Program Administrator's Checklist

For the Head Start Home-Based Program Option

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA

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"The Head Start Program Performance Standards are such a valuable tool because … you are really putting together an organization that is as comprehensive and has a depth comparable to any business or service agency … because it's all encompassing in services to children and families."

—Coordinator of Community Education, Carmen Ainsworth Community Schools, Flint, MI

"We want to keep the strengths of what [the previous] generation did thirty years ago … but [we] also realize that it's a dynamic process, and that as … society in general changes, we need to change with it…."

—Council Chairman, Shoshone Tribal Council, Wind River Reservation, Wind River, WY

How do I know which program option is right for my community?

This tool was developed to help you evaluate whether the Head Start home-based program option is appropriate for your community. Each year, under your leadership, your agency has the opportunity and responsibility to evaluate how the Head Start services meet the needs of the families in the community. The Community Assessment, conducted once every three years (45 CFR 1305), provides essential information about the needs of families and resources available in the community. In each of the two years following the completion of the Community Assessment, you must conduct a review to determine whether any significant changes have occurred in the needs and resources available to families. If so, your agency must update your Community Assessment and reevaluate the decisions that were made with respect to your program's philosophy and objectives, to the Head Start program options implemented by your agency, and to family recruitment and selection criteria.

The Community Assessment provides information in the following areas to help you decide which program option is right for the families in your community:

- **Demographic information** for children and families eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start, including their number, geographic location, and racial and ethnic composition.
- **Child care and development programs** in your community that are serving children and families eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start as well as the approximate number served by each.
- The approximate **number of children with disabilities**, the type of disabilities, and the resources that are provided to these children by community agencies.
- The **education, health, nutrition, and social service needs** of eligible children and families.
- The **resources in the community** to address the education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of eligible children and families.

Taken together, this information paints a picture of the unique features of your community and the resources that are available to support expectant parents and low-income families with children from birth to age five years. Your challenge is to use this information to make meaningful decisions about how your Head Start or Early Head Start program can best provide support to vulnerable families.

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Is the home-based program option designed for particular family circumstances?

The Head Start home-based program option is designed to capitalize on the learning opportunities in the home environment. Some families are ideally suited for home-based services; others benefit most from center-based programs; and still other families are best supported in a combination of home- and center-based settings. Furthermore, children may move from one program option to another depending on changing family needs and resources. Thus, your Head Start and Early Head Start programs might offer multiple options to meet changing family needs. The *Head Start Staffing Requirements and Program Options* in **45 CFR 1306** delineate the specific requirements for each program option.

In addition, note that families enrolled in the center-based, combination, or locally designed program options may also receive home visits to enhance those services. However, under these circumstances, the children are not enrolled in the home-based program option. The specific requirements for the home-based program option in **45 CFR 1306.33** are only for children who are enrolled in the home-based option. The home visits that are conducted to enhance center-based, combination, or locally designed program options are carried out according to the particular program option in which a child is enrolled and are based on family needs.

The home-based program option is unique and effective because it allows service providers to:

- Work in the environment where children and families are most comfortable and familiar so they can support the learning opportunities children experience every day when they use household items and participate in daily routines;
- be flexible and offer support and child development services at times that are convenient to families;
- work with families whose life circumstances might prevent them from being able to participate in more structured settings, including situations involving maternal depression, substance abuse, or other severe stressors; and
- provide support to families in rural communities who otherwise would not be able to receive services because of long travel distances to reach center-based service providers.

Home visiting is a strategy for delivering services; it is not a service itself. The services your agency provides in the Head Start home-based program option include the full range of comprehensive Head Start services, including medical, dental, and mental health services; child development and education; family partnerships and goal-setting; and community collaborations to meet additional family needs. These services are either provided by the home visitor or coordinated through referrals to community partners. Therefore, carefully consider how your agency's management systems for planning, record keeping, reporting, communications, and self-assessment are designed to support home-based services.

Questions to Answer

if you are considering implementing a Head Start home-based program in your community or evaluating a home-based option in your agency

1 *Are a significant number of eligible parents or legal guardians (e.g., parents, foster parents, or custodial grandparents) in your community available to participate with their children in their homes as required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards?*

Services in the home-based program option are designed for parents and their children together. Child care providers and other temporary caregivers cannot substitute for the parent during home visits [**45 CFR 1306.33(b)**]. Parents should be committed and able to reinforce the child development goals during the time between home visits by recreating the learning experiences that happen during home visits.

