**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**National Monitoring Training for State Workforce Agencies:**

**The Importance of Collaboration and Communication**

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GRACE MCCALL: And welcome to National Monitoring Training for State Workforce Agencies: The Importance of Collaboration and Communication. Without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to one of our speakers for today, Stacy O'Keefe. Take it away, Stacy.

STACY O'KEEFE: Thanks, Grace. And good afternoon, everyone. This is Stacy O'Keefe. I am from the Employment and Training Administration regional office in Chicago. And welcome to today's webinar on how and why collaboration and communication are so important to conducting effective monitoring.

We're thrilled that so many of you could join us today, not only because we have a great session for you, but because this is the first live session in a series of monitoring training sessions that we at ETA have been working on for over a year now.

The series is a direct response to feedback ETA received from many of you, many of our states across the country about wanting and needing to improve the effectiveness of your monitoring efforts.

This session was originally intended to be one of many sessions conducted in person during three days of live training. But with COVID, we had to explore other ways to provide this important training to you all. So we transitioned to a series of both prerecorded and live sessions, and all of them are built around the elements that make up the national monitoring framework.

I'll share some more details on the other sessions in our series and how to access them at the conclusion of today's presentation. But now, I want to move right in to today's topic.

The objectives for today's session are outlined here on this slide for you. We hope that you'll walk away from this session with an understanding of why building a collaborative relationship with your subrecipients is so important to the effectiveness of your monitoring.

As someone who's been conducting monitoring of grantees and service providers for a pretty long time now, I can confidently report that having a collaborative relationship with the entities you monitor results in a much more impactful monitoring event and a greater return on your investment of time and effort.

We also want you to walk away with a better understanding of the importance of communication and how communication is critical to monitoring effectively.

We'll share our knowledge, experiences, and tips. But we also want to learn from each of you. How important has collaboration and partnership and to your monitoring efforts? How do you ensure effective communication during your monitoring review? I know a lot of you have a lot of great things to share with us today.

With that, I will introduce today's presenter. You'll be hearing and learning all kinds of great things from Jeff Gabriel from ETA's regional office in Philadelphia. Take it away, Jeff.

JEFFREY GABRIEL: OK. Thanks so much, Stacy. And thank you all so much for being with us today, the first of the live sessions in this monitoring series that Stacy talked about.

This particular session is not what we would call a technical session, meaning there's not information that we now have that you don't yet have where you're tuning in to hear about the latest guidance or statutory requirements or contractual requirements. But, hopefully what we're going to do, as Stacy mentioned, is provide tips on how you can create an environment where you can execute through the more technical aspects of your monitoring most effectively.

So like Stacy, I do have a lot of – although I work in the front office now with a regional administrator, I have probably eight or nine years of federal experience and about 14 years at the local workforce development level, monitoring and being monitored. And your experience in both of those things, of course, can be helpful as we talk about relationship building and monitoring.

So I've had the opportunity to monitor state and local areas and be monitored by states and federal agencies. And hopefully, that'll help me. But we also want to get a sense of your experience in both of these dynamics in terms of monitoring and being monitored.

So we can move ahead to the poll. It looks like we've already got the one going for, how many times have you monitored a program, grantee, subgrantee, at whatever level you've monitored?

Looks like – and this is interesting. So we've got folks on kind of the low end of the spectrum and also the really high end of the spectrum. So we also see that we have quite a lot of [inaudible] today, which is fantastic. So that's great because we're going to – hopefully, we'll be offering information today that will help on both ends of the experience continuum.

We'd also like to ask you, how many times have you experienced being monitored, and we're seeing more monitored? And the reason we say that is because, if you've worked in a fiscal capacity, that may be the work that we use. Maybe it wasn't monitored. But I think for the purposes of our discussion today, either would be appropriate. So however you described it or however you thought about it at the time, feel free to weigh in accordingly.

And we see the results coming in. Looks like most of the folks are in that zero-to-five-time range. That group seems to be growing. So that's fine. So, again, hopefully, we'll be able to help you get more tools or change – maybe change some thinking or give you some ideas that maybe are new to you as you try to develop your experience with monitoring. So great. Thank you very much for that. That gives us a real good sense of who is in the room.

So we can move ahead, Stacy. We're going to talk about the roles that you play as an agency – state agency, monitor of workforce programs.

There are a couple of different kinds of roles here. So we – this group on the left are these overall roles that are probably what you think of first, particularly the compliance official. So this – compliance is probably the reason that we are compelled to monitor. You're ensuring that obligations are being met, whether they're legislative, regulatory, contractual, et cetera. This is really the foundation of monitoring on which the other rules can be added to hopefully add value.

In providing technical assistance, you have the opportunity to teach your subrecipients how to improve their operations. This could be helping them meet compliance requirements that they're struggling with, or it could be helping the program that's already compliant improve their outcomes and just enhance their operations.

And as the advocate or champion, if you will, you have the opportunity to identify promising practices and to kind of trumpet them and share them, whether that be with stakeholders within your state system or outside of it. And then this is something that can help raise all boats and make the whole system better.

Then on the other side, we look at some complex communication roles that go along with these overall roles. So s a relationship builder, you would be engaging in regular and persistent and consistent, I guess, communication with subrecipients that you are monitoring. This relationship building element is really our focus today throughout this session, but all three roles are important.

