

# Health Center Operations Assessments

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# Statute & Regulations

- Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 USC 254b)
  - Overarching legislation authorizing grant funding for health centers and providing framework to receive and use funds (or to obtain Look-Alike designation)
- 42 CFR Part 51c (and Part 56 for Migrant Health Centers)
  - Promulgated by DHHS to implement Section 330
  - Specifies manner in which legislation is interpreted and implemented
  - Expands statutory requirements contained in Section 330

# Health Resources and Services Administration- Bureau of Primary Health Care Guidance

- Program Information Notices (PINs) & Program Assistance Letters (PALs)
  - Sets standards that represent HRSA/BPHC position on issues ranging from internal operations to third party arrangements
  - Interprets, explains, expands and updates rules that may be too broad, unclear, vague or out of date
- 19 Health Center Program Requirements
  - Legal standards mandated by health center statute and regulations
  - Grouped into four sections that generally reflect the core components of the health center program: need, services, management & finance, governance

# What is the Operational Assessment?

- On-site audit of a health center's compliance with the Nineteen Health Center Program Requirements
- Health Center Site Visit Guide = main review instrument
  - Standardized “yes” or “no” questions to assess compliance with the Nineteen Requirements
  - “Prompting questions” to result in performance improvement recommendations
- Site visit conducted by Review Team comprised of HRSA consultants – not HRSA employees
  - Project officer may be at the review
- Site visit report issued by Review Team is final and findings of non-compliance may result in grant conditions

# What Can Happen?

- Special award conditions
- “High-risk” designation
- Cost disallowances
- Draw-down restrictions
- Suspension/termination of funding
- **Re-Competition of your grant**
- Any other remedies legally available and appropriate

# What Can You Expect?

- Pre-site visit activities
  - Review Team formed
  - Health Center contacted – agenda and requests
  - Initial document/data review and further requests
- On-site activities
  - Entrance interview
  - Review Team visits one or more sites, conducts on-site assessment of documents and interviews staff (and Board members) to determine compliance
  - Exit interview

# What is the Process?

- Post-site visit activities
  - Review Team drafts final report and sends to the Project Officer
  - Project Officer reviews the report and sends it to Health Center
  - HRSA issues new Notice of Award (NoA) with conditions based on findings of non-compliance (as applicable)
  - Health Center responds to findings of non-compliance based on timelines in NoA (typically, initial 90-day period) and HRSA's Progressive Action Process (PAL 2010-01)

# Preparing for the Site Visit

- Discuss the review internally – prepare all management, staff and Board members
  - Ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding the health center’s governance and operations
  - Identify point person(s) for each area, as well as overall point person
- Don’t assume Review Team members are “experts” about your community or that they understand your specific program’s operations
  - Prepare overview for entrance conference that highlights what you want to highlight
  - Include your current strengths and future plans

# Preparing for the Site Visit

- Review the Health Center Site Visit Guide (both the program requirements section and the performance improvement section)
  - Each functional area of the health center should review applicable sections
  - Review all of the questions for that section – run through samples and work on best answers - don't let review questions take you by surprise
  - Include all staff members, not just management
- Ensure that you meet deadlines for sending documents to Review Team

# Preparing for the Site Visit – Board’s Role

- Review the three Program Requirements (#17-19) that apply directly to the health center’s Board of Directors (Board authority, Board composition, Conflict of Interest Policy)
  - Prepare sample responses
  - Know the Board “calendar” – what the Board has done throughout the last year and when those activities were performed

# During the Site Visit

- Put your best foot forward at all times and don't assume that your program will get the benefit of the doubt
- Ask questions while the Review Team is on-site & don't miss opportunities to clarify or add something that you forgot
- Actively provide information to reviewers throughout the review
- Have accessible, accurate, easy-to-understand information available
  - Keep documentation for certain areas together in folders / binders
  - Don't make the reviewers dig for information

# During the Site Visit

- Make sure that you are answering the questions that are asked
  - Don't go off on tangents
  - Be accurate
  - Focus your responses on the keys to the question
  - Ask the reviewer to clarify or be more specific when necessary
  - During exit interview, ask for rationale behind proposed findings – and don't let Review Team members leave unless all findings are discussed, all issues are clarified, and all health center questions are answered!

# During the Site Visit – Board's Role

- Board members should be available for both the entrance conference and the exit interview, to the extent possible
  - At a minimum, Board chair and other Executive Committee members should be available
- Review Team will meet separately with the Board members, to the extent that they are available, to discuss whether the Board is meeting Program Requirements #17-19

# After the Site Visit

- If you disagree with one or more findings of non-compliance discussed at the exit interview, contact your Project Officer immediately to discuss before findings become final
- Review carefully the Review Team's report as soon as it arrives
  - If you disagree with one or more findings of non-compliance, contact your Project Officer immediately
  - Start to prepare responses to non-compliance ("not met") findings, even if you disagree with them

# After the Site Visit

- Upon receipt of the NoA from HRSA, review grant conditions
  - Ensure all conditions are consistent with Review Team’s findings of non-compliance
  - Ensure conditions are based on legal requirements rather than areas of performance improvement
- Develop official response to grant conditions that are based on non-compliance findings
  - If you disagree with finding, if finding is inaccurate, or if finding is based on “performance improvement” recommendation, point that out in the response
  - Submit the response within the allotted time period

# After the Site Visit – Board’s Role

- Review with the management team any non-compliance findings discussed at the exit interview that involve the three governance requirements
- Review applicable parts of the Review Team’s report
- Review management’s official response to grant conditions based on non-compliance findings
  - As applicable, review and approve new policies, *etc.*, developed as part of the official response
  - Pay particular attention to governance requirements

# Final Thoughts ...

- **Do Not:**
  - Assume reviewers are your friends
  - Make flippant comments to reviewers
  - Be argumentative
  - Bury your head in the sand
  - Wait until last day of response period to respond to grant conditions
- **Do:**
  - Be polite and professional
  - Be assertive and clear
  - Ask questions for clarity and if it isn't reached, move up the chain of command
  - Leave your ego at home

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