act judgemental in response to replies given.

"That's ridiculous -- you mean you do <u>not</u> keep written records of your meetings with parents?" (Wrong)

"What are the reasons for not documenting your meetings with parents?" (Right)

(5) If a vague response or a response inconsistent with other replies is given, it should be clarified.

"Okay, let me get that down," and, to himself -- what in the world does he mean by <u>that</u>?" (Wrong)

"You have stated this (repeat answer). I'm not sure I understand. Also, how is that response reconciled with what you said earlier?" (repeat previous statement) (Right)

(6) Probe the respondent for as much information as possible. Some probing techniques which are discussed in the manual, <u>Skills for Impact</u>, referenced above, are:

-- Repeating the question -- the respondent may not have heard the question correctly or may have misunderstood the question. Restating the question in different words may also aid the respondent.

-- Being silent after asking a question -- leaving a pause for the interviewee to think through his answer uninterrupted is essential to receiving clear, concise responses.

-- Repeating the respondent's reply -- repeating what the person has said allows him to hear his own reply and may spark new, additional comments.

-- Making a neutral remark which will lead the respondent to discuss his answer. Some examples of this are:

"Anything else?"
"Any other reasons?"
"How do you mean?"
"Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?"
"Any others?"
"Why do you feel that way?"
"Which way would be closer to the way you feel?"
"Would you tell me what you have in mind?"

-- Asking for further clarification. In addition to the neutral questions above, you might want to give an example such as:

"Would staff, for instance, receive training from the State Division of Youth Services?"

Beware of examples, however. The respondent may discuss the specifics of your example rather than the concept or general idea which you are conveying.

Interviewing can be one of the most informative or one of the most frustrating experiences for the monitor. The way which it occurs -- well or poorly -- depends on the amount of "homework" the monitor has done as well as his personal skills at extracting information. Interviewing is one area where problems can be anticipated and rough edges smoothed, through practice sessions and role playing prior to monitoring. Such practice and preparation are essential for those new to the art of interviewing.

Collecting Written Information

The monitoring methodology should specify exactly the types of information which need to be collected and, it is hoped, the sources of that information. Most programs have some written materials which the team will want to consult in data gathering. However, monitors should not be surprised if there is less committed to paper than orginially presumed. This is often the case.

The information that might be gathered through this kind of data gathering could include:

- Program management information such as board composition, policies and procedures, grant applications, minutes of staff or board meetings, organization charts, by-laws, outside communications (correspondence and telephone logs)

- Financial data such as budgets, income statements, balance sheets, payroll information, and financial auditor's statements

- Client data such as population profiles, client characteristics, social and medical histories, follow-up information after a client has left the program

- Treatment information such as kinds and quantity of services rendered, treatment modalities used (positive peer culture, methadone maintenance, etc.), support services provided outside the program, etc.

- Personnel data including the number of staff, their training or background, staff deployment within the program, and performance evaluations

- Facility management data such as building size and location, building and health inspection licenses, and records of repairs or improvements.

The booklet, Program Monitoring, (Arthur D. Little, Inc., June, 1978) lists specific items of information which can be gathered during the monitoring effort.

Collecting information from records can be a slow process, but is one which must be done with complete accuracy. At best, this is a job which should be done by monitors who have first hand knowledge of the component of the program that is being monitored. That is, a person who is thoroughly familiar with generally accepted accounting practices should review financial data . At the minimum, people with the appropriate background should help to design the data collection instruments and should counsel the monitors before they go on-site.

As with all aspects of data collection, the monitors should assure the agency that the information which is sensitive will be kept confidential. Personnel data and information on clients are kept confidential. This may be required by law or it could be the practice of the program. Keeping information confidential usually means that individual names will not be divulged in any analyses or reports prepared. The rules of confidentiality and the reasons behind such rules should be discussed with the program during the entry interview.

Observations

Much can be discerned about a program by just looking. The kinds of information monitors can pick up through observation include:

- Activities of clients (are they busy?, are they doing nothing but "hanging out"?)
- Overall cleanliness of the program (bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen, etc.)
- Adequacy of space for clients in waiting rooms and program areas
- Attitudes of staff to each other and to clients (is it friendly? are staff authoritarian or collegial towards clients? towards each other?)
- Arrangement of staff areas (is it orderly? in disarray?)
- Health and safety aspects of the facility (is it a fire trap? are there fire extinguishers easily accessible? if the facility appears in good condition or a broken down condition.)

In taking notes, the monitors should include as much detail as possible, giving examples to back up each observation. After the information has been collected, the monitor should review his notes to ensure that they make sense and include as objective and verifiable information as possible.