As a monitor, you are often in a position of being a subject matter expert where you can bring your experience from analyzing and understanding programmatic, administrative, financial elements of various programs, and you can bring insight from lessons learned, or from promising practices to those entities that you're monitoring going forward.

And then, finally, in being able to drive continuous improvement, you're looking at technical assistance needs. You're able to identify resources and make connections for your subrecipients to, again, help them improve it's – because – and we'll talk about this a lot. It's not just finding things that are bad but also looking at how we can make things that are already good, make them even better.

So we can move ahead, Stacy. We're going to look at why relationships matter. And, again, this is our primary theme, and our feeling is that effective relationships between you as a monitor and your subrecipient representative – you can bounce back for one second, Stacy. I'm sorry.

This can help resolve challenges and also help to improve programs. So by focusing on positive relationships in our monitoring, we can create that environment that not only supports collaboration but also productivity and program improvement. And that's a them we will revisit throughout the session.

Okay, Stacy. Let's go ahead to looking at the mindsets, both old and then what we – if it's not new, then what we hope will be something that you'll agree with, that this is something you've seen before.

This slide was actually inspired by a presentation that our ETA team in Region 1 gave at a State Workforce Association conference back in 2012. It shows kind of that traditional view of monitoring over on the left and then also the more collaborative model that we're advocating for today.

That traditional model views monitors as authoritarian. So as a monitor, you would hold the power, and that might feel nice. Being in control is nice, and you can maybe collect a lot of findings that way. But we really believe that it's going to be limiting in the long run because it's not going to get you the kind of information that will help you really understand the issues and be able to really contribute to solutions.

Back when I was working at a different level – I'll just say that – there was a monitor that I interacted with a number of times. And this person was definitely of the traditional mindset and they would say to us, work the work. My job is to find things that are wrong.

And on top of it, my feeling was that this individual also didn't admit when they made mistakes or when they were wrong about something. Even when they knew they had made a mistake, there would never be an acknowledgment of that. Now, in fairness to this individual, I think they were really just reflecting that traditional model. And I really think they felt that they would undermine their own authority by admitting a mistake. And, as such, they thought they might limit their own effectiveness or undermine their own effectiveness.

So that role that we're envisioning is that of a monitor that is more collaborative, that works in a more engaging, partnering kind of manner. It moves away from the punitive or the confrontational kind of approach into a collaborative one. And again, something that should be more pleasant for both sides of that monitoring relationship, but also, most importantly, that it will ultimately be more productive as well.

So let's look at what we feel are some of the characteristics of collaborative relationships. And, Stacy, if you wouldn't mind moving ahead, and then we can – you can bring all of these down.

There's we're sharing common goals and that we all benefit from from this kind of relationship and that we're working together towards those common goals. We all want the same thing for our customers. And that's really important.

If you think of the workforce development system as a continuum of partners, if you think of it from the American Jobs Center or if you even want to go to the service provider level and then you think all the way up to Congress, you think of all the parties in between, we all have our own parts to play in a continuum of activities that make up the workforce development system.

But it's important to remember and remind ourselves and remind each other, for that matter, that those roles are connected. They're not isolated from each other. And what connects them is that common goal of success for American workers and for employers.

And a collaborative relationship in monitoring is the way that we feel can make those roles support each other towards that common purpose. And as monitors, you can help get buy in on this idea by really driving it home early and often with the subrecipients. So let's look ahead.

Here, this is going to be a quick – this is going to be just a quick review of some of these – some of the benefits of collaborative relationships that we've touched on already.

So, again, there's more heads working together. You're going to get new ideas. You're going to get more innovation. Ultimately, this approach of a collaborative relationship is one that will be more pleasant and more productive and rewarding as well.

So with that, I'm just going to pause for one moment and I'm just going to mention to folks that you can use the chat, once again, to make comments, and you can –or as questions. Feel free to share some of your own experiences or ideas.

And we will also try to allow a little bit of time at the end to share some of those comments as well, if folks are more comfortable waiting until that time. But Stacy will be on the lookout for your input.

So with that, we're going to look at how we can try to build that collaborative relationship, and where it starts is with communication. I'm sorry, Stacy. If you could move ahead to one more. Thank you.

And so communication is – I'll argue – you don't have to cite me on this, but this is the most important thing in probably any relationship, but a monitoring relationship is really no different.

So the things you can do in establishing that critical and productive communication is setting that tone. So setting the tone starts from the very outset in our communication. If you think about an entrance meeting, for instance, if that's where your starting point is for that important communication, especially being gracious, thanking people for their help, recognizing hard work and support, recognizing strides that have been made to correct issues that maybe are well known by all parties, being flexible while you're monitoring. All of those things are important in that tone.

But next – and this is really critical – be open and explain things. So directly and specifically, let those who you're monitoring, let them know why you're there, why it is you want to collaborate and have that kind of approach, what approach you plan to take in looking at the specific information that you're going to be examining, as well as with the relationship itself. Listen to any concerns that may be voiced at that time and also try to address those concerns.

Entities you're monitoring may not trust your intentions initially. I think we've all felt that angst about monitoring, when being monitored, certainly. And I think we can understand how a subrecipient would feel as a state monitor in that situation.

