

Notes from MTARS Teleconference

June 29, 2004

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States participating:

CA, DE, PA, IL, CO, CT, SD, NY, MO, HI, MI, AK, VA, Puerto Rico, OR, MD, AL, NE, TX, ND, IA, TN, WI, Karen Flippo, Susan Madison, Sheryl Matney

Note: the format of the conference call was panel presentation.

Mary Gordon, Executive Director from Nebraska will share her experiences and recommendations as an MTARS Pilot state.

Becky Harker, Executive Director from Iowa will share her experiences and recommendations as an MTARS Team Peer Reviewer.

The Colorado Council finished their MTARS review this month and will share their perspective and experiences through the following staff members: Marna Ares, Planner; and Anna Huff, Fiscal Manager.

Lynette Swinford, Fiscal Manager for the Tennessee Council will share her perspective as an MTARS review was conducted in 2003.

Joanna Cordry, Program Grants Manager from Texas will share her perspective as an MTARS Pilot State.

What to Sweat

“Wow” the review team with the DD Network presentation.

Make sure your interviewees are comfortable with the subject matter.

Make sure your documentation is well organized – organized paper documentation is essential because the MTARS reviewers want to spend time with people face-to-face and the more organized the paperwork is—its helpful.

Use sample questions to potential interviewees – these can be found in the MTARS manual.

TIP – write sample answers for the council members in an effort to raise their comfort level of having a handle of the subject matter of the questions.

An MTARS review takes a lot of planning. DD Network executives should meet regularly a couple of months prior to the MTARS visit.

TIP – work together on a collaborative Network presentation instead of 3 separate presentations....thus the demonstration of collaboration.

Draft sample questions for the Designated State Agency representative...make sure there is an understanding of what an MTARS review is and make sure there is good communication about the interview. Many times, the DSA will not have the standard representative available during an MTARS, make sure you know who the representative will be for the interview and meet with them face-to-face to review the sample questions.

What to Sweat - program planning perspective

All staff should help prepare for the visit. Go by the checklist in the MTARS guide.

Have your documentation that was used to build your Program Performance Report (PPR) and any state amendments accessible and well organized.

Use an outcome reporting template to show outcomes from grantees.

Make a concerted effort to prepare grantees for any site-visits and interviews. Make sure you tell them the reason for the MTARS review and that they should be ready to tell any reviewer about the benefit of Council funds.

Idea - Utilize video conferencing during the public forum.

What to Sweat - Fiscal perspective

Reviewers asked open ended questions. There were a lot of questions that related to process. For example.. "What process does the council use in determining individual contract match?"

Have a chart of accounts available and know your process of utilizing funds from specific years of allotments.

Think through all your financial processes.

Be prepared to talk about the Council's involvement in all financial aspects...do they approve the budget, how is money budgeted? Etc.

Have your filing caught up!

Be prepared to explain fiscal reports that are presented to Council members....know what purpose they serve and know how staff uses it and how members use the reports.

Be prepared to explain the contracting process – who is involved in the process.

Time studies of current Council staff are very important to justify what staff activities are administrative in nature and what activities staff is performing that is in the State Plan goals.

Be aware of how you/your DSA completes the 269 and ADD-02 forms.

What to Sweat - Team Peer Reviewer perspective

MTARS team composition may dictate what the theme may be.

Please tell the truth – don't "try to pull the wool over the team's eyes".

Network collaboration is a MUST. At a minimum there should be at least one planned activity that all network members plan and participate in one of the areas of emphasis.

TIP – some reviewers suggest that there be a Memorandum of Understanding signed by all three network members....this is not reflected as a compliance item within the DD Act.

Many reviewers are "hammering" increased diversity among Councils...beyond reflecting the States population/representation.

There is a difference between DD Act Compliance and Best Practice...***always go back to the DD Act for compliance issues.***

Most reviewers look at how individuals with DD are engaged in Council activities. Make sure there is adequate activity and compliance with the self-advocacy goal which is part of the DD Act.

Be able to talk about Council activities having outcomes for people with DD

Systems Change - make sure your activities are leading towards some type of systems change. Reviewers want to see how the Council is moving things forward based on the activities they are funding.

On the note of governance, make sure the Council Chairperson is prepared to talk about how they were informed of their role in conducting the performance appraisal of the Executive Director, make sure they are aware of who at the DSA is responsible for the performance review documents, make sure your Chair knows their responsibilities as a supervisor of the Executive Director.

As far as records are concerned, the most important documents are the State Plan, the Program Performance Report and the By-Laws.

Council by-laws are referenced a lot...with regard to reviewers going back to the governance documents, ensuring that Council's are operating and abiding by their by-laws.

What not to sweat...

Don't clean, no need to dust...most of the time the reviewers are in the conference room scheduled for the meetings anyway.

Sweat everything....that way you're not caught off guard!

Put a schedule together, find out if your team leader is agenda driven...make sure your people scheduled for interviews can be flexible...sometimes things get off schedule.

Breathing a sigh of relief...It's OVER!

The last day may be a let down...the reviewers have talked to the Council all week long so nothing should be a "surprise" in the exit interview. In fact most of the items in the exit interview are likely to have been heard before during the week.

When the formal report comes to the Council, it is a good idea to get in touch with the MTARS team leader to get clarification on what the Council's response, if any, should be. There may be an expectation from ADD that a response would be desired regarding recommendations (there is an expectation that a response be made regarding compliance issues).

Do not forget about the Technical Assistance Contract through NACDD (funded by ADD) for any areas of concerns, or recommendations.

Panelists were not aware of standard follow-up from ADD regarding recommendations made during the MTARS visit.

TIP – All recommendations should be based on the DD Act.

Open questions:

What is a time study?

It is a tool used to map a staff's day. All Council staff should take part, map your day every 15 minutes...you then percentile out so that each position is averaged on what amount of work is administrative and what amount of staff time is spent on Council State Plan Goals. This assists Councils in determining 70/30 allocation and gives a solid framework of documentation to use in costing out administrative time vs. plan activity time.

Who selects the grantees to be interviewed by the MTARS team?
The Council selects...

How long does a Council have to keep documentation?

Whatever your state requires

How did the MTARS team assess systems change?

They looked at activities the Council was spending money in and wanted to see where the Council was moving towards in spending those funds. In other words...what is the Council activity leading towards?

Disability vs. Developmental Disability – is this a big issue for MTARS reviews?

This has not been an issue in all states. Check the DD Act...the DD act does not prohibit activities for individuals without DD.

Is everything done in one location?

Depends on the state. For larger states, there may be some travel.

What are the consequences of a bad MTARS?

ADD will work with the Council.

How do states validate their data?

Keep track of outcomes with grantee reporting

How far in advance does a Council get notice of an MTARS?

These answers ranged from many months to at least 1 month.

Who is the lead on the MTARS – Federal or Regional?

Federal personnel 90% of the time based on the states who have received MTARS

Helpful Hints

Put a presentation together that is state specific “What does (insert your state) look like. It would be helpful to MTARS reviewers to see some demographics on the state, size of the state, population make-up...etc.

Don't expect an easy week...its long and hard!

It's OK to repeat questions back to the MTARS Reviewer...ask the member to repeat the question in a different way to make sure you understood the question.

Questions that people remembered...

Has any of the Council's work in grants been replicated?