

EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 39

Start-up & EHS/Infants and Toddlers

Is it required for a newly funded EHS program to hire a start-up planner?

Hiring a start-up planner is optional, but highly recommended. A start-up planner is a consultant, hired by the program, to help facilitate the program's start-up team through the process of planning and preparing for the implementation of Early Head Start services (often called the "start-up" process). Start-up planners are an allowable use of Head Start funds.

A good planner can be instrumental in the start-up process. This consultant can help ensure that the program meets the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*, has developed appropriate policies and procedures, and is ready to be fully operational by the target start date. It is important to choose a start-up planner who:

- Knows how to operationalize the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*;
- Understands the unique implications of serving pregnant women, infants, toddlers and families in EHS;
- Possesses management and organizational development skills;
- Understands and can work with staff and a program planning group;
- Understands Head Start within the context of the community;
- Can facilitate the implementation and planning process; and
- Knows when to seek additional help from the Federal Program Specialist.

It is equally important for programs to select a start up planner who complements the existing staff or start-up team. A "good match" will contribute to a more successful start-up period¹.

What is a Start-Up Team? Who should be on the team?

The start-up team manages and monitors the start-up process as well as early program implementation. The team can determine the status of the management systems and procedures and create timelines for all start-up activities. The team might be comprised of community members and/or staff currently employed by the Grantee.

It is essential that team members able to:

- Provide infant and toddler expertise in program planning;
- Provide knowledge and understanding of program management and design;
- Incorporate a familiarity of the community's strengths and needs into program planning; and
- Represent a voice of authority and decision-making for the Grantee.

What is the Start-Up Process?

The start-up process refers to the activities grantees engage in as they prepare to implement their funded grant, through the planning period and during the early stages of service delivery. Planning for program implementation begins during the grant application process and continues from the time of the award to full implementation of services. Each newly awarded grantee must develop a start-up plan with identified timelines.

¹ Presentation by Betty. H. Smith during *Institute for Head Start Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers and Their Families*. January 23, 1999.

Activities completed during the planning process require thorough review of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* and should include input by parents, policy groups², community members, and staff. The goal is to be fully operational by the target start date.

The Complexity of EHS and the Head Start Program Performance Standards

The Early Head Start (EHS) program is a unique opportunity to provide comprehensive services to low-income expectant parents and families with infants and toddlers. Along with that opportunity, however, comes a great responsibility. Because of their particular vulnerabilities, very young children and their families require services of the highest quality.

Programs planning to provide EHS services must be thoughtful in how they design their program and implement the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*. The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project found that when EHS programs implemented the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* fully and early, they ensured quality program services and maximized the impacts on children and families.³

Because Head Start offers comprehensive services, starting up an EHS program can be very complicated. Programs with a history of working with infants, toddlers, and families may be challenged by the scope of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*. Existing Head Start programs expanding to include EHS are often challenged by the unique needs of infants and toddlers.

For a list of topics and questions related to designing services that meet the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*, see the attached addendum *Early Head Start Implementation Questions*.

Questions to Consider in Preparing for Start-Up:

- What qualities does the program seek in a start-up planner? How does the program ensure that the start-up planner matches the program's needs? Consider:
 - Budget, including fiscal management
 - Timeline
 - Will you want the start-up planner to be physically present with your start-up team, or will a distance/electronic relationship work for your program?
 - Where are the greatest gaps in your preparation to implement EHS? An existing Head Start program may need a planner with strengths in infant/toddler expertise, while an existing infant/toddler program may need more assistance with Head Start Program Performance Standards.
- How does the start-up team ensure timely and thorough communication among start-up team members, the start-up planner, and community partners?
- How does the program ensure that the start-up team includes expertise on infant/toddler development, Head Start programming and management, knowledge of the community, and programmatic strengths and needs?

² For programs that do not have a Policy Council, an interim policy group can be selected. For programs that have not enrolled families, prospective families that would be eligible for EHS services can represent the parent viewpoints.

³ Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. **Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impact of Early Head Start.** Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. 2002, p. 10.

Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:

The *Head Start Program Performance Standards* are:

- A foundation on which to build a high-quality, community-responsive, culturally-appropriate program that reflects the needs of families served.
- The framework for the delivery of quality early childhood and health and development services for infants and toddlers.

Resources:

Early Head Start (EHS). The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC). <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Early%20Head%20Start>

Early Head Start Implementation Questions. Addendum to Early Head Start Tip Sheet No. 39. Early Head Start National Resource Center. DHHS/ACF/OHS. 2009.

Early Head Start Tip Sheets. Early Head Start National Resource Center. DHHS/ACF/OHS. <http://www.ehsnrc.org/Publications/index.htm> (accessed September 21, 2009).

Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. *Early Head Start Benefits Children and Families. Research to Practice Briefs.* 2004. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs_resrch/reports/dissemination/research_briefs/research_brief_overall.pdf (accessed September 21, 2009).

Early Head Start 101 Toolkit. Early Head Start National Resource Center. DHHS/ACF/OHS. 2008. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/Early%20Head%20Start>

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. **Making a Difference in the Lives of infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start.** DHHS/ACF/HSB. 2002. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/ehsfinalsumm.pdf> (accessed September 21, 2009).