So it's going to take some intentional effort to build trust, which, of course, is also critical to any collaborative relationship. And if you can be open and transparent from the beginning and then act in a way that fits with that message throughout the review, you can expect to get some of that same transparency in return. We'll talk more about that.

And, finally, your communication preferences and those of your audience. This is somewhat basic, I guess, but it's really important to pay attention to because we always think we're clear. We all think that because we know what's in our head and we know how the words we say relate to those thoughts.

But those thoughts aren't coming out. And so the – your subrecipient only knows what you're saying. So make sure to understand what methodology is going to be most effective because, if the message we want to deliver isn't being received, we own that as well.

So let's talk a little bit more about verbal communication. It – it's critical in the onsite review in particular. So that's why we're going to spend a little more time on this. Effectiveness depends on a number of things.

Having a clear sense in advance of the messages that you want to deliver and what you want to convey. Likewise, having having accurate information, knowing your facts ahead of time. And then choosing word – when you're in the actual delivery phase, choosing appropriate words for the listener and for the situation.

So, for example, if you know that some of the staff that you're engaging with are new, either new to the agency or new to the workforce development system, for that matter, try to avoid acronyms and jargon. We think it's English because we use it all day, every day, but for someone coming into the system from the outside, it'll just confuse them and make them and make them – and probably make them feel like they’re at a disadvantage in a monitoring environment.

Ask questions. All I'm going to say about that, because we're going to dig into that in a little bit.

And use reflecting language and clarifying questions to do things like making sure you understand the message clearly. You're giving the speaker feedback on how they delivered the message and giving them the opportunity to add clarity if they need to. It helps show interest in what the other person is saying and, of course, respects what they're saying as a result and helps you understand their viewpoint better.

And then, finally, at the end or periodically, if you provide a summary of the main points that have been raised in the conversation, it allows everybody to make sure there's a common understanding of what's being discussed and that communication has ultimately been effective.

So with that, I'm just going to ask –

MS. O'KEEFE: Jeff?

MR. GABRIEL: Go ahead. I had a feeling.

MS. O'KEEFE: This is Stacy. I just wanted to share some really great comments that have been – that the group has shared with us that really reinforced the kinds of things we're talking about today.

One of them says, "As a state monitor, I have an attitude that I am partners with the local areas that I monitor. We are interested in providing the best quality services by giving the AJCs the best resources and information available."

And I think both me and Jeff would say that is great. And Jeff, I think, is going to talk a little bit more about that partnership piece. That's what collaboration is all about. And being able to offer tools and resources and make the monitoring meaningful for both you and the grantee is super important.

We have a comment here about the traditional monitoring that you mentioned and what that looks like. Someone has indicated that it's – that kind of monitoring seems to be a clue for poor leadership.

It's – I think that, as Jeff mentioned, we do want to move from traditional monitoring because there are just so many more benefits from taking a much more collaborative approach.

And then another confirmation of the collaborative approach, a commenter says, "The collaborative approach helps with uniting an organization, along with effective training, as a solid layer and let the people monitored know that there is no such thing as a stupid question. Don't try to be a know it all. If you don't know something, tell them you will follow up, and then be sure to follow up."

And that's another great point that I think those of us who monitor at ETA try to stick to as well. If we don't know the answer, we indicate that we'll follow up, and then you really better follow up. And that kind of follow up really helps establish a much more solid working relationship. Likely, you will see that grantee again; right? And following up and letting them know that they can count on you really goes a long way in terms of building that relationship.

So then just the last – a question that came in related to what you were just talking about around communication. "How can you find out if your communication has been clear or not? I am working on file reviews across my entire state. Can you share some ways to make that determination?"

MR. GABRIEL: Sure. Thank you, Stacy. And thank you, everyone, for the comments. They're really good. And if we can't get to each and every one, we will try to share information that will – after the session that will allow everybody to benefit from some of these questions and our answers.

But on this particular question, I did see that. I think this is relevant for the slide that we just completed, actually, on verbal communication. I think that's one way. This is, I would say, short-term – these are short-term options. So if you're in the middle of a discussion or you just had a discussion and now in that moment before you leave the discussion, you want to under- – you want to make sure, was I clear? Were they clear? Do I understand them, and vice versa?

And I think some of these techniques here, summarizing at the end, especially, but also using reflecting language or clarifying questions during the conversation, I think, periodically to make sure you're on track can be really effective as well.

Once you're removed from the situation, for instance, if the review is over or at least the on-site portion is over, there can always be follow up with email and so forth to, again, putting something in writing after a verbal exchange is sometimes the best test of are we on the same page.

And, quite frankly, that's something you can do during the review as well. And you could offer that. Say, OK, great, I think I understand what you need me to do. I'm going to send you an e-mail shortly, and then that will just clarify what my steps are going to be. And then we'll revisit this tomorrow and see if I can get you the information you need.

So that's more of a – that's kind of an intermediate term, I guess, where you can – a way to check in on if you've been successful in your communication. But, again, we'll talk more about some other techniques as we go along.

So thank you, again. Keep the comments coming. Thank you, Stacy, for doing such a great job of summarizing those.

And let's move ahead now to what I think is one of the hardest parts of communication, which is the delivery of negative feedback. And I think we need to go ahead one more slide. Yeah. I might not have done a great job of queuing those bullets, but I think I hit them all in my comment. So yeah.