The Exit Meeting

At the end of the monitoring activity, a debriefing session should be held with the program director or principal program contact. (If the monitoring is to be a lengthy, protracted process, interim debriefing sessions may also make sense. This meeting is a courtesy -- to say "we're finished and thank you." It also can serve some other purposes:

- Ambiguous points of information can be clarified before the monitors depart to analyze the data and prepare their report.
- Program staff and monitors are given another chance to discuss the uses to which the data will be put. Where program staff have strong objections to the work of the monitors, some vehicles for expressing those concerns should be discussed.
- Suggestions for a follow-up relationship between the monitoring group and the program can be discussed. If the monitors are local citizens who want to help out the project through technical assistance (by volunteering or helping with community relations,

for example), this can be discussed. Additional monitoring efforts in the future might be discussed.

At the exit interview, the monitors should indicate what the next steps are in terms of analysis of the information, preparation of the monitoring report, review of the report by the program staff or others, and any follow-on activities such as arranging for financial and technical assistance for the program.

USE OF THE MONITORING DATA

Analysis of the Data

The objectives which guided the monitoring effort should likewise guide the data analysis and the uses to which the information will be put. The methods of analysis will have been determined with the methodology and should be, accordingly, followed. Above all, every effort must be made to analyze the data promptly and disseminate the findings to ensure that program changes, advocacy work relating to the program, or other uses of the information might be pursued in a timely fashion.

After the site work has been completed, the monitoring team should meet to discuss the findings, share impressions, and discuss the drafting of the monitoring report. The difficulty may come in deciding who will analyze the data and in whether or not the information gathered by the individual monitors is clear and organized according to plan. After an initial cut has been done on the data analysis, the findings should be discussed with the monitoring team to ensure that they conform to the team members perceptions of the program.

Preparation of the Final Report

Once the analysis has been completed, a final report which discusses the entire effort must be prepared. The final report serves a number of purposes:

- The report can be easily distributed to individuals or groups desiring to support the program or advocate for changes in the program.

- Should any disagreements arise as to the conclusions or recommendations drawn from the monitoring effort, the debate can focus on points of fact or opinion expressly laid forth in the report. Thus, the possibility of unsubstantiated allegations is diminished and the discussion is raised to the professional level at which it should take place.

- It commits to paper all the information gained from the whole effort, thus constituting a reference for future efforts of a similar nature. The methods of data collection and analysis can be adopted and/or modified and subsequent monitors have a model from which to develop new monitoring designs.

The format for the final report should have been presented in the methodology. As a minimum, it should contain:

- The purpose of the effort -- why it was undertaken and the focus of the monitoring. The methodology employed in the monitoring design.

- Basic program information (budget, staff, services, clientele, funding sources, etc.)

- Summary of the findings including program strengths and weaknesses.

- Recommended action steps.

If the report is lengthy or very complex, the preparation of an executive summary may be warranted. This summary serves as an easy reference for distribution to a wide audience of people. The more complete report should be made available on request.

The action steps are one of the most crucial aspects of the final report. The monitoring team should, if they have done a thorough job, have some concrete suggestions as to how the program can maximize its strengths and overcome its weaknesses. The action steps, likewise, may suggest what others outside the program might do in relation to it.

The monitoring team has a number of options available to it. These are listed below:

- <u>Discuss the findings with the program to enable them to rectify shortcomings</u>. Often, just telling a program director that his financial officer should keep better track of disbursements; that his program hours preclude easy access by the client population; that he is not ensuring the confidentiality of client records or whatever the problem is, can solve the shortcoming. Program staff who are too close to the situation often miss problems that seem obvious to the outsider. This tack, of giving the program a chance to address its own problems without outside intervention, should always be considered first.

- <u>Help to arrange for technical or financial assistance for the program</u>. Some problems may be too difficult for program staff to overcome by itself. The monitoring team or another group -- an advisory board, a citizen's coalition or local planners -- should explore financial or technical assistance options for the program. Thus, the strengths of the program can be maintained, or reinforced, and handicaps can be addressed by individuals competent in the problem areas. Sources of technical assistance would include other local program people who have wrestled with the same problems, the state and federal governments, and professional organizations such as the State Bar Association, an association of certified public accountants, or consulting firms.

- Publish findings to increase citizen awareness of the weaknesses or strengths of the program. Often the involvement of an informed citizenry can do much to alleviate problems encountered by a program. Such citizen awareness can also be an asset to a program as it goes about its business of serving the youth of the community.

- Use the findings to change state or local administrative policies with respect to the program - advocacy. The difficulties a program faces may be the result of external policies which influence the program. Burdensome paperwork requirements imposed by the government may divert limited staff resources from providing services to filling out forms. Or, the program can be inappropriately placing children in institutions or facilities following the sanction of state law. Advocacy can also be used to bring pressure on the program if it is engaging in any illegal activity or activity which is not in the best interests of the children served. However, such advocacy on behalf of the program can be a powerful and controversial tool, and should be considered after other avenues have failed.

- Do nothing. The monitoring may show a good program, helping youth, involving the public and generally working to maximum efficiency and effectiveness. While no specific action steps may be warranted, the monitoring report can serve as a measure against which to ensure that the high standards of performance are upheld.

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