**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Maximizing the Monitoring Process**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Without further ado I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Virginia Hamilton, regional administrator, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Virginia?

VIRGINIA HAMILTON: Thank you, Jon. Well, I am super excited to be here today. Jon didn't say is there was 1350 people who signed up for this webinar, so clearly, there's a huge interest in monitoring across the country and I love people's introductions. We got a hi from the big sky of Montana. We got greetings from the beautiful state of Iowa. So keep those comments coming in. We have workforce development boards, state agencies, community colleges, non-profits, just a really broad range of people on the phone and we're really, really thrilled to have you here with us.

So I started my career in about 1905 (sic) in the workforce system in a job service office in the state of California. And my first – we were in an agricultural area, and in my first month on the job, I noticed that my co-workers were starting to pack up boxes with applications. We had – back in those days before the Internet and other electronic services – we had paper applications that people would fill out when they came in the door.

And my co-workers for a couple of days were going through files, picking out applications and putting them in boxes, and then carrying them out to a garage that we had on the property in the back. And I couldn't contain my curiosity any longer and finally one day said, what's going on here? What are you doing? And someone said to me, oh, well the monitors are coming on Monday and so we're making sure that we don't have any of these applications that they can look at.

So clearly we had a mutual understanding, both the monitors and the people being monitored, but the purpose of monitoring was that they were going to find out stuff that we did wrong. And we didn't want them to see anything that was wrong. So we were literally pulling out applications that we didn't want the monitors to look at.

Frankly, that story has stuck with me. I've been with the Department of Labor for five years now, but I've worked both at the state and the local levels, and I was always perturbed by that story and the notion that monitors were there to find out things that were wrong. And over the years I've experienced times when monitors would come out and find things that were wrong that we didn't know were wrong. We didn't know we were doing anything wrong. And no one had ever provided us any technical assistance.

So when I came to the Department of Labor one of my goals here was to make sure that we were really monitoring in a way that, of course, found out if there's things that were wrong. We're stewards of the public dollar, as are many of you who work for state agencies or local agencies that have subrecipients, but our responsibility's also to make sure that people know how to do things right and that we're not just going out and saying "gotcha" (sic).

So the genesis of this webinar today was to really step back from the details of monitoring and to think about the fundamental purpose of monitoring and how it interrelates with technical assistance. We're going to cover why monitoring's important, what we're up against, and what could be instead. And then ways that we can prepare, be on the monitoring site and do follow up after the visit.

So this webinar is not going to provide new monitoring guidance for WIOA. So like they say on Southwest Airlines, if you're – this plan is going to Dallas and if you're not planning on going to Dallas, now would be an excellent time to get off the plane. If you signed up for this webinar in order to get all the new details for monitoring for WIOA, you can just sign off now, we won't care. We won't also give you new checklists or tools.

This webinar really is to step back from the details and to talk about what monitoring is at its essence and if you've been monitoring for years, I think what you'll learn today is either that you're doing everything right and you can congratulate yourself or that there's some things that you actually could do to step back and reevaluate how you do your monitoring, whether it's preparation in person or afterwards. And if you're a new person doing monitoring, this is a great opportunity to learn to think about ways to prepare and participate and document the monitoring that you do.

We did a full-day class here in Region 6. We had about 120 people come. There were program monitors and physical monitors. I actually saw a couple of peoples' names who were in that one-day session, you guys get gold stars because you're also here on the webinar. And so we hope that this will provide some food for thought, some new small tips about how you might do the monitoring and technical assistance that you do, and really also be able to use this webinar afterwards.

As Jon said you can either download the PowerPoint, but you'll also be able to hear this webinar in a couple of days. And really convene your own monitors: The physical monitors, program monitors and really talk together about your strategy for program oversight in a way that is perhaps a little more strategic than what you've been able to do in the past.

So I think we first want to find out who's on the webinar and we think we have, Jon, a poll here. If you could just write in what your job is. Why are you on this webinar? What's your role? And we'll just take a minute to see what the results are of that. I love that there are six people – oh, eight people who are curious about the topic.

So a lot of people who provide program monitoring, quite a few also physical. Some of you may be people who are the recipients of monitors who come into your program as well. OK. Great. That's – it's not everybody, we have about 500 people on this call right now, but it gives us a little sense of how to focus our remarks.

So what I'm going to do right now is I'm going to turn this over to Amy Landesman. Amy is a – I met Amy many years ago in New York City. I have great admiration for the kinds of work she does. She's provided capacity building and technical assistance to probably thousands of workforce development professionals over the years and she has worked with us to develop this webinar and I'm going to ask Amy to take it away.

AMY LANDESMAN: Thanks, Virginia. And thanks for framing this conversation so wonderfully. Good morning everyone and good afternoon. It's great to see people from all over the country, as Virginia said, and from all different kinds of environments and work environments. And I echo everything Virginia said about what this is about, what this conversation will be about, but also the importance of monitoring.

And so just to kind of jump right in, yeah, monitoring is a requirement that we're all operating under. But I think that there's more than just – or it should be more than just being a requirement. And in fact, one thing I want to share from the day-long event that Virginia mentioned was how we kind of launched the conversation, because I think it's an important way to just get us to start thinking about why monitoring's important.

