5 Tips for Preparing for CARF Accreditation

Tom Sefcik, ACSW, MBA
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CARF accreditation is a valuable tool for a service provider that wants to be known as an organization that offers quality rehabilitative programs and services. It is a value-added process that includes a potential increase in business, risk management benefits, greater access to funds and reimbursement, visibility and transparency to stakeholders. After the agency decides to pursue accreditation, a CARF consultant can be called in soon after to be able to notify the organization of many of the processes, policies and procedures that will need to be addressed. A consultant can even be called in prior to notifying CARF that you are seeking accreditation. Here are some tips to help prepare for a successful survey.

1. Decide when you want to be accredited

Realistically, it can take six to twelve months from the time the service provider decides to apply for the survey until CARF survey takes place and then another month before the survey results are received. When an agency decides that it wishes to become accredited, it must consider the planning time to prepare for the survey. Additionally, the application process itself can be quite complicated. With the advice and instruction or of a CARF consultant, this process can be more easily navigated.

2. Find out what you will need for accreditation

Many organizations may begin to write new policies and procedures before doing the necessary research or asking a consultant. To be prepared for the initial survey, service providers should first review all of the information that will be necessary and again, a CARF consultant will know which areas are critical for accreditation.

3. Conduct a Mock Survey

A mock survey is basically a preparatory first run of a survey that will determine which areas of the policies and procedures need work. With a CARF consultant, this step begins early in the process so that unnecessary work is not performed and areas that do take considerable time can be addressed first. Occasionally an agency will spend time on
policies that are not mandatory to CARF, yet are recognized as not being critical to accreditation except by a CARF consultant.

4. Preparation to develop various manuals

♦ Several plans will need to be developed for CARF accreditation:
  ♦ Accessibility Plan
  ♦ Information Technology Plan
  ♦ Corporate Compliance Plan
  ♦ Cultural Competency and Diversity Plan
  ♦ Financial Plan
  ♦ Risk Management Plan
  ♦ Health and Safety manual
  ♦ Performance Measurement and Management Plan
  ♦ All leading to a Strategic Plan

Be prepared to review the CARF informational supplements and possibly use the services of a consultant to develop these documents for review.

5. Hire a CARF consultant

A CARF consultant can provide comprehensive accreditation preparation, review, assess and offer technical assistance for CARF accreditation. With the policies and procedures development an important step in the process, this can be a huge help in an accreditation. In addition, program and administrative documentation can be assessed and recommendations made. A CARF consultant can provide all of the help mentioned in the previous tips, as well as a sense of self-confidence that you have hired an expert to assist.
For individuals determining a choice for the treatment of various behavioral health, addictions and rehabilitation, disability rehab, aging services and other health and human services, CARF accreditation is important. Whether your agency is already CARF accredited or is seeking first time accreditation, a CARF consultant will lead your team to a much greater sense of readiness.

*PowderHorn Consulting is staffed by professionals who have served as providers, executives on treatment organizations and have an extensive history as CARF surveyors and can assist and answer any questions you may have in the CARF accreditation process.*
About the author:

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Tom received his Masters of Social Work degree from the Tulane University in New Orleans LA with an emphasis in clinical services specializing in child/youth/family services. He received his Masters of Business Administration from Indiana University in Bloomington, IN with an emphasis in marketing and information technology. Tom has provided services as a clinician in emergency response, inpatient services, outpatient treatment for child, youth, adult, family and group therapy, and community and business development. He has served in the roles of director of a variety of individual clinical programs as well as clinical director of behavioral healthcare organizations. Most recently, he has served in the role of executive director of several behavioral healthcare organizations that provided services to over 3,500. Most recently he has served as Chief Operating Officer for a nationally recognized benefits management organization providing services to persons with autism spectrum disorders.

In the position of a CARF surveyor, Tom has provided services in both the administrative and program surveyor roles for behavioral health, opioid treatment programs, juvenile justice, and children and youth services in both the United States and Canada.