

Foundations for Early Learning: Systemically Supporting Program Quality and Early Learning

Christopher Barnes: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Chris Barnes, and I am the senior training and technical assistance associate with the national center on program management and fiscal operations. And I want to take this time to welcome you to our virtual Birth to Three Institute. We actually are really excited to be here today, and I think this is a great opportunity for Syrita and myself to really showcase and really echo some of the messages that we've heard over the last couple days, especially Dr. Honick's message. I think there were some really great points that she brought up earlier today. So, without further ado I want to turn it over to my co-facilitator, and allow her to introduce herself.

Syrita Robinson: Hi. Thank you for joining, everyone. My name is Syrita Robinson, and I'm an Early Head Start consultant. And so, as Chris echoed, we're just so excited that you're joining us today, and our hope that by the end of this session and actually during the session, we hope that you're able to describe one strategy of effective leadership to set the direction of your Head Start Program.

Secondly, we hope that you'll identify two principles that new leaders should know about fiscal systems in order to operate an exceptional program. And then thirdly, we hope that you will be able to state one key management system for promoting program quality. During this session, we will explore the key components to implementing sound management systems such as hiring exceptional staff and creating safe environments to outline what Early Head Start leaders should know, do, and oversee when operating a quality program. We're also hoping that we want to take all of Dr. Honick's 20 quality caregiving tips and make them operational within a healthy and safe environment.

So, let's begin with leadership. An important element of leadership is the program's governance. Section 642 of the Head Start Act outlines the responsibility of the governing body and policy council in our Early Head Start program. An Early Head Start program must establish and maintain a formal structure of program governance. And program governance oversees quality of services and works collaboratively with all of the leaders within the program to make decisions related to program design and implementation. So, let's talk a little bit about leadership.

Christopher: Let's do that. Thanks, Syrita. So, as we begin this discussion about leadership, I think it's important for us to talk about what leadership is not first. And I think that's a great way to kind of start this conversation. First of all, leadership is not a noun. It's not based on position or defined by your role. What we know is that leadership now is a verb. Leadership is something that organizations do, and it's defined by what you do. And so, as we have this conversation, we want to talk about and really stress the components or elements of strong leadership.

And so, as we talk about this, we want to talk about how a leader is really someone who leads a group, who really sets the direction. You set the direction for the mission, the goals and objectives of your respective agencies. And so, we want to talk about that within that context. We also want to talk about strong leadership in terms of maintaining an agency's direction as well because there are a lot of changes that have been amidst -- you know, either political changes or financial changes that actually happen to an organization.

And so, a leader's charge really is to set the direction of the agency, but also to maintain that course. And so, there's a lot of anxiety there that oftentimes comes along with that. So, we want to make sure that you understand that leader's role also is to maintain or manage that anxiety. So, really kind of keep that to a level where everyone understands what their positions are. Everyone understands what the agency's direction is. And so, all of that ties in together.

One good thing, I think -- and we talked about this offline, Syrita -- is that leaders really, especially in Head Start, are really grown from within. And so, as we talk about growing leaders, as we talk about how they are able to really -- you probably don't know this -- but speaking personally, I actually worked in family services when I was in the Head Start program. That actually started my Head Start career in family services. And so, working with my board of directors, with the executive director, it really kind of, you know, honed my skills.

And we talked about a lot of issues both informally and formally. And with those experiences, really kind of honed me and sharpened, smoothed out those rough edges and really set the stage for me becoming an executive director and working in senior management within other organizations. And so, Head Start, I think, has always had that as one of their founding principles, growing leaders from within.

One of the, I think, the great niches, one of the things, observations that I had starting with Head Start is that we've oftentimes given preference to parents or families that are in the program, we actually look at them as partners. And then looking at them as partners, we actually have offered them opportunities to start in the programs and their growth has started from there. So, I've seen that development from a couple different vantage points, and I think that's an important piece to kind of bring up.

Syrita: Well, so, one of the things that we do want to do and we would like for our audience to chat with us today, and that is to tell us who are the leaders in your program? So, if you could just use the chat and let us know who you have identified the leaders in your program. Do we have a few chats?

Tara: Parents?

Syrita: Yep. Most definitely.

Tara: Directors. Our leaders.

Syrita: Directors, of course.

Christopher: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Tara: Myself. [Laughter] Teachers, managers. Child-health consultants. Community businesses. It's moving fast now. [Laughter] Program managers, Head Start Director. Education coordinators, children. Somebody said children. Fiscal manager, parents, policy council, director, lead teachers in the classroom, therapeutic teachers, policy committee members, senior team, family child-care providers.

Woman: Parents. Children and parents.

Tara: Board of directors, policy council. Teachers.

Christopher: Absolutely. It's interesting that you say that because I was thinking when I saw it, when you heard the comment about children, I'm thinking "children?" but I have three children of my own. I'm like, "You know what? Children are leaders." I oftentimes get told what to do. [Laughter]

Tara: This says, "Anyone who's willing to take action and move the program in a positive direction."

Syrita: There you go. Exactly. Exactly. Exactly.

Tara: Somebody said the children again. Okay.

Syrita: So this is excellent. So, we're all thinking the same thing, And we realize that leadership is at all levels within the program. So, what we want to talk about now is how does leadership support quality? And leadership supports quality with working collaboratively with other leaders and key stakeholders such as which you mentioned, your governing body, okay. You mentioned your policy council. You mentioned parents, tribal councils, your management team, your partners. You work collaboratively with all of these key stakeholders to systemically support program quality in early learning.

And let me give you some examples of working collaboratively, and I'm certain that you will be able to relate to some of these. Coming together with your program governance, okay? To hire well-trained staff who are involved in the process of ongoing professional development to enhance not only the quality of activities that are essential to daily classroom or home-visiting practices, but also to the quantity of their interactions with infants, toddlers, and their families.

Another example is working with your management team to create policies and procedures to guide a systemic process to ensure that facilities are up to code or well-maintained and in compliance with your local, state, and federal regulations. And finally, another example of leadership support and quality is, of course, and I'm certain Chris will love this, working with your fiscal representative to come up with those budget-development processes. To ensure that all program areas are considered when establishing your budget line items. All of these involve leaders working together collaboratively with each other and your key stakeholders, as mentioned.