And with this size group and over webinar being more challenging to do, so I'm just going to tell you a little bit about it, but our opening activity was one where I asked the group to think about – and I'll ask you to think about this as well – if monitoring was a service that people paid for instead of it being a requirement, how would you advertise that? If you actually charged for your monitoring services, what would you say to those who receive the monitoring for them to understand the benefit?

And it was actually a great activity because, one, I asked people to do more of an advertising campaign, so we definitely, right from the start, got to see that those who provide monitoring services have a great sense of humor and can be quite talented and creative in how they highlight or emphasize the benefits of monitoring. But it also got everyone thinking about what are the benefits.

And I think before we even get into how to create a more meaningful monitoring experience, we do have to take a step back and we have to think about what are the benefits for monitoring so that we can, from both perspectives, from those who are doing the monitoring and those who are receiving monitoring services. Hopefully it will unify us somewhat in the goal of providing the best services to our customers, which, I think, is where we're kind of all aiming for.

So let's take that step back and look at what are some of the reasons why monitoring is important. And some of these may seem really obvious but I think we need to remember this, too, when we're having conversations, again, rather you're providing the monitoring or you're receiving the monitoring services. We're all in this, we have time limited grants and opportunities to provide the services that we'd like to our customers.

And we all know that there is a point where if we can provide early intervention, perhaps we can stop or alleviate or lessen and reduce some challenges that we might face. So if we have monitoring before we can provide those early interventions. We can be preventative and we can be proactive instead of waiting. I keep thinking of monitoring or I keep thinking of the course of our grants as kind of if we're operating under a red light, yellow light, green light, we want to have these interventions. We want to be able to talk to each other before we get to that red light. So we want to be preventative and proactive.

Monitoring – and we'll talk about this further – it may not be perceived that way but I'd truly like to believe that it's actually not just a compliance opportunity, it's a coaching and training opportunity as well. And it's an opportunity to have stronger or even better working relationships and partnerships with each other. There's definitely this theme of that monitoring is about compliance. And hopefully by the end of this conversation we'll dispel that a little bit that, of course, there's a compliance component to it, but it is really more than that. And I think one of the goals is to really build stronger relationships between the monitor and those receiving monitoring services.

It's also a – a lot of grantees, whether you're a new grantee or maybe it's you've had funding before but it's a new grant, a lot of times we don't know what we don't know. And so there's a lot of instances where grantees may be operating in a certain way or providing a certain service or just going along with something that they've always done just because for no other reason then that's how they've always done it.

So it may not even be that they recognize that this is a problem. And so I think, again, if we're going to be proactive, monitoring is a way to address problems that grantees may not even know that they have. It's also, again, really important if we – and again whether you're on the monitoring side or you're a grantee, data is a critical, critical part of these grants, it's how we look at and how the grant is progressing and how the services offered are being delivered, but data alone cannot tell the whole story.

You need observations, you need conversations, you need an analysis and we're going to talk about – again, think about a statistic without context. So if I tell you 47 percent is good, is that good or not good? It's all about the context. So while you can monitor from afar and look at data, I don't think data alone can tell the whole story.

Monitoring is also an opportunity to provide resources and I don't know that that's always – that the perception is there that it's an opportunity to learn and grow and obtain new information as well. You know, thinking back to Virginia's opening story, that was clearly something about we have to get through this.

We have to get through this and keep quiet as much as we can; keep cover as much as we can versus here's an opportunity actually for us to get something out of it as well. I think finally that monitoring also can drive continuous improvement. It's a way for programs, for grants, to grantees, to look at what are they doing and perhaps if there's other ways that they need to be doing it, better or different, but it drives continuous improvement.

So for those of you who provide monitoring services, I've spoken to many grantees, I've worked with many grantees, in addition to providing capacity building and training, as I've been a coach with grantees for different Department of Labor funded initiatives, and in talking to grantees I've asked them, like, what are the perceptions of monitoring visits.

And I'm going to warn you; this is not a pretty list but this is what's out there. There's this idea that monitoring visits are a punitive or monitors are detached or perhaps they're not familiar with the grantee or they're not really sure how the programs work; they know just a little bit and they're making assumptions.

There's definitely a perception that monitors don't really understand how challenging the outcomes are or the performance expectations are, or even how challenging the population may be and that could be working with young adults, working with dislocated workers, working with re-entry – returning citizens.

I mean, that there's this idea that monitors may not understand the population. If we're all about work, there's this perception that monitors may not understand how difficult it is to engage employer, to engage the community. Again, different areas whether it's rural, suburban, urban setting, but it's difficult to engage different members of the community.

There's this idea that monitors only care about the science (ph) or that they're not really there to help or advise. There's this feeling of we're looking for the problems. You got to find something, that monitors have to write up something. It can't be perfect so there's got to be something.

And finally, there's this idea that positive is not highlighted, success isn't and what we're doing well is not highlighted. Now, I warned you that this is not a pretty list but I do think the perceptions are out there. I think that this is what we're kind of up against and if I had to kind of have this overlying or overarching theme in these perceptions, it's that monitoring is about kind of that gotcha moment.