So delivering negative feedback is in any relationship really challenging. So in a monitoring relationship where there's already some inherent tension and potentially some distrust, it's going to be even harder. You're not necessarily starting with a clean slate in terms of what somebody is ready to hear.

So as a state monitor, because, again, you're in that position of power, you need to be even more sensitive and attentive to how you deliver negative feedback. And there might be a conversation that you think is very easy, but it's actually very difficult for your subrecipient. They may have a punitive culture, for instance, where any negative feedback from a state monitor is going to cause everybody to vibrate in the subrecipient agency. So, again, that's something you want to be sensitive.

So let's look. So first couple of items here, some things you can do. Start with positive feedback. It reinforces that idea that you're not just there to find fault, but you're looking at the whole picture and you're recognizing successes as well.

State the observable issue or behavior. This may sound really obvious, but here's what I mean, because this is going to be a little sequential, these next couple bullets. If you start with that observable issue, you're not judging, and this is critical. You're not saying, I don't – you guys aren't following up with your youth participants. You're not doing anything for them. You don't care.

However you might word it, start with the facts. Based on our final review, we've seen some gaps in your – the – in the amount of time that goes between your follow-up efforts with your youth participants. And it seems to be inconsistent with what we saw your policy was for frequency of follow up.

There's no judgment there. You're just talking about what you've seen. Then you could – it kind of opens the door for these next things.

Then it gives you an opportunity to explain why. OK. Here's why I'm concerned about it. And in that particular example, the feel concern because you – it could cause some retention problems, if you're not able to keep the youth engaged by following up with them less frequently. So that's why we think this is important to look at.

And it's a real short walk from there to discussing potential solutions. In that example, it could simply be having a new policy on the frequency of follow up, if that was the issue, or maybe some training on the policy, if what's in existence isn't – doesn't seem to be followed based on what you're seeing in the – in file review.

And once you're in that mode – go ahead, Stacy – you can maybe come to agreement on some next steps. They might be able to say, OK, well, here's what we can do. And then you can talk about, well, all right. When – that sounds great. When do you think you might be able to do that?

And, again, that cascades right into the next bullet where you might be able to set times to follow up on the issue.

And you can add two more there, Stacy.

And you can provide additional resources to resolve that, to resolve the problem. Maybe you – they've identified a plan and they said, well, we're not going to see results, we're not going to know if this is working until after the next quarter report.

That gives you an opportunity to say, OK, fine, that sounds good. We'll agree that, upon the – my review of the next quarter's reports, we'll be able to make a determination on how we're doing and we'll revisit, if necessary. So that negative feedback turned into positive strategies pretty quickly I think just by starting with observing occurrences, sharing data, not making judgments.

And, finally, I think it depends on [inaudible], necessarily, but being open to receiving negative feedback is important, too. It could take a lot of courage to offer that [inaudible] the monitor given that position of authority that you're in. But it's a sign of a good, healthy monitoring partnership, and it can help you improve how you do your job and your own performance. So be open to it and I would say show appreciation for it when you get.

So let's talk about how we prepare for effective monitoring. And we can move ahead to number 15. There's the setting the time frame. So great.

So first, preparation is important here. Getting the best information from an onsite visit doesn't happen by accident. OK. Monitors have to prepare in advance just to be able to communicate effectively. And here are some things you can do to help that happen.

You shouldn't expect to know everything, but you can gather knowledge, do your homework. Know some foundational basics about – now, some of these things might be things you would want to know from any subrecipient that you monitoring.

So particular grant or program requirements, scope of work, program design, their infrastructure, how their system is set up, the local economy where they are, all these things are going to be helpful in you understanding what they're doing, their outcomes, certainly. And then particular information that may be very, very unique to them that can be really valuable as well.

Next, you might want to try identifying some key themes. And look at that next bullet, Stacy, [inaudible] when you have an opportunity.

We can look at the – a few important things that maybe are things that are specific to – issues that have to do with their own performance or conditions or challenges that you know they're dealing with, or perhaps it's an issue that as a state you've identified as a priority.

You know this is an issue across local areas through the state, and you want to make that a theme of the review. And by sharing that, you make it clear, this is something I'm going to be paying attention to because the state has determined that it's important to do so.

Consider – next, consider drafting a few opening questions, things that you take the time to prepare in advance, which will help reflect what you need to learn. So using those questions as a lead in and get you right to those – start the communication, get it rolling, but you're also getting information back that's very important to you.

And when you combine all of these things, they not only show your interest in getting to know your subrecipient and understand them and their programs, but also it just lays a basic good foundation for communication.

So let's look a – this is a [inaudible] program.

Let's look ahead. Thank you. Let's move ahead to trust. And trust, like communication, is, of course, critical to any relationship and including a monitoring relationship. So it's based on perceptions, and when you think about that – again, that position of authority you're in, perceptions are going to be very strong and may be very ingrained. They have long roots, maybe some history.

So what you do and what you say can either build or erode trust. So you have that power but also that responsibility. So the more – as I think I mentioned earlier, the more open and honest and transparent you can be in conducting the monitoring activities, the more those who are being monitored are likely to be open, honest, and transparent in return.