And as I look at this, Chris, going back to our first objective, this is definitely an effective leadership strategy that is described that can help set the direction of your program.

Christopher: Absolutely, Syrita, and I think this is an example of successful partnerships, especially when you think about management systems -- from the perspective of a management system. So, as we move forward with this presentation, you'll see that we are going to offer some resources that you've probably seen before. For instance, this constellation that you're going to see in a few seconds. And it really just kind of stresses all the elements that go into running a Head Start, Early Head Start, or child-care program.

And so, this constellation, again, illustrates the 10 Head Start management systems and how it creates the framework for understanding how to best support quality services. And so, each of these systems function independently, but if they function effectively, you see the connections between those systems and how they work together. For example, if you look at, for instance, fiscal management and human resources, fiscal management and human resources are really, really tied really closely together because, again, you pay staff.

There are elements of, you know, benefits and so forth that really contribute to morale, contribute to just the overall environment that we want to foster in a Early Head Start environment. And so, those things are really tied together. Another example would be program planning and governance. You mentioned Head Start leaders not too long ago. And with this presentation, we're really going to focus in on executive directors, CFO, the policy council, the governing body. We want to look at those groups of folks as leaders. And so, as we talk about this leadership capacity and these capacities that they bring, we want to really talk about the systems and what their role is within those management systems. All 10 management systems do work together.

We do have an illustration that we're going to talk about. This illustration, we think, this graphic really kind of sets the stage for the animation of how these systems are linked. And so, as you see in this animation, we kind of look at the systems as cogs on a wheel. And if your systems are working effectively, then the wheel runs together. That system, that mechanism, that engine keeps running. And so, we think that in our minds, as we look at how systems are interrelated, if the systems are working effectively together, then your entire program will work and function in the way that you want it to.

Syrita: Okay. Well, great. So, today, what we're going to talk about and share with you are five key components that are components of the management systems. And we call them five key components because they're foundational. I want to remind us, though, what Amanda Bryans said during the opening remarks on the first day of this virtual conference. Amanda shared with us that we have to lay a strong foundation so that we can build on that foundation. And that foundation must be strong to support the quality services we provide for our babies and our families every day.

So, the key components are foundational, and they are not new to most of us. Most of us have heard of these key components. But they should be mentioned because sometimes we get so busy into the day to day, we forget and we overlook these key components. So, we want to make certain that we don't overlook them, and that they play a big part in systemically supporting the quality in early learning about programs. So, the first key component is hire qualified and diverse staff. That is: We want to recruit well-equipped, qualified, and diverse staff to support the quality of services for our children and families in our program.

Our second key component is to welcome our new staff on board. We want to introduce our new staff to our program's values, missions, goals, code of conduct. Just everything about our program. And sometimes we overlook that, and we really do need to plan that and make certain that the newcomer that's coming on board really understands and feels welcome and feels well-informed at the same time.

Our third key component is to implement active supervision. And I know we've all heard of this. And it sounds easy, but it requires time. To collaboratively explore with staff their experiences with pregnant moms, infants, toddlers, and their families.

Finally, number four, we would like to make certain that we have reflective supervision. Reflective supervision. And so, reflective supervision, we have heard of that before, but we want to also make certain that our third key component which I overlooked, and I do apologize, is to implement active supervision. And then finally, what we want to do is take care of our staff. We want to support staff needs to reinforce quality services to our babies and their families within our programs. So, again, these five simple foundational key components we will share with you, and with each component, we're going to share some fiscal implications, and then we're also going to share some questions that leadership should consider.

So, let's start first with hiring qualified and diverse staff. Here we have a simple foundational key component because we all know that in order to support quality services in early learning, we must have qualified staff. But the question is are we just hiring staff because we have a vacancy? Or are we hiring substitutes because that is exactly what we need at this moment, a substitute? Or do we really take a closer look at our organizational structure and ensure that we are meeting the needs of our families and meeting the required standards and regulations? Hiring qualified and diverse staff begins with a thorough needs assessment of our program -- an assessment of our program services, and an assessment of our families.

So, one of the key credentialing questions that we have is that what are our credentialing requirements and functional responsibilities that need to be included in our job descriptions and in our job announcements? Such requirements include Early Head Start teachers. Making certain that they have their CDA and that they have that specific training in infant and toddler care.

Secondly, our home visitors having an average caseload of 10 to 12, making certain that we can't go over 12 families with our home visitors. Or what about ensuring of what diversity we have within our families, within our center base or our home-based program? Making certain that we assess that area where we serve families in the community and within our community-service area. Having a diverse workforce cultivates an environment that is respectful for every family's language and culture. This information, again, should be reflected in our announcements and our job descriptions.

And another foundational point when hiring qualified staff is what is the process for obtaining criminal background checks, okay? And before employment or for all perspective Early Head Start employees. How long does it take to hire our employees? Do we have coverage while we're waiting for those criminal background checks to be processed? And do we have qualified coverage?

Another question is how effective are our systems? Our tracking system and reporting system for each member's complete initial health examination including screenings for tuberculosis and all of these -- including the criminal background check, our health exams -- All of these require some fiscal implications.

Christopher: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think you bring up some great points, Syrita, and I think one of the, you know, in terms of hiring qualified and diverse staff, you really need to really think about what's the culture of the agency. You need to think about what are the priorities of the agency, and you also need to think about what are the requirements. And you brought up a lot of them in terms of criminal background checks, health screenings, and so forth. And I think that that is really important to think about, especially from a budgetary perspective. You really need to think about either setting aside funds or resources for those activities, but you also need to think about are there particularly some partners in your communities that can make support your efforts in making that happen?

And so, wages, you know, we talk a lot about wages. And I'm sure in Head Start and Early Head Start programs across the country, they have experienced the same thing that I've experienced. Because of the budgetary constraints, sometimes, you know, wages aren't necessarily on par with maybe your public schools or some regions in your area. And so, you need to think about what sorts of ways can you make your resources work for your particular agency. And so, as you talk about some of the requirements, there may be some partners in your community that may be able to support your agency in terms of health screenings, criminal background checks, and so forth.

