

Evaluation of Grief Support Services (EGSS)* Guidelines for Implementation

I. Introduction

NHPCO is committed to providing hospices with the means to receive feedback and compare their performance to national data as a mechanism for ensuring quality of care. An important part of that process is the development of performance measures that provide useful, meaningful, and actionable data.

The Family Evaluation of Bereavement Services (FEBS) survey was developed by NHPCO as a means for hospices to evaluate and improve the quality of their bereavement services. NHPCO launched the survey and comparative reporting for FEBS in 2007. With feedback from FEBS users and guidance from an advisory group of bereavement professionals, NHPCO revised the survey in 2017 and began implementation of the new survey in 2018. That revision was accompanied by a change in the name of the survey to Evaluation of Grief Support Services (EGSS). In 2021 the NHPCO's survey platform was upgraded to allow for new functions of EGSS including emailing surveys to families and real time benchmarking across the industry. NHPCO continues to provide online data submission and comparative reporting of survey results for hospices to use in their quality assessment and performance improvement efforts.

The EGSS survey is designed to evaluate bereavement services from the perspective of the recipients of the services. The survey is based on the assumptions that bereavement services:

- a) are intended to match the bereaved person's need for support, while recognizing that not all individuals will have the same needs; and
- b) have the goal of assisting the bereaved person to manage the impact of loss.

The survey design also takes into account that hospices offer services based on their particular preferences and resources, and that this, in turn, creates wide variation in the number and nature of bereavement services offered by hospices. The survey includes questions on a wide range of services, many of them optional so that hospices may tailor the EGSS survey to reflect the specific services they offer.

Because the quality of a bereavement program cannot be evaluated based on where its clients are in the grieving process, the survey does not include an assessment of respondents' progress. While grief assessment may be useful for bereavement staff in screening and planning interventions for individual clients, individual grief assessment has little utility in reporting and interpreting comparative program evaluation data at the national level. A screening question has been included, however, to identify persons who may need additional follow-up and assistance.

*formerly Family Evaluation of Bereavement Services Survey (FEBS)

II. Data Collection

Survey Preparation

The survey is available for download from the [EGSS page](#) of the NHPCO website. The survey is accessible to provider members only utilizing your email address and NHPCO password. If you have difficulty accessing members-only resources, please contact solutions@nhpco.org.

There are two versions of the survey – Generic and Customizable. Both versions are meant to be customizable with optional questions that hospices may choose not to include to better reflect the specific services they offer.

- The Customizable version is designed for those hospices whose bereavement program has a designated name. Insert the name of your bereavement program where it is noted in red [ex: (Name of Program)] throughout the survey.

NOTE: If your hospice’s bereavement program has a name we strongly recommend that you use the customizable version to ensure respondents focus on grief support services and not get confused by the services provided by the hospice prior to the death.

- If your bereavement program does not have a name that is separate from your hospice’s name, use the Generic version of the survey. The Generic version is designed to be used “as is” with the insertion of the name of your hospice at the top of the first page.

NHPCO recommends that the survey be used in exactly the same form as it is presented. This means that:

- only questions labeled as optional may be deleted;
- the order of the pages of the survey should not be changed;
- the order of questions within a page should not be changed; and
- the wording of the questions should not be changed.

For those who choose to not include one or more optional modules or questions:

- Delete the optional modules and/or questions in Microsoft Word that don’t apply to your program’s services

The survey is designed to be printed back-to-back (duplex) to minimize the total number of pages. When making copies of the survey print the pages back-to-back. This means that page 1

will appear on the back of the cover page, page 3 will appear on the back of page 2, and page 5 will appear on the back of page 4 if all the optional modules and questions are used.

IMPORTANT: Staple the survey along the spine using two or more staples so that it opens like a book. This will make the survey easier for the respondents to handle and increase the likelihood they will complete all the pages. Using multiple staples along the spine to create a booklet produces a more user-friendly survey and will result in a higher rate of return.

Cover Letter

The cover letter that accompanies any survey is important and may have a significant influence on the number of surveys that are completed and returned. A sample cover letter is provided as part of the survey materials. This letter may be used as is or modified, or you may create your own. [Click here to access the sample cover letter.](#)

Including a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) is also highly recommended. However, if the SASE is not included, be sure to delete the sentence: "Please return the survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope" if you use the sample cover letter. Ensure that individuals mail the survey back to your hospice and not NHPCO.

Survey Administration

NHPCO recommends that the EGSS survey be mailed. The original survey was designed and tested as a mailed survey, and it may not yield comparable results if administered by telephone.

When to mail the survey:

- NHPCO recommends mailing the EGSS survey during the 14th month post-death. For example, if the death occurred in March 2018, bereaved family members will reach their 13-month post-death anniversary in April of 2019. The survey should be mailed to these individuals in May 2019.

This recommendation is based on the NHPCO Standards of Practice for Hospice Programs which specify that bereavement or grief support services be provided for a minimum of 13 months following the death of the patient. Sending the survey during the 14th month post-death allows for evaluation of services provided through the 13th month. However, individual hospice programs may differ in the length of time bereavement or grief support services are offered and the timing of the survey mailing can be adjusted accordingly.