Planning for Early Head Start Program Services. Early Head Start National Resource Center. DHHS/ACF/OHS. 2009.

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This Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among Office of Head Start, Regional Offices, TA consultants, and grantees. If you need further clarification on Head Start Policies and regulations, please contact your Regional Program Specialist.

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Addendum: Early Head Start Implementation Questions

This document provides a listing of implementation questions for the EHS program director and start-up team to consider; the topics and questions are directly connected to designing services that meet the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*. The intent represents a partial listing of important questions to consider as you work through your start-up process.

Child Development:

1. What is your approach to curriculum? How will you determine:
 - a. The goals for children's development,
 - b. The experiences through which they will achieve these goals,
 - c. The materials necessary to support the implantation of the curriculum, and
 - d. How staff and parents will help children achieve these goals?
2. Have you located facilities for program activities that meet *Head Start Program Standards*? How will you ensure that these facilities are accessible and developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers?
3. How will your program activities support individualization and continuity of care? How will you recognize the importance of relationships to babies and their families?
4. How will screening for development, sensory, mental health, and behavioral concerns be conducted? How will you use multiple sources of information to obtain the most reliable results?
5. How will you help parents in securing a reliable source of ongoing health care for their children?
6. How will infants and toddlers with disabilities be recruited and served by the program?
7. How will you support parents in their role as the child's first and most important teacher?

Family Partnerships:

1. How will the development of the family partnership agreements will be implemented and maintained? Which staff person (or persons) will have primary responsibility for this activity? What process has been specified to provide an opportunity for reviewing and revisiting such agreements during a family's participation in the program?
2. How do you intend to ensure that duplication of services do not occur for families?
3. How are you planning to work with families to ensure that they are able to access related community supports that are not directly provided by your program? What process and/or strategies have you developed to ensure that families are able to access services offered through referral and that they are satisfied with those services?
4. If you are serving pregnant women, what service plans and strategies have you developed?

Community Partnerships:

1. Which community agencies have you considered collaborating with – and why? [Note – the guidance within the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* lists potential community partners.]
2. How will you reach out to designated community partners with whom you expect to have collaborative relationships?
3. In which ways does your program recognize the development and maintenance of community partnerships as a task that requires allocation of resources (e.g. time and effort)?
4. How do you document the effort you expend on developing and maintaining community partnerships?
5. What confidentiality guidelines are in place to guide the sharing of information about children and families with your community partners?
6. How might you use volunteers effectively in EHS? What plans do you have to recruit and train volunteers?
7. What process will be used to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the collaborative agreements you have in place?

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Community Partnerships, continued:

8. What are the identified barriers that may impact families' access to high quality services? What is the plan to address those barriers?
9. What is the process for establishing a Health Services Advisory Committee? How will your Health Services Advisory Committee membership reflect diversity of health care and health issues that are important to your community and are inclusive of infant and toddler concerns?
10. Given the identified needs of the families, as determined by the Community Needs Assessment, what other advisory committees might be necessary to ensure that families in your community have access to desired services?
11. What initiatives are currently underway in your community that might benefit from having Early Head Start as an active participant in the planning process (e.g. citizens coming together to address safety, availability of outdoor play areas, etc.)?
12. How will you coordinate with other agencies to ensure that relevant records are transferred so that continuity of programming is maintained?
13. How will your EHS staff reach out to their counterparts in the agencies where you are transitioning children and families in or out of? What supports are available for staff to perform this function effectively?
14. What plans are in place for transition-related training?
15. How will you ensure that transition planning occurs at least six months prior to the child's third birthday?
16. How will you involve parents in the transition planning process?

Staffing:

1. What plans do you have in place to make certain that all staff members understand the vision, goals, objectives, and expected outcomes associated with the EHS program as proposed?
2. How do the developed job descriptions clearly identify qualifications and specific job responsibilities associated with each EHS position?
3. How will ongoing consultation and/or support on meeting the needs of children with disabilities be provided?
4. What is the plan to ensure that staff reflect the culture and speak the same language of families being served by the program?
5. What is the process for infant/toddler center-based staff and home visiting staff to come together on a regular basis to discuss the status of their work with enrolled infants, toddlers, and their families? How will mental health consultation be available on a regular basis for these meetings?
6. What is the process for staff to do curricular planning? Have you considered building in regularly scheduled time (outside of their time with children and families) for effective planning?
7. What is the plan to support the continued professional development of staff working in your EHS program? Have you considered establishing a group and/or individual "reflective" or "supportive" supervisory process?
8. What will the program's approach to individual staff development? How will the program support staff in gaining required credentials? Will each staff member have an individual professional development plan that includes, whenever possible, academic credit for training experiences and career advancement (e.g. compensation and increased level of responsibility)?
9. How will your program's approach to individual staff development activities tie into the program's overall approach to staff development? How will you develop a professional development plan for the program that allows for cross-training opportunities for EHS, other agency staff, and/or community partners?
10. What approach will you use to conduct performance appraisals? How are performance evaluations linked with career advancement?
11. What are your agency's policies and procedures that govern appropriate staff conduct (including conduct expected by consultants and volunteers)? How have already existing policies been reviewed and revised in light of implementing an EHS program?