Some of the other things we actually look at in terms of just how we are operating as a program is thinking about the diverse workforce -- How can you attract people from your community to actually work in Head Start or Early Head Start or child-care organization? And so, those opportunities are out there.

It really is really thinking about the recruitment process, thinking about how you can really talk about your agency from a marketing perspective. And you also need to think about what money or resources you have set aside for that. So those, I think, are really important fiscal implications for looking at hiring and attracting a diverse and qualified workforce.

Syrita: And once we've hired our diverse, well-qualified staff, we want to make certain that we welcome our new staff on board. Here again, we have another simple foundational component of management systems. And I know we always welcome our new staff, but remember, we're talking about laying a strong foundation and growing at all levels, strong leadership within our strong management systems. So, how well do we prepare in advance for onboarding new staff? Does our welcome packet include our program's mission, vision, goals, personnel policies, procedures? How about key staff bios? Our governing body bios? Our organizational structure and our policy councils, even our code of conduct?

When you think about this packet, it's pretty much a big packet. But we want to make certain that our staff are well-equipped and well-informed from the very, very beginning. Leadership should always plan activities that support new staff throughout the first several months of hire. We can't really bring on board our staff within one week. I mean, I really think that's a lot.

So, we have to think about planning one week to three months out to make certain that we're able to just inform our staff and make certain that they're well-equipped and ready to get started with their jobs. So, perhaps during the first week, we can assign new staff a buddy -- a buddy system -- as an immediate resource who can function as a tour guide as they administer office tours or even go out on site visits. The buddy system can also support new hires throughout the first three months by scheduling opportunities to integrate new hires into their working groups and also to introduce them to the larger organization as a whole.

And finally, another strategy is setting up formal feedback sessions with their supervisors. I mean, this is a very good piece of beginning the reflective process, supervision. It's an excellent opportunity also to initiate ongoing professional-development plans. And to also clarify roles or any questions that new staff may have. Here again, it is simple, but it is vital. And it sets a positive tone of what the impression that they have and also the expectation of the organizational's culture. And I'm certain bringing them on board and bringing all those materials together, there's a lot of financial implications with that.

Christopher: Absolutely. Absolutely. So, I'm glad we're actually having this conversation about onboarding staff because -- just in my experience, I think my first week as a Head Start employee, I think they showed me where the desk was, and they may have told me where the bathroom was. And so, as we think about onboarding new staff, and really --

Syrita: There was no packet.

Barnes: Yeah. And you think about what "onboarding" actually means. And so, we spend a lot of action and time and effort really screening staff, you know?

The interview process -- They may have maybe one, two, maybe even three interviews. You may speak with policy counsel, you may speak with executive director, you may meet other folks that are active in the community, possibly. But then once the employee actually comes on board, then there sometimes can be a gap. And we recognize, sometimes, that either can be a poor system, or it also can be just a capacity issue. And so, as we think about that, I think you brought us some really great suggestions or strategies as to how to onboard and welcome staff as they come on board.

And I think that one of the things that you brought up in terms of, like, setting a plan for the employee, whether it's one week or three months, you really need to think about that plan and think about how professional development factors into that. And so, in terms of fiscal implications, professional development means a number of different things. It could mean maybe a local college or university. It could mean possibly having some consultants come in. It could also mean using some of your staff who have other responsibilities, as you said, a buddy, taking time from what they already are doing to participate or team up with this new employee.

And so, those things, those resources are drawing from something. You have this finite pool that we can draw from. And so, they are drawing from something. And so, we need to think about that from a budgetary perspective and think about what that means fiscally as you think about, you know, whether if the buddy is taking time from their original responsibilities, and now they're doing this, then what is falling by the wayside?

And so, we need to think about that as we have those discussions. But professional development, I really think, is the cornerstone for onboarding staff. And as you think about professional development, we always plan for professional development. But oftentimes we may not think about those other -- as you mentioned -- those onboarding instances where we're really not training staff on what they're going to be doing in the classroom, but really creating a culture in the organization. We're setting the environment that you want to create in terms of having that quality environment. So, those things really need to be considered. And as we have this conversation about the budgetary impacts, those things need to be included in that discussion. And so, that's something, I think it's a great point. And I think those are really great strategies.

Syrita: Excellent. So, now to our third key component which is to implement active supervision. That is to intentionally position staff and children in a healthy and safe environment. Child safety and supervision is a priority for the office of Head Start, and leaders at all program levels must create an organizational culture that prioritizes safety as well. Active supervision strategies ensure that programs provide safe, well-supervised environments for positive learning for all children.

So, I have a question for you. Or for us. Does our program set up healthy and safe indoor and outdoor environments for infants and toddlers and staff? And of course I'm certain teachers do this all the time, but I wanted to dig in just a little deeper.

So, looking at health and safety, are we administering a health and safety checklist daily to ensure that there are no broken equipment, no broken toys, no chipped paint, or unsafe items in the playground? Or do we administer a health and safety checklist before socializations? A lot of times we don't think about socializations. And we need to think about socializations because sometimes socializations are not always held at the same place, they vary. So, we want to make certain that wherever we're having our socializations with our home visitors, that they are safe. And does our home visits work collaboratively with our parents to show them how to do health and safety checks in their home?

So, all must be done, and all must be part of a supervisory plan. We know that our staff set up supervisory plans to ensure that staff can see and can hear all of the infants and toddlers in their care. However, we want to make certain that the supervisor plan also ensures scanning checkpoints of play areas and playgrounds where our children explore and learn. And we realize that this may be different from state to state or from communities that we serve.

However, although the state to state and the different community areas that we serve may be different, what remains the same is the intentionality. And the intentionality must be the same -- to have a healthy, safe environment. And we realize that this may look different depending upon the communities that you serve. And so, Chris, I believe you just mentioned earlier that you were a Head Start director. And I believe you were a Head Start director in an urban community. So, what are some concerns you would have in inspecting your outdoor play area?