Again, going back to Virginia's opening story, if monitoring is perceived as, we're trying to find something and we're trying to hide something, there's this idea of looking for that gotcha moment. And so that's sort of what we're up against, but what could it be?

So kind of taking it to the next step, if we really think about partnership building when we're talking about monitoring, it can really – we can strengthen that. We can build relationships. We can really work together towards that unified goal to be a steward of the taxpayers' dollars, as Virginia said, but to also be a strong of a program or a grant as possible to serve our customers in the best way.

Monitors can also be thought of as subject matter experts versus just compliance officers. Monitors can be a source for resources or referrals or even match making of other entities around the country who are doing the same kind of work. Again, monitors can be that opportunity to start the continuous improvement process. Hopefully they can be seen as being able to provide coaching or training as well.

Monitors can come in with that eye and act in that role of assessment, which we'll talk about a little bit, of how monitors can take on that – (inaudible) – we'll talk about that in a little bit, but they can take on that role of what's working, what isn't. They can even have a part in a strategic planning. Now, obviously monitors can't take the lead and I'm not advocating that they take the lead on a strategic planning process, that's not in their scope of work.

But they certainly can participate and be a thought partner in that. And certainly they can, in addition to the match making I just mentioned, monitors can share models of best practices and lessons learned around the country and kind of provide those opportunities. But monitors can also allow a grantee to become a model of best practice. They're the ones who can highlight them as well and say, oh, you should hear what so and so is doing.

So just something to think about. Like, we're up against this. This is real. And so for those of you who are providing monitoring services, this is sort of out there and hopefully we can work against some of those perceptions. And for those of you who also are receiving monitoring services we'll hope that you can be open-minded so that the relationship can be different than just the left column.

So moving forward I wanted to just share with you really quickly that in Region 6 a while back they did a three-month development detail that explored ways to improve the monitoring process. Interviews were conducted with monitors and grantees, over 20 of them, and it resulted in several findings actually and as well as a model to move forward to the monitoring process. And I want to share a little bit of that with you.

So one of the things that they found was this model or they developed this kind of model overview, which we'll highlight some of our conversation as well, of this idea of moving forward: What can we do in kind of area one on hour, what can we do to prevent the frequent findings that happen before the monitoring?

In other words, what can we do before the monitoring visit to prevent some of the challenges that grantees might face? Also, what can we do during? How do we maximize the benefits of the visit, both for the grantee and for the monitor? How can we do on the monitoring visit and concentrate on what matters? And finally, what happens after the monitoring visit? How can we learn, share, and adjust for now and for next time as well? How do we keep that partnership going strong?

So that's a kind of model to frame the rest of our conversation a bit. I wanted to start us off with, well, what can we do ahead of time? How do we prepare for the visit? So just quickly, I wanted to go back to the Region 6 study for a second. And if you look at the five key activity areas that occur during a monitoring visit, look at where – and this was for both discretionary and formula grantees – but if you look at where the majority of the findings were, they're in areas two and three, which are the program and grant management systems and the financial management system.

And you can see slightly different numbers but general themes are the same, that the findings were a majority in activity two and three versus four and five, the service, product delivery and performance accountability areas. So you can't help but wonder when you look at this table, well, how many of these administrative findings could be addressed or even prevented ahead of the visit.

And then, along those same lines, of areas four and five, the product, delivery and performance accountability, that's often where the core success and challenges of program lies. Wouldn't it be more productive if we spent more of our time on the monitoring visits in those areas and maybe some of those areas that have been found in areas two and three, maybe some of those could be addressed prior to the visit?

So what can be submitted and reviewed ahead of time? Well, I mean, there's quite a few areas and I'm sure many of you, if you're in regular conversations with your monitors, if you're a grantee or if you're a monitor in conversations with your grantee, I'm sure many of you have shared some materials and some areas you've talked about before the visit.

But let's look at what can be submitted ahead of time. Clearly, there's no reason why work plans need to be reviewed at the site visit, at the monitoring visit, unless perhaps there was something you need to dig deeper in.

But in general, these can be submitted ahead of time and reviewed and then this way the monitor has time to look and see if there's questions or things they need to follow up on. Same thing with policies and procedures. This is something that can be reviewed ahead of time and even comments offered so that the grantee is prepared to address them. And MOUs –

MS. HAMILTON: Let me just cut in there. That is –

MS. LANDESMAN: Of course.

MS. HAMILTON: – (inaudible). As a recipient of monitoring, I spent probably two days in one of the monitoring visits that I had when I worked for the State, where the monitor asks for all that stuff on site and then sat and read for two days. I mean, really, what was the point of being – coming out and spending the money and the time to read the document they could have read before they got there.

MS. LANDESMAN: Absolutely. And that's an excellent point. If we're going to agree to do this we both have to agree. We have to agree to submit it and we have to agree to review it because that is very frustrating, of course, and, so, yeah, excellent point. And a lot of these things on the list and the next slide should be accessible and available for the grantee to provide ahead of time fairly easily because they should have been developed already.