And in talking about transparency, in the interest of that, you may want to consider a daily debrief. This is a strategy you can implement periodically through your onsite review, for instance, that enables you to discuss issues or outstanding items that you're coming across or to provide positive feedback from throughout that day.

It helps – it will help you set [inaudible] remaining days. It also avoids the gotcha, which we saw on the earlier slide with that authoritarian model. It's very preferable to a subrecipient that they can hear something in real time versus hearing it for the first time at an exit conference.

And it also gives them an opportunity to help them, I guess, educate us and maybe reinterpret something we've seen and help us understand better. Maybe we were wrong in identifying a concern that we saw, or we were wrong in how we interpreted some piece of data that we came across.

And – but in any case, if there is something wrong, it also helps them begin to fix it. Ultimately, if a subrecipient can trust you to work with them, provide good resources, help solve problems, they're more likely to come to you with challenges, with – even with areas of noncompliance, things that they may know that they're doing wrong or they know you need attention, but they've tried and they feel like maybe they don't have the tools or the ability right now to correct those things themselves.

It's better to be in a position where those things are being brought to you so you don't have to dig to uncover things that the subrecipient is uncomfortable bringing to you.

So let's let's look a little bit more at things we can do specifically to build trust or rebuild trust.

And the first one, I think, was – actually, one of the comments addressed this, that touched on this idea. Follow through on your commitments. If you leave an onsite visit, as an example, and you've agreed to email links for technical assistance, do it and do it when you said you were going to do. This really adds to your credibility.

We touched on this already, but take a genuine interest in your subrecipients. You might ask about a recent training that you know they've gone through. Or if someone's been out sick or recently returned from vacation or extended leave, ask how they're doing. It helps see you as more on an equal plane and more partner and probably as more human.

Tell the truth. This might seem obvious, but sometimes I think it's easy to find an issue, and maybe we feel we have to kind of keep that to ourselves. But, ultimately, that doesn't help. Again, as we said before, you can get better understanding by sharing these things. And you might also be able to get immediate remediation.

If – based on the type of issue you have or the policy of your agency, if you can avoid a finding by having it – by being able to get it addressed right now, do that. Again, don't hide the information. There's almost no good that can come of that but a lot of good that can come of sharing it.

I touched on this when I talked about my colleague from years ago. Admit your mistakes and apologize when necessary. Stacy talked about this too. That place of authority you're coming from, that old monitoring construct we talk about, admitting mistakes might be completely unexpected and, as such, it's really powerful when you do it.

If you've been misinformed or have misinformed your subrecipient in some way, admit it, apologize, and make corrections as soon as possible. We are all human and reminding ourselves and each other of that is a good thing.

And something that will really help the subrecipient not only trust your intentions but also trust your ability is taking advantage of professional development opportunities, keeping your expertise up to date on changes in regulations and guidance. It really makes you a strong resource for them.

And then listen well, focus, paying attention to what the other person is saying, not thinking about what you're going to say next and not multitasking. Let's – and having mentioned listening, let's dig into that more deeply now on our next slide.

We're still talking about trust, but we're talking about the importance of listening in that trust dynamic.

So some simple approaches to improving our listening skills, being fully in the moment, again, not thinking about your next interview but really focusing on the person that you're engaged with in that moment. Putting yourself in their shoes, listening to understand, listening to know where they are coming from is really critical.

Picking up key points and this kind of gets – this is more to the reflecting that we talked about earlier. Picking up key points and letting the speaker know that you did that, letting them know how well you're listening or how poorly. It reminds them that you're with them and it'll make your listening more effective and they can correct, if needed.

Listening actively. So stopping them periodically, perhaps you if you have questions, if you don't understand something. And this is challenging, I will say. But a silent pause may go further than a quick response. Just because somebody has finished saying something doesn't mean we're required to respond. It doesn't mean they want an answer. If they ask a question, then they're owed an answer. But active listening really shows respect, and, obviously, respect is in turn critical to trust.

And, finally, just be curious. Have an open mind. Listen to learn, and show that desire to know more and to grow.

Stacy, I see some more items in the chat. I didn't know if there were some things you wanted to share with the group at this juncture.

MS. O'KEEFE: I think we are good. I'll address a couple of things, a couple of the comments that have come up when I wrap this up at the end of your presentation. Let me see. I just saw something new. We definitely have a lot of support for the collaborative approach and –

MR. GABRIEL: Great.

MS. O'KEEFE: But yeah. I think we're good right now, Jeff.

MR. GABRIEL: Terrific. OK. Thank you. Yes?

MS. O'KEEFE: Well, let me offer up this one that just popped in.

"During active listening, it's often mentioned to have good eye contact. That being said, would it be acceptable to take brief notes when listening to be sure what is being said is understood properly? Some of the discussions can be quite detailed and complicated."

And I'll let Jeff speak to that. But from my experience, I will say that, as I've gotten older, it has become much more difficult for me to listen and take notes. Ideally, if there is somebody else joining you on the review, I like to have that person take notes, if I'm the one in the discussion. But that's the ideal scenario.

When that doesn't happen for me, I prefer to be fully engaged in the conversation. If I need to write something down, I say, can I take a break for a second? I need to write something down. And then I'll take my notes and return again to the conversation.

Jeff, did you have anything to add to that as well?

MR. GABRIEL: That's a great – thank you, Stacy. That's a great suggestion, the pausing periodically to capture some key points, particularly those that you think might be critical and you don't want to forget.