Christopher: It pretty much ran the gamut. You definitely have to make sure that you are inspecting for maybe some animals or animal droppings and so forth. You're also thinking about broken glass. You're thinking about medical equipment. You're thinking about a number of different things as you're doing your inspections. One of the other things, speaking with the Head Start director from Alaska. They have a concern about bears.

And so, I'm thinking, you know, look at the difference between areas. You know, you brought up this issue about, you know, the intentionality or the effort is the same. It really is. But, you know, your concerns may be different. And so, as you have this discussion, you know, you're thinking about, you know, what does that look like, using a screener or some sort of diagnostic tool or assessment tool to really assist you in that really makes sense. Having a routine or a system in place makes a lot of sense. And I think those things really, you know, using those things together give you a really, really, I guess, strong background or strong foundation for ongoing monitoring in health and safety. So, I think that is a really important issue to talk about.

Syrita: Yeah, so as we establish a supervisory plan where staff can see and hear all the infants and make certain that we have safe areas for the children to play, I've actually had experience working with a program who implemented a tiered monitoring concept. So, you have here where you have, of course, the teacher scanning the outdoor area and the indoor area.

But then you may have a center director who actually uses a health and safety checklist on a daily basis. And then you may have the supervisor of the center director who uses the health and safety screener on a biweekly to monthly basis. And then we have those mid-managers who come in on a quarterly basis just to do a spot check. And so, what happens there is that you widen the lens of health and safety within the environment where our children are learning and our children are playing.

So, at every tier or program level, there needs to be an active and intentional supervision to ensure that safety for our infants, our toddlers, our families, and staff. And you know, Chris, I think that speaks back to our second objective where we're talking about what are the principles that leaders should know and do and oversee when working with fiscal representatives. And one of them is working with your fiscal representative to ensure that you have budgeted line items to take care of some of those noncompliant needs in your center.

Christopher: I agree with you. And I think that, you know, talking about this within the context of a center-based program, but, you know, of course, they have family child care agencies that we need to consider, as well. So, a big piece of that is really helping everyone understand or train them on what the potential hazards are. And you know, really the thought behind this is keeping our infants and toddlers safe. And so, that really needs to be the motivation behind this and really impressing upon all of our grantees the importance of keeping our infants and toddlers safe.

So, as we think about these fiscal implements, and we talk about training, number one, but we also need to think about who's going to do the actual assessment, or the health and safety screener, for instance. And so, that may look different depending on what program that you're in. You may have maybe a contractor that does that for you. It can be an employee that does that. In family child care, it could be the homeowner that actually does the screener.

And so, when you think about who is going to be responsible for the activity. But then number two, we need to budget the resources and materials in order for that to happen on a monthly, daily, weekly basis. And so, those things need to be taken into account. As we have this discussion, I recognize really the challenges, the practical challenges, of doing that. So from a center-based perspective, I recognize, and I've been involved in really thinking about who was going to be able to have that responsibility. As budgets kind of shrink, so to speak, we have to recognize that there are opportunities for us to maybe think about volunteers and maybe how they can maybe participate in a program in that way.

Or maybe we can think about maybe using some of our formal organizations in the community to kind of support us in our endeavors. So, I've seen a number of different ways in our travels throughout the country. We've seen a number of maybe best practices or strategies to kind of work with that. But I think, again, it really is coming up with a plan that works for your respective agency. And so, that's really important to think about that.

But again, you're right. All these issues have a fiscal implication. And so, how that plays out in your organization needs to be talked about, needs to be planned on, and then facilitated in whatever way the plan.

Syrita: Yeah, so, implementing active supervision really requires, like, that dedicated eye. But as we move on into our key component, the fourth key component, we also have to look at dedicated time. And so, we want to make sure that we are making time for reflective supervision. Reflective supervision is a technique used to support staff in building and maintaining relationships. We've all heard about it, and some of us do this well, and some of us are still working on how we're going to implement and make that time with our staff.

So, it not only provides an opportunity for us to communicate and explore the many emotions and experiences that take place, but it also provides an opportunity to enhance staff's professional development, their growth, and their level of comfort building an effective relationship with a supervisor and taking calculated risks with children and families. Reflective supervision requires, first, the commitment. It must be a commitment, and it also must be consistent. It requires a commitment to frequently embody a working partnership with your staff, and using the skill of reflection with the goal of improving and deepening the relationship that surrounds the infant and the toddler.

This commitment requires, also, planning. So, we have to remember that when we plan our reflective supervision, we also need to plan coverage, maybe for our classrooms. And we need to make certain that that coverage is with qualified staff -- I've worked with programs where the mentor coach actually covers for the staff while the staff goes in and have that reflective practice with their supervisor -- So that you can ensure that there's coverage and that you plan a scheduled and consistent time to meet with your staff.

Our commitment to make time for reflective supervision requires planning and provision. So, our reflective practice may reflect that staff needs additional training. And we will need to provide ongoing training in our coaching to support our staff. But here again, another question for the leaders to consider, does our TTA plan reflect the reflective process trainings or coaching and modeling? Or what are the professional development needs or the trends that are found during these reflective practices? So, Chris, one of the leadership's greatest challenges is finding fiscal resources to support professional-development training needs.

Christopher: Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. I think one of the things that we've talked about -- We actually spoke to this a few moments ago about using the resources in your community. So, oftentimes, depending on your area, there are local colleges and universities that sometimes offer programs that maybe could be of low cost or no cost to the actual agency. Having trainers or consultants come into your agency to actually either provide time for our manager, the midlevel managers, to actually get the training and understand just the foundations of reflective supervision, I think is really important, too.

Making time for reflective practice is really the key. You have to really make that -- it's time invested. It's really investing in your employees and investing in your staff to really help them understand and get comfortable with recognizing their strengths, their skills, their professional competencies, for instance. Those things take time. And so, really as you think about your budget, you have to factor in time for those sorts of activities and understand what opportunities in the community there are for you to use -- not necessarily your Federal Resources, maybe, but some other resources to make that happen.