So MOU's are easy enough to submit and have reviewed ahead of time. Marketing materials is a big one as well and this could be flyers, brochures, any kind of promotional materials to a variety of audiences: It could be to the participants, it could be to employers, it could be to referral partners or community members, but, again, all of that could be thought out ahead of time and submitted ahead of time; financial reports as well; performance data, both scheduled data and real-time data.

Again, depending on the grant, the monitor of the grantee, access may vary but actual and real-time data could be submitted ahead of time. Or data even above and beyond the requirements that the monitor might be interested in looking at ahead of time could be submitted. Surely program models, whether it's written narratives or visual program flow models or descriptions, all of that could be submitted ahead of time.

Meeting minutes – and that can be, again, a variety of minutes: It could be for employer advisory panel, it could be board meetings, community meetings, depending on the different grant, what kind of meetings might occur or how they're labeled, but all of those minutes you have them and they could be submitted ahead of time.

And to Virginia's point, again, they can be – they should – if they're submitted, we want to have – if we're willing to knock out some of those perceptions, we're going to have read them ahead of time as well.

MS. HAMILTON: And –

MS. LANDESMAN: And this could be ongoing not just right before the visit.

MS. HAMILTON: Amy, there's a question. "What do you mean by work plans?" And I think we're talking about both formula grants and discretionary grants, so if you're monitoring a formula grant there might be an actual formal state or local plan that you're looking at. If it's a discretionary grant it might be a scope of work or a work plan that was related to that grant.

MS. LANDESMAN: Yeah. Thanks for clarifying that. Yeah. So if we're going to ask grantees to submit these materials ahead of time and review ahead of time, what can monitors do ahead of time as well? Again, if we're trying to minimize maybe some of those findings or some of that time on site that is spent, as Virginia pointed out, reading, what can monitors do as well? Well, what can we offer?

So a great suggestion that I heard too was that several monitors have created kind of a toolbox for grantees. So that could include targeted letters and letters could be email blast or snail-mail letters or – but reminding grantees of policies, either existing policies that area important for that particular grant or even new policies that are changing or being amended or coming up. Just sending out blasts saying, hey, this is coming out and here's how it might affect you; tip sheets as well.

So going back to the marketing materials, if you submit – you can send tip sheets out saying make sure your marketing materials acknowledge Department of Labor is your funding source. Make sure – again, I see a lot of site visits where grantees are experiencing that gotcha moment on something on their marketing materials. So, well, that could be prevented.

And so grantees could submit ahead of time but monitors can also provide tip sheets and these tip sheets can go out to a large portfolio of grantees all at the same time. It could be email blast or even webinars or trainings such as this. Now, again, this particular conversation is more about maximizing the monitoring process, but a webinar like this could be easily conducted to offer tips to the grantees as well.

MS. HAMILTON: And we, in Region 6, talked about and started to think about just sending out a letter when we're sending out our – when we send out our letter saying we're coming, just attach something that says, you know what, these are the top ten things that we find when we typically go out and monitor. The EEO poster is up on the wall –

MS. LANDESMAN: Yeah.

MS. HAMILTON: – but more importantly there's not a good EEO process in place or your marketing material doesn't mention DOL or whatever it is; those small administrative details that often end up in findings. It's not cheating to tell grantees what they should be doing before we go to look at it. We are not – our job is not to go out and collect as many findings as possible. Our job is to make sure we're stewards of the public dollar and that we're helping our programs deliver the best possible services we can.

MS. LANDESMAN: That's – absolutely. And chances are top ten things, at least a couple of them are going to resonate with the grantee and say, oh, I can prevent this. So again, if we're trying to be preventative and proactive, that's a great strategy to get the word out ahead of time about what other grantees are experiencing. So and again, going back to a lot of times the grantee doesn't know it's a problem, but if they see it on that list, there's an opportunity.

So what needs to be part of the planning for that onsite visit on the part of the monitor itself? So couple of questions to ask yourself. What do I have already? What have I – has been submitted? What have I reviewed? What do I have? What do I still need? What else do I need? And then this way I can make sure that they know that I still need to look at this.

Certainly, I want to review that performance data that I have available to me and I want to think to myself, like what are some hunches I may have and what do I need to follow up on. Again, I'm not making any assumptions that this is the case but I have some hunches that the data is telling me a story, I need to verify this story.

What do I need to also share with them in advance? So this is where that top ten list can be really helpful. What do I need to let them know so that they are prepared for the visit? I want to to think through and let them know as well, what do I need to see and who do I need to see? Who might I need to speak to and interview?

And then for myself, I also want to think about what specific questions will I have for different people. If you think about this list that I might want to see and it's not limited to this list, of course, of leaders, of finance folks and program folks and community partners and employers, and even participants, but I want to think through in advance what kinds of questions or what kinds of conversations I might want to have with each.

So again, and sharing that with the grantee will again be very helpful because if a grantee – think about it from the grantee's perspective: If they have to let an employer or community member or participant know, you know our monitors are coming we'd love for you to meet with them, it would be great if they could let them know, OK, they're going to talk to you about this.