2 *Are the families in your community available for the number of home visits and the duration of the home visits that are required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards?*

Home visitors are responsible for conducting 90-minute home visits on a weekly basis (**45 CFR 1306.33**). The duration and frequency of home visits is necessary to achieve the child development outcomes of the Head Start program. Note that the federal regulations in **45 CFR 1306.33** specifying the yearly number of home visits and socialization experiences are based on a 9-month preschool Head Start program. Head Start and Early Head Start programs that offer year-round services are expected to adjust those numbers to provide weekly home visits and two socialization experiences per month for 12 months a year. If a significant number of families are not available for the frequency of home visits required by the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*, you should reevaluate whether the home-based program is the appropriate program model to meet family needs.

3 *What additional barriers might prevent families from fully participating in the home-based program?*

Consider the cultural diversity of your community. Different cultural backgrounds may influence how families respond to service providers in their homes. Gather information from eligible families about their interest in and need for home-based services.

How have policies related to public assistance affected your community? If the majority of Head Start eligible families are now in the work force, perhaps your community has an increased need for high-quality child care. In that case, a center-based Head Start program might best meet community needs.

An important element of the home-based program option is family participation in biweekly socialization experiences outside of the home. Is public transportation readily available for families who lack their own transportation or can your agency provide it? Do you have community partnerships that can offer suitable space for the socialization experiences? Identify the obstacles families might face with this aspect of the home-based program and the resources your agency has to overcome them.

(questions continued from opposite side)

4 *Is your agency committed to hiring practices, professional development opportunities, and supervision methods to ensure an adequately trained staff?*

The work of the home visitor is complex. Home visitors must possess a wide range of knowledge and skills. They must know how to work with both children and adults as well as facilitate group experiences. Your agency should have an array of training and professional development experiences available to support home visitors in their roles both in the home and during socialization groups. In addition, the intensive, interpersonal nature of the work demands a particular kind of supportive supervision. Home visitors need a strong, trusting relationship with a supervisor who provides regular opportunities to reflect on the home visitor's work with families. Home visitors and their supervisors should have adequate time to participate in this important process.

5 *Is your agency committed to the approach to curriculum that is articulated in the Head Start Program Performance Standards?*

Your program's approach to curriculum determines how home visitors deliver child development and education services. The curriculum, defined in **45 CFR 1304.3(a)(5)**, is your program's written plan that includes the goals for children's development and learning, the experiences through which they will achieve these goals, what staff members and parents do to help children achieve these goals, and the materials needed to support and carry out the curriculum. The curriculum should be based on sound principles of how children grow and learn and should be consistent with the requirements of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*.

It is not sufficient to take a packaged set of activities and use that as your program's curriculum. Packaged materials can be useful tools for home visitors to get ideas about learning experiences, but they are not adequate for the comprehensive approach to curriculum planning as it is described in the federal regulations.

What makes the home-based program option effective?

The intensity of the services is a critical factor in your program's ability to achieve the anticipated outcomes. The intensity of home-based services is measured by the frequency and duration of the home visits as well as by the extent to which families can recreate and build on the child development experiences in between home visits. Thus, your agency and the family must be committed to the requirements of the home-based program option in **45 CFR 1306** of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*.

Another element of the effectiveness of a home-based program is what home visitors actually do on a home visit. Your agency should be committed to hiring practices and professional development opportunities that fully prepare and support home visitors to meet the early childhood development and health services, family and community partnership, as well as program design and management requirements of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (**45 CFR 1304**). (See the *Home Visitor's Handbook* and the *Home-Based Supervisor's Manual* for more detailed information.)

Summary

The first step in building a quality home visiting program is to ensure that you are reaching the families that home visiting is designed to help. Next, you must equip your staff members with the tools they need to do their jobs to the best of their ability—ongoing training and professional development experiences, supportive supervision, concrete resources, and tangible rewards. Finally, recognize that family needs and community resources are in constant motion and regularly evaluate whether the home-based program option is the best way to support young children and their families in your community.