How a CARF Consultant Prepares an Agency for a Survey

Tom Sefcik, ACSW, MBA
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CARF accreditation is more than submitting an application, undergoing a survey and receiving accreditation. A great deal planning will go into the procedure of getting that stamp of approval from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, and there's much to be learned and a lot to be gained by going through this course of action. When an organization decides to pursue accreditation, and submit the "Intent to Survey" form, a positive first step to take is to contact a CARF consultant. Several types of programs are available to those wishing assistance.

Conducting Mock Surveys

Service providers that are undergoing initial accreditation from CARF, as well as those who are seeking re-accreditation and accreditation for a new program under a currently accredited organization will benefit from a mock survey, typically conducted by a CARF consultant. In a mock survey, a consultant will conduct an organizational assessment to evaluate the level of compliance of an organization to CARF standards. This assessment will be specifically created to address its client population, scope of services and setting so that a specific survey preparation plan can be prepared for the consultant. The consultant will take a couple of days to review the organization's policies and procedures to match them to the current CARF accreditation standards and meet with the organization's management team and staff to assess their understanding and requirements for achieving CARF accreditation. This will help better prepare the agency for the CARF review process itself.

The CARF consultant can conduct the survey either before the organization begins revising policies and procedures to meet CARF standards or shortly before the site visit. It is recommended that service providers call in a consultant before it begins the process, as sometimes unnecessary steps are taken that a CARF consultant could recognize as not required. The organization's staff receives a huge benefit of preparation. They are able to experience the survey process while practicing their
presentation skills, as the surveys are typically conducted on the same timeline as an actual survey. An experienced CARF consultant is up-to-date on the most current survey techniques and will advise the staff on the best way to handle challenging situations.

After the mock survey, an initial verbal and then a written analysis with corrective actions will be presented by the CARF consulting agency.

**Document Preparation**

To become CARF accredited, a service provider must have a plethora of paperwork prepared. This is where the experience of a skilled CARF consultant or consulting group will be very advantageous. Policy and procedure documents, quality assurance processes, corporate compliance programs and performance management measurement instruments are some of the documents that you will need in place during the survey and to keep up with accreditation and re-accreditation. A CARF consultant with a history with CARF will be able to assist the agency in being prepared.

**Currently Accredited Program Review**

Once a service provider has been CARF accredited, the process does not end. Each year, the organization must submit an update report to CARF, documenting any changes and additional quality improvements that it has made. Since this is a yearly event, a consultant could come in at a specified period of the year prior to when the CARF report is due. An onsite visit from a CARF consultant can ensure that the agency is keeping up with the latest updates to CARF standards, and measure performance, review quality assurance practices and monitor professional training. With this examination, the service provider can maintain its operating protocol to the standards necessary for re-accreditation.

Several areas of qualification should be reviewed before hiring a CARF consultant. Find out what level of experience he or she has. Five years should be the minimum amount of time in the core area of your agency, and experience in an executive position, experience as a CARF surveyor, a commanding knowledge of the CARF process and
capabilities to brainstorm and resolve conflict should be on a checklist of qualifications for a consultant.

_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:

**TOM SEFCIK, ACSW, MBA**

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.