So it would be great for the grantee to be able to say to employer, this is what we're hoping you'll address or this is what they'll probably ask you. So the more you think about it and pass that on is great. I think it's also important for monitors to think about what technical assistance they may offer. So if I know that they're having some challenges, if I know that they're having some challenges around what – in a certain area, what can I bring? And then what resources or best practices might I share.

So you got to get the theme of this, the idea is what do we need to do beforehand? So let me take a moment to pause here and ask all of you, which ones apply for you? How many of these do you currently practice? It might be that you ask for materials in advance. It might be that you review them in advance to provide feedback. You're regularly communicating with grantees about expectations.

You've maybe developed some technical assistance strategies and check all that apply, please. Or maybe this has just gotcha thinking about some new things. So it looks like we've got a little bit of everything here. I'm glad to see that this got quite a few people thinking about some new things, and it looks like people are asking for materials in advance and reviewing them in advance, so that's terrific. And it looks like the results are still coming in, but I'm glad to see all across the board each of these replies (ph) are being acknowledged, so that's terrific. So I'm going to move forward on this.

So what happens – and this is kind of the meat of the matter of what we want to talk about with you is, what happens once we're at the visit? So I think the first thing is managing expectations, and this kind of aligns with it – the previous conversation, of course hopefully our expectations are discussed prior to the call, but – I mean prior to the visit whether it was over an email or a phone call on the top ten list, but I still think it's a good way to start off on the right foot.

And just quickly I want to liken it a doctor's office. If you think about it and if you have a doctor's appointment and you go to the doctor and they tell you – you sign in and you're in the waiting room and 90 minutes go by, clearly you're frustrated. Now, again, you're still there, right, but you're frustrated, probably upset. Now, imagine the same example when you go, you check in and the person who signs you in says, we've had an emergency, it's going to be about a 90-minute wait, and what would you like to do?

You could go get a cup of coffee, you could reschedule, you could wait, but you've got choices. Now, I use that example because you're probably still upset that it's a 90-minute wait but that person managed your expectations, knew what to expect and right away you're defused of it. I think monitoring visits are the same way. The more we can share expectations, the more the grantee understands or knows what they can expect. How long's it going to take? What's going to happen?

So what are some of the things that we should do to help manage expectations? Well, we certainly should go over what's the purpose of the visit. We should go over the scope of what will be covered? Who should attend? Now, we mapped it out before but it's a good reminder about who should be attending and what section. We don't want the employers there the whole time, but when and who should they attend. What are you looking for? What are the successes?

And again, it's not just the gotchas. You're looking for successes. You're looking for challenges. You're looking for gaps, even best practices. Certainly, you might want to share with your grantee what's your style. Your style may be – again, it may not be open for change, but just sharing, like I'm pretty directive or maybe I have a more formal approach or an informal approach; maybe funny or, I want you there the whole time, or I like to work alone, or I like when you ask questions throughout or I'd rather you ask questions at the end.

Again, I'm not here to critique your style but I think it's a great way to manage expectations by sharing what your style is and knowing your style as well. You also want to share what are going to be the next steps. If this is the first time inside a monitoring visit I may not know what to expect on the visit or after the visit.

The main thing here is that communication is critical. It's critical for the visit and it's critical for the ongoing relationship. It lays the groundwork for the relationship. I think it's really important to remember that monitoring is not a perfect science and that it's part art, part science and that we just need to pay attention to the – our communication. It's our foundation. It's really not possible to gather full-on information from just the reports or even on site.

If it's not a partnership and the grantee doesn't feel like it's a safe environment to be open; if they're not being transparent – go back to Virginia's story – they're hiding materials or they're feeling threatened or defensive, it's going to be very hard to get full information or the full picture. So positive relationships, they lead to more communication, they lead to more transparency, which allows you to really dig deeper and kind of figure out what's going on.

So what are the key roles for monitors? Well, I think there's three key roles and I'll quickly highlight each of these: The first being relationship builder, subject matter, expert and driver of continuous improvement. So what do we mean by each of these? Well, the relationship builder, I mean it's important, and this may sound simplistic, but we have to really – if we go back to the perceptions this may not be the perception. So we need to look at how are we going through this?

Or how are we doing this so that this is – we're building a strong relationship? So yes, we need to be professional. We need to follow protocol. We need to be prepared. I think the most important ones on these slides are – this area being respectful, going back to those perceptions. We acknowledge that there are complex challenges faced by the staff and in the programs, in the funding and managing performance.

And at the same time, not only acknowledge that there are challenges and that this is a difficult perhaps grant, but also that the staff and the managers have expertise in this area; that they may know what they're doing as well. There's this idea that a monitor comes in and kind of observes the visit, makes a couple comments, but they're not in it day in and day out; or that they're not heard or acknowledged that they have expertise.

Certainly, we want to be responsive as well. I don't think monitors are the only ones guilty to do this, but if we're not responsive, we don't meet deadlines and yet we expect it of those we monitor, that that does not really build a strong relationship.

Monitors are also the subject matter expert. There's the idea that they're well-versed in policies, both federal, state and local, but also that they're well versed in innovative practices and best practices, and in a variety of areas, whether it's governance, service delivery, performance, and even workforce development.

MS. HAMILTON: And I think –

MS. LANDESMAN: So there's an opportun- – go ahead.