Another thing that you can do to try to be – because I think the question at its core is really talking – we were showing a sensitivity, I think, and an awareness of how one action versus another can convey a certain message, an unspoken one. Well, this person's not looking at me. They're just buried in their notebook versus, OK, this person's looking at me, but they're not writing anything down because they – they're probably zoning out.

But – so there's all kinds of ways that this can be interpreted, but I think one thing that is helpful would be understand what is going to work best for you to get the most out of the conversation. Understand what's going to work for you to get the most accurate information, and be able to use the information going forward.

But then, secondly, they do – the individual or the team that you're engaged with, say to them, before we start, here's what I would like to do. I'm planning on taking notes. I really need that. If I'm not making eye contact, don't feel like I'm not engaged. I totally am, but I want to make sure I'm capturing key points, or whatever your approach. Or, just so you know, I may pause a couple times to take some notes on some really critical points.

So I think letting them know what your approach is, which actually we said at the beginning, if you think about it, but even on something as finite as this, letting the folks know what your approach is will help them know where you're coming from and they won't have reason to draw an impression from your actions that is not what you intend.

So thank you, again, for the comments, and thank you, Stacy. And let's – I'm going to push ahead to, again, some themes that we've touched on already, but next we're going to look at demonstrating empathy and understanding.

So, again, empathy is that ability to recognize emotions in others and put yourself in their shoes, as we mentioned before. That includes getting to know the people you're monitoring.

What are their roles and responsibilities? What kind of pressures and challenges are they dealing with, sometimes just by the nature of those roles and responsibilities themselves? This will help you understand their unique needs as individual people and also as an organization.

Do you have a sense of the culture of that organization? Organizations, like people, have their own personalities, and when you understand their culture, that becomes the lens through which you view everything that your subrecipient does.t helps you understand what they say and how they say.

It helps you understand their actions and reactions. If you get a reaction from them that maybe isn't what you were expecting, if you stop and think about, oh, yes. That was because of their culture. And also the decisions they make and the choices they make. That will really help you to know that culture, and they'll appreciate the effort because you'll have lots of opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge in that area.

Next, you're very likely to be different than the people you're monitoring. Your agency is likely to have a different culture than that which you're monitoring. That's OK. Embrace it. Different backgrounds, experiences, demographics, perspective, insights all lead to more information, more innovation, and more informed decision making. So, again, embrace that diversity of thought and input.

Open ended questions. Open ended questions are great in that they can help you learn more and demonstrate your interest and understanding, again, the individual and the organization. We'll talk more about types of questions in a minute.

And then finally here, really reach for regular open communication with those who you monitor. You want the subrecipient to feel comfortable approaching you, however it is you communicate. You want that – we talked before about them bringing issues to you before you even have identified them yourself. That's the kind of relationship that we feel you should want to have, because it's the one that will be most productive and beneficial.

But make communic- – by making it open and making it regular, especially, you're making it normal, and it doesn't feel like communication is an event, like, OK, we got a clock. They have no reason to feel concerned about talking with you.

So, quickly, in terms of showing understanding, if you build a good relationship with the entity you're monitoring, it'll be easier to find opportunities to show understanding. And if your relationship is good, chances are you've already been able to demonstrate understanding successfully prior to the point in time where you're at now.

We touched on these points. Communication and attitude. That message that you're from the government and you're there to help, won't be well- received.

Resolving a problem on site. Does it need to be published in a report, or is it something we can remediate now? This is a great way to show understanding, to show that you're all about collaboration. And, again, it also supports that claim that you made at the outset, that your approach is not about the got you. It's about helping, and it's about improving.

So let's let's talk about some specific actions that you can do to make sure you're making the best effort to build an effective monitoring relationship.

So, first, taking stock of your own people skills or soft skills. Do you get along with people in general, with colleagues in the work environment, especially? Are there some recurring areas about yourself that you know need attention in terms of your awareness of your emotions and how they play out?

There are a lot of resources on the topic of emotional intelligence. OK. That's not – I'm not planning to be a trainer in this area. So if this is an area where you struggle, definitely seek out the resources, but focus on awareness first. That's what makes the rest of the learning possible, obviously.

Consider the need very purposefully. Consider the needs of the relationship within the monitoring. What do you need from the subrecipient to do your job most effectively, and what information and support do they need from you?

We talked about scheduling earlier, but specifically scheduling time to communicate and check in. In the last year, we've had a living symposium on the need to schedule time because our casual communication, as you pass in the hall, has pretty much gone away. But by regularly scheduling time to communicate, you're demonstrating, you're documenting, essentially, that this is a priority for you. And that helps everybody feel good about their value.

So show appreciation. We talked about the entrance conference earlier and an exit conference might be another or meeting you prefer might be another time where you can do this. But there's no bad time to do it. Monitoring takes people away from their regular jobs. They have taken time out of the real work, if you will, to interact with you, during monitoring in particular and even outside of that.

So you remember that inconvenience. Remember all the work and the preparation and the support that goes into a review on the part of the subrecipient. Acknowledge it and thank them for it.

And be positive. Even constructive feedback or negative feedback can be delivered in a positive light. You can acknowledge things that need to improve while framing them as an opportunity for learning and growth. You can recognize successes. You can talk about incremental progress. That can be really helpful here, as an example.