NHPCO recommends sending the survey to individuals 21 years of age or older who:

- received hospice bereavement or grief support services of any type (including mailings) AND

- were eligible for services because a family member or friend died while enrolled in a hospice program AND
- have reached the 13th month anniversary after the death of the family member or friend who received hospice care

III. Data Submission

EGSS Portal*

When surveys are returned, data submission can begin. Data submission is done online through the EGSS Portal via the [EGSS page](#). The EGSS Portal is the portal for data submission and report retrieval for the EGSS survey.

For all hospices interested in utilizing EGSS:

- Contact egss@nhpco.org if you do not know your hospice's egss account information as this is used to access the EGSS Portal.
- Once you have reviewed the updated EGSS survey, you are welcome to customize it as needed to reflect the services that you offer in your bereavement program and can begin mailing it out.
- Once you begin receiving surveys back to your hospice, log into the Portal with your Username and Password. Please make sure you are logged out with your individual member access before accessing the Portal (otherwise, you'll get an access denied message).

How to Enter the Portal:

- Click on "[Enter the Portal](#)" under Step 2 – Data Submission
- Log in with your Username and Password (if you are already logged in with your email address, log out before attempting to Enter the Portal!)
- You are then taken to the EGSS portal to "Enter Surveys" or "View Report"

NOTE: Accessing the EGSS Portal requires a Qualtrics username and password, assigned to you by NHPCO.

If you do not know your hospice's login information, please contact NHPCO Quality Team at EGSS@nhpco.org.

Once you are logged in, you are taken to the EGSS Portal home page. At the top of the new EGSS portal, next to your hospice name, you see dates and a calendar icon. The default will show the current data submission period.

Click on the calendar icon and a drop-down menu showing previous periods appears. Click on the relevant data submission period and your report will be populated for that data submission period. Then click on “View Report.”

Number of Surveys Mailed

The EGSS Portal allows you to update the number of surveys mailed out for any data submission period. Simply click on “Update Surveys Mailed” and a window will pop up allowing you enter the updated number (see screenshot on next page). The number entered should represent the number of surveys mailed for the relevant six-month period.

This number is used to calculate the response rate for your hospice for the current reporting period. Ideally, you will enter the number of surveys mailed on an ongoing basis, making periodic updates in the current data submission period each time you enter new surveys. When entering the number of surveys mailed, do not count surveys that were returned by the Post Office as they are considered undeliverable. Your report will automatically update to reflect the number of surveys mailed.

NOTE: Be sure to update the number of surveys mailed a final time before the data submission period ends to accurately reflect the final total number of surveys mailed within the relevant time period (ex: for surveys mailed between January 1 and June 30). Your response rate and the national response rate will not be accurate on your Aug 1 and Feb 1 report after the data submission period is over if this number is not correct.

Enter Surveys

In the Portal, click on “Enter Surveys” to begin entering your survey responses just as they appear on the hard-copy EGSS surveys. The survey software is designed to save automatically, so survey responses are saved as they are entered.

To enter survey responses, click on the response on the screen that matches the response on the hard-copy survey for each question.

- If the respondent has left the question blank, choose "No Response".
- If your hospice chose to not include an optional question, select “Not reported (did not include question in survey)”

The entire survey, including optional modules and questions, is displayed in the online data entry except for two questions.

Questions Not Included in Online Data Collection:

- How could our grief support services be improved?
- Would you like someone from our grief support services to contact you?
- Write-in Comments Question

The above questions are important for your hospice to track and follow up on, but we do not report out that sensitive information. Comments can be valuable to hospices for various activities such as tracking errors in care delivery or as a source of favorable quotes for use in promotional materials.

You can only complete one online survey at a time for each of your returned surveys. When you have completed data entry for the last page of the online survey, clicking the "Next" button takes you to a review page where you can check your entered responses and save or print a PDF copy of your responses. If you are entering more surveys, you'll be able to click on a link to start a new survey. When you are done entering surveys, close your browser to end your session.

For each survey you enter, you must first:

1. Verify your DART ID.
This is the same ID you use to access the DART system. Your DART ID is pre-filled for accuracy.
2. Enter a Respondent Number.
This is unique number you assign to the survey. See next section for more detail.

Respondent Number

The respondent number is for your own tracking purposes only. Ideally you will create a unique respondent number for each survey to keep track of the surveys you have entered online within a reporting period. Surveys may be numbered in order (ex: starting with "1, 2, 3") or a number that is meaningful for your hospice. Please note the system will allow you to enter whatever respondent number you like. We strongly recommend a unique respondent number per survey. Do not duplicate Respondent Numbers.

The survey software does not allow you to review a list of what has been entered as you go or delete surveys entered online. This is where the use of respondent numbers is helpful. You have the option after entering a survey to print a PDF of the survey summary to attach to the original paper survey in addition to writing the respondent number on the hard-copy survey. These are good methods to ensure that all surveys have been entered online.