MS. HAMILTON: No. I'm just going to jump in here because there are two questions that relate to this I want to cover. One is –

MS. LANDESMAN: Great.

MS. HAMILTON: – the monitors often re-monitor. So if monitors are helpers or experts, how can they avoid monitoring the results of their help or monitoring themselves which might not be totally neutral? I think we have to remember that we're talking about for the purposes of the monitoring, that is either physical or – are people following the law or not, that's not actually very subjective.

I mean, we should know when there's something that the grantee is not doing in compliance with the law or regulations. When we talk about best practices, because another question was: I'm a grantee looking to do better, we've asked for examples of exemplary policies regarding what might work or not work but we're often redirected to a TEGL or a statute, is there a better way to find these resources?

We really like examples; even bad examples are helpful if we know what makes them bad. I think the point here that Amy's making and in answer to both of these questions is that, when we're talking about program design, when we're talking about good outcomes, pointing people to other programs that you know work well is not – there's nothing wrong with that.

We're trying to help people design and deliver the best services possible and get the best outcomes for our customers. We don't want to tell people something that's not accurate or correct in the law or regulations, but a lot of what we're looking at are – and Amy's going to talk about this is a minute – are more sort of program design root causes. You know if you're a college who isn't really designing for job placement, they're designing for student success, that's not a law or regulation, that's just giving good advice to people about how to change their mindset.

So just want to make that comment at this point because I think there have been, over the years, sort of fear that if you give people an example of where someone's doing good work or if you give people advice and somehow there's something wrong with that and I just can't figure out what that would be.

MS. LANDESMAN: Yeah. No, absolutely. And that's where we – monitors can take on that third role, too, of just continuous improvement. So it's not only identifying best practices but even potential risks and be careful of this. And so that information, that technical assistance it just supports continuous improvement.

And that kind of is a nice segue into another thing I want to address is this idea of are we a monitor or are we a coach and, again, some grants have both. I mentioned before that I grant – I'm a coach to several grantees and for one Department of Labor grant and, so, what's the difference, and can you be both if something were often asked? And I mean, the most simplistic definition would be that monitors – the idea that they focused on compliance and the grantee did something or didn't do something.

And I think of the example of like a policies and procedures. If you're monitoring it, you kind of say, OK, you have it or you don't. Coaching, on the other hand, is focusing on training, advising or guiding them towards obtaining their goals. It can be more supportive. So going back to the policies and procedures, that might be thinking through the ramifications of certain program flow or getting into the weed more about a model.

Now, the question that we're often asked is, can you be both? And I would say, and then if I was in front of you I'd poll you all and say, I would say we can. I think the clear thing is that monitors have to be clear with the grantee on when they must focus on compliance versus training or supporting, and be clear when there's wiggle room. So there's certain things that if you have it or you don't and then there's certain areas where you can support them on getting to that point of having or not. Just being clear.

I think the most important thing, and where grantees sometimes struggle, is when that person is taking on both roles it's like almost if there's two personalities and the grantee doesn't know which to expect. So I think that's why the first two bullet points are important, is they like, OK, well, right now this is like – there's not really much wiggle room here, you need to have this versus, oh, well, here's an area you can improve. So I think, as long as you're kind of clear on what's a compliance issue, what's a coaching issue, I think you can be both.

So let's take a super quick knowledge check. And so what are the key roles for monitors? Is it A, direction, organization and compliance; B, relationship building, subject matter expert and driver of continuous improvement; C, trainer, knowledge expert and fact checker; or D, guru, therapist and cheerleader. We're going to keep you on your toes and give you about 30 seconds for this one just to see.

MS. HAMILTON: And while you're waiting – while you're doing that, I'm going to answer one more question which is –

MS. LANDESMAN: Great.

MS. HAMILTON: – can in-person monitoring ever be waved? Almost all the information can be monitored electronically, programs already require periodic monitoring using reports, data, validation databases, etcetera. I think the answer is, it depends.

There are certain policies that require in-person monitoring, but frankly if we're in a time of austerity or our funding is getting cut, I think we need to spend more and more time really thinking about how to do better risk analysis so that, for example, here at the Department of Labor we used to have a policy that said you had to visit every state every certain number of years. And we don't have that policy any longer. What we do have – our policy is we need to monitor where there's risk.

Now, one of the risk factors is we haven't been out there in three years. But I think we're at a point if you're a local and your state has a policy that says we need to visit every local board every year, you can't just sort of ignore that, but I think we need to think more carefully now that we have all these tools that we didn't have many years ago.

MS. LANDESMAN: Yes. Absolutely. And while you were answering that question, we broadcast the results and it looks like everyone got that one. A lot – or most everyone got that one. The correct answer was the relationship builder, subject matter expert and driver of continuous improvement. And for those of you who did vote for D, guru, therapist and cheerleader, I'm not saying that that one's wrong either.

So let's look at – and, Jon, we could just remove that poll that would be great. So perfect. So what – when we're on the visit what are some of the skills and strategies that will enhance effective monitoring? Well, it's already come up but assessment is really important. I mean, I think by trade a lot of us are problem solvers by nature but we have to pay attention to knowing the problem before we solve it.