Syrita: Excellent. So, our fifth key component is one of my favorite, and that is to take care of your staff through support supervision. We want to make certain that we remember this simple foundational component. We take care of staff so that they can take care of our babies, our infants, and our toddlers. Supportive supervision creates a mutual conversation between the supervisor and staff which supports staff's ability to communicate in a safe and healthy climate. Supervision maintains staff productivity, and it also reinforces the goal of caregiving within the program. During our mutual conversations with our staff, we as supervisors or leaders should use support messages like those we use with our parents. For an example, I'm going to use you, Chris, as an example.

Christopher: Uh-oh.

Syrita: So, Chris, I realize you have strengths.

Christopher: Okay.

Syrita: Let's talk about your strengths. Another example -- you know, Chris, I realize that there are so many things that are going on and so many things that you're doing. However, but right now, let's just reflect on what it is that you need right now. Another supportive message example can be as simple as, "I want to make sure that you take care of yourself, and that you feel comfortable doing your job. So, let's talk." All of these are supportive messages and can build resilience among staff and let supervisees know or staff know that they are valued, and they're valued partners in our program.

For an example, a supervisor may observe that their home visitor is assisting a pregnant mom. But the home visitor is over-committing themselves when working with the pregnant mom. And it could be because of various issues, but it's probably because of an emotional connection with the mom. A supervisor can understand the home visitor's point of view and respond with supportive messages but still must communicate the code of conduct. So, therefore the supervisor may respond by reviewing the policies and procedures on code of conduct, but also provide some alternatives and some strategies on how we can work with the mom and work with the mom's needs.

One strategy may be inviting a mental-health specialist to a socialization to talk to the parents so that the mom doesn't feel like she's singled out, or that she's the only one involved in that process. I've worked with programs where home visitors have a case-management meeting, and during this meeting, they have invited mental-health specialists to come in periodically to provide support to the staff. So, one of our plenary speakers on yesterday, Dr. Ross Thompson, he mentioned how teachers and home visitors can provide support to one another. So, one of our third strategies could be to support staff by setting up a schedule or regular time to build teamwork with the staff and brainstorm with staff with developing, you know, ideas on how we can better work with our families and work with our pregnant moms and work with our infants and toddlers.

Christopher: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, when we were going through the supportive exercise, I felt like we were on an episode of "Dr. Phil." I really was feeling the support. [Laughter] So, as we talk about this supportive-supervision notion, I think that this is a really good opportunity to kind of think about this from a fiscal standpoint. So, you know, as we think about this, have you set aside time for out-of-classroom time or away time for your staff? Have you built in those mechanisms for professional development or for that support that you just mentioned or retreats?

So, I think that's a really -- from a planning perspective, a great place to start. Just to create those opportunities for that to happen. I think -- and you kind of made me nostalgic when you were talking about some of the experiences that you had or you've seen in programs. Because I think that that is fairly common that our staff really -- they draw to some parents. They feel obligated. There's a sense of obligation. And I think that that is a true, true emotion. I think we as humans oftentimes do that. And I think that one of the strategies that you just mentioned was really important. Really creating that network of folks inside the agency that really people can throw ideas off of each other. And I think that's really important. But then again, that takes time. That's going to take effort. That's going to take dedicated space and time for that to happen.

So, as we have this conversation, what resources have we put aside for that to happen? And so, time for training, that mental-health consultants may have a price tag. This may be a consultant outside of what we've already budgeted for. So, those issues are really true issues, issues that happen on a day-to-day basis, but we need to make sure that they are accounted for. And again, I can't really stress the importance of the community.

Part of the reason why we have a federal contribution and a nonfederal contribution is because we recognize the community's value, and we recognize they are a part of this team in terms of moving the program and educating our young children and families. And so, as we think about that from just from a purely philosophical perspective, we need to draw from our community as much as possible those opportunities to partner, those opportunities to kind of support our staff and for us to support the community in return.

So, I think that's a really great place to start with, and I think that's a great point that you brought up about supportive supervision.

Syrita: Well, one of the things we want to do now is we really want to hear from our audience. And we would love for them to chat with us and to tell us what do you do to help support staff? So, if you could just type in your comments, that would be great.

Tara: So, Shelly says as a director to implement this, she started with 15-minute meetings for staff outside to meet and build up from there.

Syrita: Excellent.

Tara: A pat on the back goes a long way.

Syrita: Exactly. I agree.

Tara: "We're just starting out-of-classroom time at our program. We're staying connected to what's going on in the classroom. We encourage them. We take time to recognize the positive things that staff and teachers are doing."

Syrita: Recognition is very important.

Tara: Let's see what others have to say. They are agreeing that out-of-classroom time is important. Some programs are sharing that they do have those things in the program, and some are saying that they don't have that as of now.

Syrita: Right. [Laughter]

Tara: As of now, but after today, they will. And they did agree that it's true that we are lucky to have highly qualified coaches, and they have truly made a difference in the program. Let's see if there's any additional ones.

Syrita: Is there anything else?

Christopher: Yeah, I think those are great, great points that you brought up, as well. And I think as we talk about this conversation, I'm going to allow you, Tara, to kind of give us more comments. But I think that there are some opportunities for programs to really analyze or look at their budgets to see whether or not there are some opportunities to create either the coaching aspect or maybe that mentor/peer sharing. I think that's a really great point. One of the other things about supportive supervision also is that I think that it recognizes or takes into consideration the actual realities of the program, working in some of the communities that we work in. And so, creating a culture for support with both the staff and the families really creates an environment that really is beneficial to children, toddlers, and infants.

So, I think that is really how we underscore all of this by saying that creating that supportive environment will benefit our infants and toddlers in a positive way.

Syrita: Exactly. Do we have more?

Tara: I have a few more. Ophelia says in their program, they have once a month staff development day, and they bring lunch for the staff.

Christopher: Food works. [Laughter]

Syrita: We love food.

Tara: Based on periodic e-mails that tell them what an amazing job they do and how their efforts are valued.

Syrita: Awesome.