If you think you have mistakenly entered a survey twice, email egss@nhpco.org so the duplicate survey can be removed in the survey software. Please include your respondent number(s) and DART ID for reference.

Skip Patterns

The EGSS survey instructs respondents skip certain questions on the survey. The data entry screen is configured to not display questions that should be skipped, preventing inappropriate data entry. Whether questions should be answered depends on the response to the previous, or “parent” question. If a hard-copy survey has responses to questions that should have been skipped, these responses should not be entered online.

Example:

- If the response to question 3 in the Grief Support Telephone Calls section is NO, indicating that the respondent did not make any calls to the hospice program for grief information or support, the EGSS survey instructs the respondent to go to Question 5 (skipping question 4).
- Question 4 in this section should be skipped because it asks how well the hospice did in getting help for the respondent as soon as possible. If a respondent did not call the hospice program for grief support or information, this question would not be relevant.
- When entering the survey responses online, clicking NO to question 3 means question 4 is not displayed.

The following EGSS survey questions have skip instructions for certain response options (either stating “skip” particular questions or “go to” a particular question):

Section: GRIEF SUPPORT MAILINGS

1 – response option “Did not receive any mailings or email”

Section: GRIEF SUPPORT TELEPHONE CALLS

1 – response options “Not sure” and “Was not contacted by phone”

3 – response option “No”

Section: IN-PERSON GRIEF SUPPORT VISITS

1 – response option “No”

Section: GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

1a – response option “No”

Section: OTHER GRIEF SUPPORT SERVICES

1a – response option “No”

2a – response option “No”

3 – response options “No” and “Not applicable”

NOTE: The EGSS Portal will display all questions on the survey, including optional modules and questions. If your hospice program did not include an optional module or question, select the “Not reported (did not include question in survey)” response.

Request Access to Distribute EGSS via email

To send EGSS to families via email you must first appoint a EGSS ambassador from your staff.

Data Submission Deadlines

There are two data submission and reporting periods for the EGSS survey each year. The data submission period includes a two-week grace period between the end of each half year and the data submission deadline. There are no black-out periods. National comparative data and the national response rate will populate on August 1 and February 1.

Important dates are listed below and are posted for the entire year on the [EGSS page](#):

Year	Data Submission Period	Report Available
1st half of year (Jan 1 – Jun 30)	January 16 – July 15	August 1
2nd half of year (Jul 1 – Dec 31)	July 16 – January 15	February 1

NOTE: Dates above do not change from year to year.

No data can be submitted for a previous data submission period after a data submission period has ended. *The dates do not change from year to year.*

IV. EGSS REPORT

Your report is available in the EGSS Portal. Once you are logged in, select “View Report” to access your report. Your report will populate with national comparative data on August 1 and February 1.

For reporting purposes, the data analyzed in the semiannual report come from surveys RECEIVED in the half year covered by the report. Reports for the 1st half of the year reflect the

data from surveys that are received by your hospice January 1 through June 30 and entered online. Reports for the 2nd half of the year reflect the data from surveys received July 1 – December 31 and entered online.

Your report will not load until you enter surveys in the current data submission period. As soon as you enter your first survey, you will have the option to “View Report” in real time.

The online report will display all questions. If your hospice program has chosen not to include elective modules or elective questions in your survey, the elective modules or questions for which you have no data will display as “not reported” on your report.

Corrections for Number of Surveys Mailed

You can ensure the number of surveys mailed is accurate and updated when you log in to the EGSS Portal and click on “Update Surveys Mailed.” You should enter the number of surveys mailed on an ongoing basis, making periodic updates each time you enter new data. Be sure to update this number before the data submission deadline.

If, when you view the report with the National Response Rate on Aug 1 or Feb 1, you notice the number of surveys mailed for your hospice was not updated correctly, **update that number immediately by clicking on “Update Surveys Mailed”** in the Portal. Your report will refresh and you’ll be able to see the change you made to the number of surveys mailed, your hospice’s response rate, and you may see a change in the National response rate. Please allow a few minutes for the system to refresh. This [video tutorial](#) shows you how to update the number of surveys mailed.

V. General Information

Transition from FEBS to EGSS

Hospices that utilized FEBS (the Family Evaluation of Bereavement Services) must now use the EGSS survey. You are still able to access previous FEBS reports in the Portal.

Tips to Improve Response Rates

The following are several practices that hospices have successfully employed to improve their response rates:

- Cover letter explaining how the information gained from the client’s response is used for quality improvement. [Click here to see a sample cover letter.](#)
- Personalized note with the cover letter from a staff or volunteer that had direct contact with the family.

- Include a self-addressed pre-paid stamped envelope to return survey to hospice.
- Print the survey on colored paper to draw attention to it. Be sure to choose a light color that does not make the survey difficult to read.

Help

For questions related to any aspect of the EGSS survey process, email us. Email is the most efficient way to get assistance with issues and questions. Even if you would prefer to discuss your question via a phone call, please send an email requesting that someone call you. Email us at: EGSS@nhpco.org. When emailing us, please include your hospice's DART ID.