If you have a poor performing or unresponsive program, we might assume that it's because they're lazy or they don't know what they're doing, but, in fact, it could be a variety of reasons. And I just came up with a list here but I mean it could be a lack of training, resources, knowledge; it could be a partnership issue, it could be management, leadership, staffing, capacity. I mean, you could see there's a whole host of potential reasons why there might be a challenge.

And I think, what I really want to highlight here is you can see how they would be solved very differently. So if an organization has a staffing issue, that's very different than a lack of resources or a lack of training or there's a flaw in their program design. So before we jump into problem solving, we have to do an assessment because that would shape how we might assist our grantee. So again, hopefully it's not all of these but it is important to kind of figure out which one it is.

And again, we talked before about the monitoring guide, it's a tool and it's a guideline, but it's not a script. And I think if we go back to perception, we hear these stories of grantees talking about how they're – the monitors just follow the script and follow the guidebook and just page for page and question for question. The truth is the guidebook is written with a lot of closed-ended yes or no questions.

And yes, we need some of those but it's really not efficient and it's really hard to dig deeper and provide that technical assistance and best practice and resource sharing role with just yes-no questions. So I mean if you think about it, there's nothing worse than that person who's like just looking at the stereotype of the monitor who doesn't look up from the guidebook, so we want to avoid that at all costs.

So how are some ways that we can kind of dig deeper? Well, just even in the questioning that we ask. So we kind of mentioned already that there's a lot of closed-ended questions. Those are pretty discreet yes-no questions. For example, like do you fund on-the-job training? What if we went a little further to some open-ended questions then and there's different types of questions: We could consider clarifying questions which are often questions of fact but we go a little bit more.

We get a little more information. We get deeper than the yes-no with more nuts and bolts information. So OK, you offer on-the-job training but in which industries? So we dig a little bit deeper. Probing questions go even deeper and we're trying to understand the rationale or the reason behind something. So we might ask things like why do you think this is the case, or what's another way you might think about this, or what do you think would happen if or what criteria did you use or what was your intention?

Probing questions get the grantee to talk even further and you'll learn a lot of valuable information from that. We can even think about leading questions, which in many ways – so leading questions will suggest the answer or contain the information to be confirmed. Some people think leading questions are maybe a little bit dangerous because we're assuming the answer but they can be useful. Think about the question, if you asked a grantee, how do you deal with such a challenging high case load?

Well, there's a lot of things going on in that question. We're going to find out information about how they manage it. We're also recognizing that the case load might be too high, but we're getting feedback without – you were asking us to talk about on a positive how they manage it not so much complaining or venting. We also can use reflection questions, right? So that's making sure you heard or understood what was said. So it sounds like this, you're repeating back and taking that even a step further, we can summarize. So we're reviewing a whole conversation and next step. Reflection might be on a certain point but summarizing is sort of the bigger picture. So here's how this happened and now we plan on doing such and such.

What we're really trying to get here is the root cause analysis. We're trying to get to the heart of the matter, right? We're trying to figure out what's going on and root cause analysis is an approach for identifying causes of an incident, right, so, the most effective solutions can be implemented. In many ways it answers three basic questions: What's the problem here? Which is like a way to define the issue. Why did it happen?

Which is a way to analyze causes. And what will be done to prevent it from happening again? Which is a way to solve the problem or offer solution. Another way to look at it is if this idea of the weed, if that's the problem, we often see the above the surface, the obvious, the – (inaudible) – the problem. If we're doing a root cause analysis we're digging deeper and that's what we're hoping monitor visits will become, that we're looking at what are some of the underlying causes of below the surface to think about what might be going on here.

And I asked Virginia to kind of give me a few examples that she's seen in her office of where digging deeper turned up something quite interesting or different. And so maybe Virginia you can share one or two.

MS. HAMILTON: Yeah. Just one in the interest of time. We had a situation with one of our grantees here, the performance was really bad and we were, in fact, ready to go out to the state and local area and try to dig deeper to try to figure it out, but the monitor was able just in a phone call to be able to ask a series of questions and realize that the IT person in their shop was being super helpful and it put a little widget or icon on everybody's desktop to help them do their reporting better except that he had or she had written the allorhythmia wrong.

So the people were reporting correctly but the data wasn't getting through to the reports. The IT guy didn't know because they never bothered to talk to the program person. So it's a really good example of trying to ask a whole bunch of questions and dig really deep before you just sort of go, oh, their performance must be bad and maybe it's their program design.

MS. LANDESMAN: Absolutely. And I think that that digging deeper, I mean, the grantee might not have known – going back to my green light, yellow light, red light – it could have gone to red if that conversation hadn't happened. And so what we want to encourage all of you and, again, I mean we could spend a whole day workshop just talking about how to dig deeper and look at examples to dig deeper, but thank you for sharing that short example just to show how we dig deeper. So that's sort of on-the-site visit.

So what happens after the visit? That's actually just as important to continue this conversation and dig deeper; gives you time as a monitor to go back and kind of figure out the process of what you've seen as well as the grantee. So a couple of key things I want to highlight – and this actually could be an entire workshop as well – so I just want to highlight a couple of key points here, but when we look at findings and citations, we want to make sure that they're clear, they're concise and they're judgement free.