Tara: Cynthia makes it her business to ask staff how they are doing when she visits the classroom. So, they have fairness across the board. And they talk about what they need. Then they give them strategies, observe them, and then reflect with them.

Syrita: Excellent. Excellent.

Tara: Team-building activities each meeting led by peers. Patricia mentioned listen to them, be an avenue for them to go to in times of overload. "We make sure to thank staff for even small things that they do to help."

Syrita: Exactly.

Tara: They cook, and they provide them with snacks.

Syrita: Wow. [Laughter] We got cooks.

Tara: Victoria says, "Drop a 'great job' note." And Winona, as a former coordinator, implemented chat sessions as well as a newsletter for teachers, both home-based and center-based, to increase the level of communication.

Christopher: Tara, do you see any comments from family child-care centers or home visitors?

Tara: Any family child-care folks out there, please chat with us, and let us know what you do to support your providers and family child-care option. I haven't seen anything related to child-care partners or family child care yet. But I know that they're out there, so we'd like to hear from you. [Laughter] Barbie says that they do reflective supervision once a month per home visitor. And then any time they need extra support, they're always available. She also gives them a one-hour peer reflective per month when they can talk to each other about what they're going through when they share strategies. They plan social activities for the staff to do team building, and just to mingle with one another.

Christopher: Oh, good. Good.

Tara: Monthly breakfast and lunch meetings. Mail cards to staff, respond by listening closely, and finding resources, and talk with them to brainstorm on ideas. So, there's lots of great things that are happening here. I don't see that our family child-care people have responded yet. We have lots of responses in the chat.

Syrita: This is great. [Laughter] They're out there.

Tara: Okay, Bertha says, "I observe my staff's strengths and try to build off of them. If I observe areas where they need to work on, I will help scaffold via trainings or modeling new behaviors to make them successful."

Syrita: Yes, modelling is very good.

Tara: Staff meetings every two weeks with Round Robin for everyone. Team building by peers. They like that idea. Somebody sent it earlier. Individual attention and group support. Let them know they're progressing and ask for input perspectives on what they need to proceed.

Syrita: So, you know what would be great? If we're able to take all of those strategies and list them out and share them with everyone.

Tara: And everyone can see those also, the ones that I'm saying.

Syrita: And by the way, you can cut and paste, if you want to, in the chat box, to get that information. This is wonderful. Thank you. Thank you so much for chatting with us. We really do appreciate you participating. So, here again, we're trying to just keep everything foundational and keep it simple. And so, Chris is going to talk a little bit about a tool that PMFO has provided for us, and it's called "keeping it simple with systems."

Christopher: Absolutely. So, this is a great segue, keeping it simple. So, the actual tool is a part of an overall active-supervision tool kit. One of the tools, as a part of that tool kit, is called "keeping it simple with systems." And so, it really is, I think, a really easy way to think about active supervision from a systems perspective. It really gives you the opportunity to think about the 10 management Head Start systems that we talked about earlier. It gives you perspective on how you can tie active supervision to those management systems specifically. And so, the questions on this keeping it simple with systems tool kit is really broken into the management systems, but it gives you a set of simple questions to ask to see how they are related.

And so, the questions are designed to be to give a yes or no response. They are basically kind of giving you an overview of the program. Thinking about how you are actively supervising your staff and the overall environment of that organization as a whole. And so, the kit's tool supports you -- How do you begin this journey as a program leader.

It really kind of uses the program systems to support quality. And again, there's actually a few different tools on here. There's a PDF that's available that you can download off of the ECLKC website. And there's also a webinar, and the transcript is available, as well. So, it kind of gives you a little bit more background, a little bit more guidance on how to use the tool. So, again, it's really just thinking about asking some really simple questions about your program. And you can, at your leisure, at your own pace, really think about how you are effectively engaging your organization and engaging your staff and making your program safe.

And so, it really kind of, I think, is a great opportunity for any agency regardless of size or jurisdiction or region to really kind of look at their program and kind of work that out. So, I think that's a great way to kind of start. And again, it's keeping it simple. I think that's the one thing where it's not going to be a huge drain on your time. It really is an opportunity for you all to use this tool and create opportunities to kind of have a dialogue about how we can improve systems.

Another thing I wanted to kind of suggest, too, as we have this conversation about resources, is to offer some web-based resources that are available to you, as well. And one of the things that I just mentioned, and we just mentioned ECLKC, and I'm sorry for using acronyms. We at Head Start use a host of acronyms. But it's the early childhood learning and knowledge center. So, that's what we affectionately call ECLKC. That is a resource to not just Head Start, Early Head Start, but really the greater child-care community.

There are a lot of resources and tools and documents available for people to either download, to share, and so forth. Really to strengthen your program as much as possible. The second link is a health and safety checklist. And this is actually a health and safety checklist that I was able to share with some colleagues. And they really, really, really, I think, have taken to it. I think this is a really great tool. But this was developed by the University of California, San Francisco, their school of nursing. And it really is a really detailed checklist. It's really something that you can really use as a diagnostic tool to evaluate your program, the actual physical environment of your program, both indoor and outdoor. And so, I think it's a really great resource to use.

So, these are active links. And so, you can actually click on these links in the presentation. It will take you directly to that website. Caring for Our Children is a publication. This is actually its third Edition. The Caring for Our Children is a really, really important and useful tool. It's, I think, a great resource for either program leaders or child-care providers who are working with children on a day-to-day basis. I think it has a lot of information in it. It is really something that I think that would be worthwhile for anyone to read and really kind of use and share with your colleagues. It was developed by the National Resource Center for Health and Safety, and I think that it really has a lot of -- It's a huge booklet, but it really has a lot of information that they really, I think, you can share with your colleagues.

There's a couple other resources that we have I mentioned. I mentioned also that active-supervision tool kit. There's an active link there for that. And then also mentioned there's a webinar on strategies that helps managers become better systems thinkers. And so, that is an active link there for you, as well. So, these, I think, are some really good -- It's a start. Again, this is not an exhaustive list, but this is really, I think, something that can kind of get some conversation going around systems and thinking about different forms of supervision or strategies about improving quality.

