Little Tex’s Odyssey

Facts about Little Tex:

• Sponsor of 250 homes in Texas
• Homes are scattered throughout the State
• Many homes are small, and have only one or two non-residential children
• The families served are primarily blue-collar workers, young parents and young children.
• The weather can be bad—a lot—in Texas in the winter
• Little Tex’s Program Director is Joe Texas
• Little Tex employs five part-time Monitors
  o The Monitors always plan to work fewer hours around the end-of-year holidays.
• Travel related to onsite reviews is a major cost
• All Monitors work out of “home offices” located across the state:
  o This reduces driving distance to any sponsored home. Still, Texas is a large State, and it is not uncommon for Monitors to drive several hours, one way, to conduct a home review.
  o This also means that Little Tex had to develop an information system that provides Monitors with the information they need to adequately prepare for monitoring visits. Each monitor has copies of provider application information and monthly claims.

PART 1 Little Tex’s Monitoring Review Plan for FY 2006:

Little Tex’s management plan for Fiscal Year 2006, submitted by Executive Director Joe Texas, includes a tentative schedule for conducting home reviews. With 250 homes, Little Tex is required to conduct at least 750 onsite reviews per year, at least 500 of which must be unannounced. However, because the weather in Texas is so harsh during the winter, and driving to reviews can be so treacherous, Little Tex’s part-time Monitors are not expected to conduct an equal number of reviews each month throughout the year. As you can see from Little Tex’s plan (below), a higher number of reviews are scheduled between April and October, when the weather is better. The highest number of reviews is scheduled for May, June, and September, good-weather months when school is still in session, and when providers are more likely to operate on a normal schedule.

Little Tex’s FY 2006 Monitoring Review Plan:

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The Best Laid Plans...
Little Tex’s very rational and well-conceived review plan is almost immediately derailed. In early November, when running edit checks on October meal counts, Joe Texas finds that 110 of his 250 providers have submitted a block claim. Joe had only planned to conduct about 75 reviews over the next 60 days, roughly from November 5 to January 5. Now he has to ensure that at least 110 follow-up reviews of these block claiming homes are conducted by January 5, in order to meet the requirement to conduct an unannounced follow-up review within 60 days.
Of the 110 block claims detected in early November, 40 homes had already had their first onsite review of the year in October. That means that these 40 homes will need another review much earlier than planned. Because Joe is already worried about conducting unannounced onsite reviews during these months, he decides that all of these followup reviews will have be “complete” reviews, so they can be counted as one of his three annual reviews of each facility.

Let’s look at the number of reviews that Little Tex is required to conduct in November and December to meet the 60-day unannounced follow-up rule. The top line of the next chart shows Little Tex’s original plan, the bottom line shows the revised plan, adjusted to meet the 60-day requirement:

**Little Tex’s first Revised FY 2006 Monitoring Review Plan:**

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[** Revised Plan: 40 additional reviews must be conducted between Nov-Jan**]

The only way for Little Tex to meet the 60-day requirement, and to make sure that it conducts enough first reviews during the first four Months of the year, is to conduct 40 more reviews than he’d originally planned during the Months of November, December, and January. Joe Texas has adjusted his review plan accordingly, adding 40 new reviews between November 5 and January 5, and planning to conduct 40 fewer reviews during the last four Months of the year. Joe is relaxed for about five minutes; until he thinks of how difficult it will be to conduct 40 extra reviews during this period, when the weather is bad and his part-time reviewers want time off for the holidays. At that point, Joe calls his State agency in despair.

**PART 2**

**The New “New” Plan:**

The State agency reviews Little Tex’s request, and agrees that an additional 30 days is reasonable to complete the required unannounced reviews, given the situation.

After receiving State agency approval, Joe develops another plan. Here’s what it looks like, with the original plan on the top line and the “new new” plan on the second line:

**Little Tex’s second Revised FY 2006 Monitoring Review Plan:**

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[** Revised Plan: 40 additional reviews from Nov-Feb, (rather than from Nov-Jan)**]
The additional 30 days has given Little Tex some breathing room, by allowing him to conduct his forty extra reviews over a three-month, rather than a two-month, period.

Still, Joe is a worrier as well as a planner. He can’t stop thinking about the “what ifs?” What if 110 more block claims are detected again in early December, and 40 of those homes have been reviewed for the first time between October and the end of November! He’ll have to come up with a “new new new” plan, and again face the prospect of doing many more reviews than he’d planned, right during the worst Months of winter.

Joe knows this could happen because of his experience with the edit check on the claims submitted for October – remember 110 of 250 homes failed the block claim edit check. Also, remember what we know about Little Tex. The homes in Little Tex’s sponsorship are primarily small day care operations. Most providers care for only a few children, whose parents are blue-collar, working families. Most of the providers care for children even when they are ill, usually because parents do not have sick leave. He thinks that many of the homes COULD be legitimately providing care and serving meals to all of their enrolled kids every day!

Joe tells the State agency that he believes that ALMOST ALL of Little Tex’s 250 homes will, at some time during the year, fail the block claim edit check. He’s worried about having to scramble every month to develop another review plan for the remainder of the year. Joe calls the State agency again and asks whether there’s any way he can document the legitimate reason for a block claim before his edit checks have detected the block claim. (See Policy Alert CACFP DCH 2005-20, Implementation of Meal Edit Checks, for answer to this question.)