We'll talk about how to give feedback even, in a minute, but we also want to be clear on whether it's a finding or an area of concern, because the grantees may not know the difference or – and we want to be clear for ourselves as well. I was – it was shared with me that the five Cs when it comes to follow up and finding citations and I thought this was useful and I wanted to share it with you.

It's important that we look at and we ask ourselves as monitors, can we answer these questions? First, what conditions did we find? What was either missing or incorrect? What was the finding? What are the criteria? This is where you might explain what the criteria should be and give a citation.

Maybe there was compliance issue and something was violated. A compliance violation or maybe there is a goal or performance issue and it's not up to measure, but this is where you list, like performance should be a 70 percent or this compliance number needs to be in compliance with this, a policy.

So this is where you talk about the criteria. We also want to talk about what we think the potential causes are that we observed. So it might be training, it might be documentation, it might be a program design issue, but what do we – what have we observed. What's the conclusion? And then what is the corrective action that is required? So we think about that this should frame how we document and also verbalize findings and citations.

We also want to make sure, again, going back to those perceptions, we want to balance those positives and successes with those negative failures and challenges. And when we're giving feedback we want to think about three things: We want to make sure, what's their motivation? Is it to be critical? Is it to offer – fosters learning and best practices? Is it to save face? We need to pay attention and if you're thinking to yourself, oh, this would help in my personal life, that would be true as well.

We want to check the timing of when we give feedback. Are we giving it at the site visit, are we giving it after? Immediate may be important, but if we're not prepared to be able to talk about the five C's, or the circumstances are an idea, like maybe there's an employer present or staff present, you want to give the feedback to a leader, you want to pay attention to that. We also want to know our audience, like we've gotten to know them a bit.

This is where our communication style, ours and theirs, plays a role. What might be the best way to get feedback? When we think about feedback, again, these are like kind of basic feedback rules but use "I" messages and describe the effect of behavior. We want to invite discussions and we want to discuss alternatives. These tips can be useful on the site visit as well, but giving feedback and how we give it. How we give it is just as important as the feedback we give.

So a couple of final points about the follow-up visit, we want to stay in touch. We want to have regular check-in points. We want to get feedback, either we do it ourselves or a co-worker, but we want to find out how was the site visit. Did we manage expectations? What about our style? Were we clear on our findings? Did we provide best practice? What can be improved? And this can be done in a variety of ways. We also want to think about where can we assist in corrective actions?

So again, we're not going to correct it for them but maybe we can assist in goal setting or offering advice on action planning. We want to think about, are there promising practices, Virginia mentioned. What are the best practices and lessons learned that we can offer? Is there an opportunity to even have the grantee profiled as a best practice? People are very empowered by that.

And finally, we want to think about what technical assistance we offer. Again, going back to what we said earlier, it could be webinars or training. We can be mentors. We can create pure learning opportunities and learning circle. We could share resources and literature that we know of, but we want to think about what technical assistance that we can offer.

Virginia and I were concerned that we had a lot of information and that we would be cutting it close to the wire and it looks like we did cut it pretty much to the end. And so I know Virginia's been monitoring the questions. Are there pressing questions that we should be answering right now, Virginia?

MS. HAMILTON: Yeah. There are a few more I would just like to address. "Where can I locate the monitoring guide? Can I have copy of your guide? Does DOL have a timeframe for updating the resources on our website that has the monitoring toolkits?"

We're moving from WIA to WIOA. We are spending a lot of time at DOL not just changing the words but actually looking at the different provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act compared to WEA and we are writing a new core monitoring guide that can be used in WIOA. And I think, as I said at the beginning of this session, it will be – we are planning on having it done in the fall of what year, you might ask – of this year, the fall of '17.

"Can you list some of the most common findings?" I think that's really different from place to place. The states probably have different kinds of common findings than the regions of the Department of Labor. It might be something you want to ask the agency that monitors you.

We're planning on doing that here in our region.

"And do we have future webinars planned?" Yeah. Absolutely. I mean, it seems like there's a lot of interest in this topic. You're going to have a chance to suggest other webinar topics or give feedback on this webinar in just one minute, but we'd love to do more if that's what you need. Because just like we're asking you, we want to be able to provide technical assistance in a way that will help you get your jobs done better. So with that – oh, and a question, "Can we have your draft copy; it's a work in progress?"

No. Because I'm not even sure at this point that there's a draft copy. We're really – we have a big work group. Just remember in WIOA, it's not just DOL in the game, it's also the Department of Education, HHS, so we're working really not only in DOL but outside with our partners to make sure that we're monitoring the real spirit of the law, which is that we should be working with a whole bunch of other partners, not just ourselves.

We are out of time but we'd love to have you give some feedback to us. I think there's going to be a poll that's coming up here about this webinar. We'd love to do some more if you're interested and we just really appreciate your attention. And thank you to Amy who's done an amazing job for us and we hope to continue to work with her in the future.

MS. LANDESMAN: Thank you very much.

(END)