Syrita: Great. Well, we hope that we will continue to do a maintenance check on our foundation and that we want to make sure that we are not overlooking those simple key components that really do contribute to the quality of our program. And those components are a part of our management system and continue to strengthen our program foundation. As we grow strong leaders and use strong management systems to support our program quality.

And I do want to just restate what Amanda Bryans stated. She actually gave us a charge. And I think it was a wonderful charge. That when we observe our babies, experiencing those developmental milestones, I call them that "aha moment" because you know, children, babies, they have aha moments, to make sure that we celebrate with them and that we share those aha moments with our colleagues, with our supervisors, and most importantly, with our parents -- with their parents. And when we do that, it speaks volumes to the quality of work that we do every day.

So again, we want to thank you so much for chatting with us, sharing all of your strategies with us, and we just hope that this was a very helpful, simple, foundational session and that you were able to learn from it and that you will continue to go about improving the program quality in early learning within your program. Thank you so much.

Tara: Thank you both. That was great. So, they're not finished chatting with you yet.

Christopher: I know. I know.

Tara: I have questions here from the audience. So, let's see. Where shall we start? A question from Maggie. She says often great teachers are promoted to a managerial position midyear, disrupting the continuity of care for the children. Do you have suggestions for how program leaders might recognize and reward teachers who stay in the classrooms instead of moving to a position of higher pay and status?

Syrita: Wow! [Laughs]

Tara: Solve the problems of the world.

Syrita: Oh, wow!

Christopher: Right. Well, you know, the thing is is that, you know, this is probably one of the foundational elements of Head Start is really promoting and growing leaders from within.

And so, I don't know if we want to discourage that. I think that that is one of the key foundations of Head Start. It's really, I think, a selling point for what we do. It really speaks to, you know, an organization as a whole when you're able to grow your leaders from within. And so, as we have this conversation about, you know, having that quality in the classroom, I think it really speaks to going in the opposite direction, your recruitment process, how you onboard staff, and how you create a culture.

Syrita: Exactly. You know, I understand continuity of care, but continuity of care doesn't necessarily have to be tied to a particular person. It could be tied to a culture. And so, as you cycle people in and out of the program, that culture remains the same. And so, again, it kind of speaks to what we talked about earlier in terms of recruitment and onboarding staff.

Tara: Nice. Great. Okay. This question is from Leah. She wants to know who should a leadership team consist of in a Head Start/Early Head Start center-based and home-based program?

Christopher: So, I'm going to take a stab at that one, too. I'm sure you have some comments or thoughts on this as well. The thing is is that there's not going to be a one answer for this because your organization may be part of a multipurpose agency. It could be a single-purpose agency. It could be an urban area. It could be, you know, a large organization. It could be a small organization. So there's not going to be a cookie-cutter approach. I think you really have to kind of think about what works for your program. And so, as you think about your management team, who are those folks or what roles are instrumental in decision-making. And then that kind of creates the environment for who is actually a leader in your program -- in most cases.

Syrita: I think it also goes back to the reflective supervision and supportive supervision, that all could be leaders. You know, everyone has strengths. And so, what we want to do is to work with them all and have them to all come together to work as a team. And hopefully out of that we will grow leaders out of that particular center. But I think all are leaders. I don't want to say which ones. And each one has a different role and responsibility. But I don't think we want to "label" who are the leaders within the center program.

Tara: I think that's a great point. And in thinking about some of the work that's done around the school-readiness pieces, where you talked about bringing the stakeholders to the table and you talked about that earlier in your presentation, as well.

Christopher: Sure. Sure.

Tara: Very nice. Sherry wants to know -- Well, Sherry was asking a question about -- Let's see. Oh, she had a logistical question. Sorry, Sherry. [Laughter] I won't ask you that one. Hold on. When parents/caregivers are very -- No, that's not a good question. Okay. Let's go to this one. [Laughter] Sorry, everybody.

Are there places to learn more or read about program models that have more than one source of funding? There seem to be so many options around blended funding. It would be great to have some examples as we think about how to set up our program.

Christopher: All right, so just one more time. Read it to me. I missed the first part.

Tara: They're looking for resources, places where they can learn or read about program models that have more than one source of funding. And the second piece of that is there seem to be so many options around blended funding. It would be great to have some examples as we think about how to set up our program.

Christopher: I got you. So, really, the whole notion of partnerships is not new to Head Start. Head Start has been partnering for a number of years. So, there may be some resources in your community that you can draw from in terms of how to either look for or track other sources of funds. And there may be also some resources around once you track those funds, how you can blend those funds or in some cases, because with the Early Head Start child-care partnerships, we basically talked about this layering process. And so, depending on the partner -- And the reason why I make this distinction between blending and layering is that in some instances, blending gives the impression that once you merge these funds together, you can use all the funds in whatever way that you want to.

And there may be some requirements or restrictions attached to that funding source. And so, you really need to think about that as you look for other funders, think about what restrictions there are on the money, how it ties with the overall program mission, and so, you know, you need to think about that as part of that consideration. Some of the resources that we have used, there are some resources definitely online that I think are helpful in terms of, you know, looking at the budgeting process.

I think that the budgeting process in itself is kind of inherent to, again, this ties to the funding source, but it also really takes into consideration your stakeholders. So, as you have this discussion, think about those stakeholders that are already either on your board or as a part of your community or maybe a resource that you have that you can kind of talk about how we can budget and budget for those different funding sources.

Tara: All right. We have a question from Michelle that asks how would you implement active supervision in a home-based program?

Syrita: Well, one of the ways to do that is you would have your home-based supervisor or manager to actually go out with you to do observations to be -- remember I was talking about that tiered monitoring framework. But also I know home visitors who actually have a supervisory plan in place where they have this form that they have established and created to have some intentional areas to scan when they go into the family's home to ensure that there's safety in the home such as making certain that the outlets are plugged in or scanning the environment to make certain that the toys are in a safe area within the home.