You may – there may be a project that they're operating that is way behind in enrollments and you're really concerned and this has been a – this is an issue that everybody's well aware of. You can frame that as well. Your enrollments are still low. They're beyond the target you projected for this point in the life of the grant, but – or the life of the project. But there has been definite improvement since last quarter.

That is – you can't – if you're struggling, you can't do anything immediately to get better. So with that, that can be a real good call to turn what might otherwise be negative information into positive.

So let's move ahead now to social intelligence. So social intelligence involves managing our relationships. So let's look at how that plays out in the monitoring partnership.

So remembering – and we touched on this before in terms of how you are viewed as the monitor – your actions have consequences. Your words have consequences. Especially if you're a new monitor, you may not know this yet, but you – what you do and say is really powerful and carries a weight that you probably don't feel yourself but that a subrecipient will definitely feel.

Si be sensitive to that, and be cautious about how you say what you say, what you say, and those things that you do and how.

We need to balance our needs against the needs of others. Letting someone else speak first, helping everyone decide who or what approach might be best for a particular task or a particular assignment. Consider how decisions will benefit both sides, not just meet our own needs.

And, Stacy, can we back up to our previous slide, please? Perfect. Thank you so much.

And, again, speaking again about that authority we have as monitors, whether it's actual or perceived, think about other people's feelings before you say or before you act. Are you being constructive, or are you being insulting? Are you respecting roles in the chain of command? Are you taking stock of who's in the room and how they might all be impacted differently by what you're going to share? And are you letting – are you prepared to let others share as well?

And, ultimately, using different strategies for different situations, which can involve scenarios like being aware of circumstances that may be going on in a particular day. I mentioned the different people that you're talking to or who's in the room, especially if it's something negative that you're sharing.

These kind of variables will dictate what you ask for or what you share, how you do it, and when, as well. So recognizing the need for a particular approach at a particular time makes your subrecipient more comfortable in the short term. But it really is also more likely to get you what you need in the long term.

So I mentioned before we were going to talk more about types of questions. Let's go into that now.

Open ended questions, I mentioned already, and let's look at them and how they can be valuable. The two-way conversation is something that an open-ended question really allows for. You're controlling the information that's being shared in that you're asking for it. But then by providing that space for an open-ended answer, you're –it's really a mutual exchange at that point. You're getting the maximum amount of information you can. And I will repeat that a number of times. I promise.

It also allows more opportunity for follow-up questions because you're getting more information. So there's more things that you can pick out that you might want to understand better. And it also demonstrates a desire to increase knowledge and show that you are – that you're open, that you want to learn and understand.

We talked – actually, I wanted to just give an example about this. Let's use an intake process for service delivery, let's say, at an American Job Center. We might want to ask about an intake process in an open-ended way by saying, would you go through your intake process? And then it allows the people you're speaking with to explain the whole thing.

Obviously, that's a lot of information. The – and it will give you the best understanding. The open-ended question – this is a big takeaway, I think, for open-ended questions – gets you the most information possible in response to a single question. OK.

So with that fresh in our mind, let's look on the next slide at closed questions. And if we're monitoring effectively, we're using book. OK. I don't – this isn't a good and evil situation here.

Closed questions, they do allow you to control communication, which, again, can feel good, but if you're trying to encourage two-way communication and collaboration, that may not be ultimately what you're going for. And if you use too many questions, because close-ended questions give you small pieces of information intentionally so, if you ask a lot of them in rapid succession, it can start to feel like an interrogation.

And interrogations in this kind of environment aren't probably going to lead to sharing of more information. It's actually more likely to have a shutdown effect. And, again, like – as the flip side of the open-ended question, a close-ended question – and this is not a judgment, but it's something to be – to keep in mind.

A close-ended question will get you the least amount of information in response to a single question. But they can also be useful. So they can be useful for focusing a discussion, of course, and for getting clarity when needed. So let's go back to that intake process example.

If you were to ask the question, do you use a common intake form? Well, the answer is yes or no. So you now know one small detail of that intake process. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but if you then take that and attach judgment to it and if you attach a characterization to it where they're not using a common intake, they're making this impossible for participants to navigate their system, well, maybe there's a reason for it or maybe there's a nuance for it that the close-ended question didn't allow you to hear.

But let's look at it a different way. Let's say you ask both questions. Let's say you ask about the intake process. You heard the whole process, but then you said, hmm. You know what I didn't hear? Let me ask them this. I heard what you said, and I think I understand the process in general. But what I didn't hear – and this is something I'm really interested in because we're looking at this as a statewide – I didn't care whether you use a common intake form. Do you? Yes. Great.

OK. Now, I have that focused piece of information that I wanted, and I have the big picture that – where I know where that piece of information fits in. So that might be the best way to do it, but, ultimately, you need to be able to use closed or open questions strategically, depending on your purposes.

And just as a plug for a future session, on May 12th there's going to be a session as part of this series on interviewing techniques. And there'll be a lot more information on the use of different kinds of questions in that session. So if you were riveted by these two slides, do not miss that session. Don't miss it anyway because I know it's really good.