But I think the key thing here is, as home visitors, it's important to work collaboratively with the parent to show them how to look at their home in a much more safe environment and then work with them and model with them. And then just discuss some key areas within the health and safety checklist that they may have or just providing information and T.A. and some technical assistance on what that would look like.

But I think you really do need to work with the family because it's the mom or dad that's with them the entire time, you're only there for so many minutes. And so, we have to be able to educate and inform our parents on how to have and establish those healthy environments. But also, to also teach our parents how to scan the environment, not only within their homes, but when they go out to the playground, how to do that, as well. So, I think it's a wonderful educational opportunity when working with the families.

Tara: Okay. Let's see here. I have a question here that says, "Our program lacks leadership and four of the five key components of the management system. How should staff discuss these issues with management?"

Christopher: Well, I want to say over drinks. I'm not sure. [Laughter] I think that in the instance where, you know, leadership, there's a culture that you need to kind of think about. And so, as we think about that culture, it really comes down to using your board, maybe the policy council, as resources to kind of discuss certain issues that may or may not be -- You know, there are some drawbacks to having that discussion openly. And so, that conversation may need to, you know, channel through the governing body and may need to channel through the policy council in some way in order for that leadership to be shored up. It seems as if there are maybe some areas for improvement. Maybe they need to talk about that.

Tara: Thank you very much. On a lighter note, how does the buddy system work for new teachers? Are subs hired for this period of time?

Syrita: The buddy system?

Tara: Mm-hmm. You mentioned that earlier.

Syrita: Right. So the buddy system can primarily be with, like, you could have a mentor coach, if you have mentor coaches, second buddy with you. Or you could have other -- I don't know, it depends upon, I guess, the makeup of the program. I have programs where they have like seven early-childhood centers throughout the city. And so, being able to buddy up with another teacher at a center. And I think the most important thing here is, which is always challenging, and that is having that substitution pool and qualified substitutes to be able to cover that class for you while you buddy with another staff person.

Christopher: Right. Right.

And, you know, part of that onboarding process, as you bring on staff, it could be an opportunity for that new staff person to team up with that buddy and shadow. Shadow that person for a period of time. And then after that shadowing period is over, maybe two days, three days a week or so, after the shadowing period, then they have either some set-aside time, maybe 15, 20, 30 minutes per week, that they kind of talk about some of the challenges, strengths, or experiences that that person has had during that period of time. And so, I think there are opportunities. That buddy system can operate in a number of different ways. It's really about establishing the relationship.

And so, once that person establishes that relationship and they feel comfortable with that person, then they're able to kind of say, "Hey, guess what. This worked for me today," or "This didn't work for me today." That relationship is really what's important in terms of establishing that buddy system.

Syrita: And if it's difficult or challenging to find someone to cover class, use technology, okay? You can have a conference call or GoToMeetings, and you're able to discuss and share some of the challenges or some of your highlights or any type of information with your buddy. It doesn't always have to be in-person.

Tara: Okay, thank you. This is a related question. Can you share some strategies for working interviews so that we can assess some of the skills of the potential staff at the time of interview? So, they're going back to how do you hire the relationship-ready staff which we heard a little bit about yesterday, as well.

Syrita: Can you ask that question again? I'm sorry.

Tara: Can you share some strategies for working interviews so that we can assess some of the skills of the potential staff at the time of the interview?

Syrita: And I think that all goes back to the questions. And another collaborative opportunity to work with your key stakeholders is when you're working with your policy council or you're working with maybe a representative from your governing body, that you allow them to assess the resumes and to ask questions. One of the best ways, I think, to evaluate a person's skills is a lot of times we ask questions, but we really don't give case scenarios. So giving case scenarios really help a lot so that you can see how they respond to that particular scenario. And that is where you can really find out their skill base, their knowledge base, and you really can find out even their experience in some cases.

Christopher: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Tara: Another question would be how would you interact and bring parents into the acts of leadership and have them onboard with their children?

Christopher: I think the policy council is an excellent way of, number one, getting parents involved, getting them in a position of leadership and understanding their role and how important early childhood education is to infants and toddlers.

I think it's a great way of giving them, you know -- oftentimes we talk about policy council from the perspective of what the parent can contribute to the program. But there are a lot of skills and benefits for participating in on policy council as well. So, you think about it from the perspective -- We just talked about human resource. You talked about hiring. Policy-council members oftentimes participate in the interview process. They oftentimes have to. I say oftentimes, they must participate in the budgeting process.

Syrita: [Laughs] Remember that. Those are actually marketable skills, though. Those are marketable skills. Those are skills that you actually, you know, that you don't know sometimes that we're planting the seed for greatness. And so, as we think about that, we need to think about that from that reciprocal relationship. It's really a reciprocal relationship where the policy council is something that we need from the parents to participate in, but also there are some really beneficial, marketable skills that come out of that experience. And so, I think that's a really great marketing tool to kind of talk to parents about how they can participate and be leaders in the actual child's education.

Syrita: Yeah, and I think also having them involved in some of the activities at the center level, at the socializations, having them to take on those key roles like participating in the parent meetings. And even having them participate in some of the trainings. Most parents are better with learning from other parents, and so, having them attend some of the trainings and bringing that information back to the parents and to talk to the parents at their center level is another way to engage parents into their child's development.

Tara: Thank you very much. We had a question in Spanish, so I had to engage our experts here. He's going to read it in Spanish.

Christopher: And do we have to answer in Spanish?

Tara: They're translating it back into Spanish. [Man speaking Spanish] Now the question in English. How can you make a meeting with a culture to discuss regarding how to support our family and our infants?

Syrita: Can you ask the question again?

Tara: The question about the coach, right? How do you engage the coach to be supportive to the families and the infants?

Syrita: Well, I would think that they are supportive because they're working in the classroom with the teaching staff. One of the things that I know some of the programs do is they actually, when they have meetings or when they ever activities, they have the mentor coach to be a part of those activities and to also provide information and activities for the families. And so, it's a wonderful supportive piece for both the staff, because the staff gets the support that they need, but then it's also getting some very key information from your mentor coach so that they can be a part of those activities with the children and with the families.