So let's review what we have looked at. When we look at these two lists, again, what we're seeing is that this is really about the type of environment that we want to create, one that's pleasant, as we said before, but also one that's productive in terms of helping everybody do their job well and help – and, ultimately, for programs to be enhanced and outcomes to be improved.

Real quick positive – excuse me. Combining words there. Positive monitoring relationships are – built on that consistent and persistent communication. Questions that will get you the most information possible. Trust, the active listening. And these things all reinforce each other. These aren't – this isn't a layer cake we're looking at here. This is like a lot [inaudible] cake. These things all support each other.

Trust and active listening. Again, showing from the outset, I am here to help and then reinforcing that message with your behavior and what and how you say things throughout the monitoring activity. And honesty and transparency.

Those things that we want to try to avoid is lack of communication, lack of information, not really setting the stage and helping [inaudible] the tone and helping the subrecipient know where you're coming from and what your approach is in the monitoring just makes everything that follows more difficult.

That got you attitude doesn't really help ultimately. That's going to be very limited in the type of information you can get going forward and that you can use effectively. And close questioning, again, remembering that that is limited. It's to be used strategically, but it's limited.

So, ultimately, what we're trying to convey here is that we want to give your subrecipient a sense of that we are partners in these endeavors, that we are – we do have common goals. It's jobseekers and employers that, ultimately, we want to help, and we want to do so with programs that are effective and also in the context of compliant activities.

And as a monitor, you can ensure that – or I should say it's your responsibility to ensure that programs are being administered in the best possible way, in terms of their outcomes, in terms of their consistency with the laws and rules that govern the program, and that subrecipients are doing the best job that they can do towards these same goals.

And by building collaborative relationships, that can lead to a better monitoring experience, ultimately, better programs, and then better outcomes for those participants.

So I'm going – I know Stacy wanted to circle back on some things, and so what I'm going to do here is I'm going to say thank and then we'll go into the rest. But I'm just going to say thank you for your attention, for your participation today.

Again, we're trying to create an environment in this non-technical session where you can be most successful in executing all the other technical elements of monitoring that you'll be engaged in and that we're addressing through this series. And with that, Stacy, I'm going to hand things back to you.

MS. O'KEEFE: Thanks so much, Jeff. I I just wanted to mention one question that came up – well, I think two people asked a similar question.

Someone said, "I really like what's being discussed, and I would love to implement more cooperative strategies. However, going from a cooperative monitoring to formal findings in a letter seems jarring. Should changes be considered to the way finding letters are formatted?"

And so I just wanted to say a couple things to that. I don't think that being collaborative and cooperative while also identifying finding, those two things are not fighting one another or mutually exclusive. And it goes back to all the things Jeff talked about in terms of being transparent and honest.

Set the stage for folks so they understand that a monitoring report will be issued, and this is how the monitoring report is formatted and that findings are really – really just represent an issue that – a compliance issue. But it is still an area for continuous improvement and technical assistance.

And I would also want to point out to those who asked about findings and that report piece that we will have two sessions, I believe, coming up as part of this series that will get more into detail on the reporting – report writing piece of the overall monitoring efforts.

And so with that, I wanted to show you where you can find information on all of the sessions in the national training series. And you can also find all kinds of resources relating to monitoring and oversight.

So this is a partial view of our landing page, which is on WorkforceGPS. It's within the Grants Application and Management Community of Practice.

I know someone had asked about networking with other state monitors across the country. And I would suggest that this page is a great place to start in terms of finding resources, tools from other states across the country, and identifying contacts.

So this partial landing page view that is on the slide right now, it shows a list of all of the available and upcoming recorded or live training sessions. There – you'll see on the landing page that there are already three webcasts that are available to you now, and those are an overview of the national monitoring framework, which I mentioned in my introduction, preparing for monitoring, and then a session on conducting effective participant file review.

You'll also see that there are three more live webinars and a podcast coming soon. I'm not going to read the entire list to you, but I do want to point out the next two live webinars.

The first, I think Jeff mentioned, is scheduled for May 12th, and the topic is Digging Deeper Into Entrance Meetings and Conducting Interviews. And the second is scheduled for June 2nd, and it will cover effective monitoring practices and wrapping up your monitoring review.

Invitations to these two webinars are in the file share, as is the – today's PowerPoint. So you can go ahead and actually register for the next two sessions through today's file share.

So now that you've gotten a glimpse of what's on our landing page, I will share that the PowerPoint includes a link to the community of practice. It'll take you right to the landing page. And Jeff and I and the rest of the national monitoring teams – training team really hope that you'll check out our page and take a look at all of the great resources that are available there.

And, finally, I just want to thank Jeff for sharing today all of his insights and experiences related to the importance of establishing a collaborative relationship in doing – in conducting effective monitoring. And I just wanted to thank you all for joining us today.

Jeff, did you have anything else you wanted to share?

MR. GABRIEL: No. Not necessarily, Stacy. Just thank you, of course, for your job today and the information that you shared and the desk handling of the great comments and questions that we got. I've had the chance to to read through so many of them, and you guys are a great audience. You're really engaged in this stuff, and that's great to see.

I appreciate the comments and the – hearing what your experiences are. It's really helpful for us. And we'll continue to use this information as we go through the rest of this series. So thank you, again. And that's all for me, Stacy.

MS. O'KEEFE: OK. Thanks, everyone. Please stay tuned. More to come. Thank you.

(END)