

EHS Grantee Start-Up Fact Sheet #1

Determining the Need for a Start-Up Planner in EHS Programs

INTRODUCTION

Early Head Start (EHS) grantees that received Federal funding through Public Law (P.L.) 111-5, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), are expected to provide quality services for pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families sometimes following a short start-up period. New and expanding EHS programs are at various stages of implementation. For all EHS programs, planning is critical to the design and delivery of quality services. *Although hiring a Start-Up Planner is optional, it is highly recommended by the Office of Head Start to facilitate the start-up process and ongoing implementation.*

*The **start-up planning process** refers to the activities that grantees engage in as they prepare to implement their funded grant, through the planning period, and during the early stages of service delivery which could extend well beyond the first year of services.* The initial planning for program implementation begins during the grant application phase and continues from the time of the grant award until full implementation of services. Most EHS programs have begun delivering services, but a Start-Up Planner can work to help facilitate a smooth transition during the early stages of implementation of services.

This fact sheet presents EHS programs with key questions to consider when assessing a program's need to hire a Start-Up Planner.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What is the role of a Start-Up Planner?

It is important to recognize that start-up is a *process* that is not limited to the period of time before services are provided to pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families. Start-up includes the initial and ongoing implementation of and support for services. Depending on the program's needs, a Start-Up Planner can play several roles:

- Facilitate program leadership and staff through the process of planning, implementing, and assessing EHS management systems and services;
- Guide program leadership and staff through the process of developing policies and procedures to successfully align with the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*;
- Assist the program's management team and staff with creating and/or revising management systems to ensure effective delivery of services;

- Provide program's management team with tools to conduct ongoing program self-assessment.

What are the benefits of having a Start-Up Planner?

With a clear understanding of an EHS program's goals and needs, a Start-Up Planner:

- Provides an objective perspective for guiding the program through the planning and beginning stages of implementation of services;
- Enhances current staff's expertise and knowledge as a program moves towards full implementation of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*;
- Engages in a guided systematic approach to assess, evaluate and, if necessary, develop effective management systems to support implementation of services;
- Facilitates discussion between and among those responsible for the implementation of program options to address challenges and issues as they arise;
- Offers practical solutions, provides suggestions and guidance to EHS management team and program staff on strategies for engaging and utilizing local, regional, and national community partners for service delivery (e.g., services to pregnant women and expectant families, Part C early intervention providers);
- Supports the establishment of relationships with community partners and other resources, such as consultants, who are able to assist with the program's operations and to address challenges after initial services begin.

Why employ a Start-Up Planner if an EHS program has already started to implement services?

As EHS programs begin implementing services, it may be necessary to make changes in the program's approach to successfully meet *Head Start Program Performance Standards* in a way that meets the specific needs of the program's community. A Start-Up Planner can be instrumental in:

- Guiding EHS programs in adapting and adjusting their initial plans, if necessary, and modifying program options (after approval from a

- program's Federal Program Specialist) based on changes in circumstances, such as a delay in facilities being completed;
- Assessing and continuing to develop relationships with community partners (e.g., Health Services Advisory Committee, Memoranda of Understanding with Part C and/or public health partners, etc.) to meet program needs, as well as, creating or revising written agreements to formalize those relationships when necessary;
 - Assisting in the development of a structure or restructure of program governance (e.g., Policy Council);
 - Determining and assessing initial progress towards implementing services including examining whether or not management systems are working effectively;
 - Providing guidance and support in staff professional development planning including recommending upcoming trainings and conferences;
 - Reviewing current and revised position descriptions and analyzing the appropriateness and feasibility of assigned program staff to complete tasks;
 - Ensuring effective communication among management team, program staff, and other key stakeholders;
 - Reviewing draft or existing program service plans; and
 - Helping a program to partner with a neighboring EHS grantee.

How can a Start-Up Planner assist when there are problems during planning and implementation?

A Start-Up Planner can help facilitate discussions and support a program in identifying potential solutions for EHS programs experiencing unexpected changes during program implementation in areas such as:

- Developing strategies to engage new community partners;
- Formalizing the development and assessing the effectiveness of management systems and program services as a result of the community assessment;
- Identifying other Start-Up Planners or consultants with specific expertise to work with a program (e.g., fiscal management, delivering services to pregnant women and expectant families, etc.);

- Sharing approaches that other programs have found successful when experiencing similar situations;
- Utilizing research to support changes in approach to implementing services;
- Supporting communications between and among grantee and Federal staff and/or other governing entities;
- Referring to *Head Start Program Performance Standards* and the Head Start Act for clarification.

CONCLUSION

Whether an EHS program is just starting or expanding from a Head Start program or increasing enrollment, the start-up process can be challenging. However, the support of a Start-Up Planner can make a difference during the early stages of implementation of services and beyond. All activities initiated during start-up and thereafter must comply with the Federal regulations specified in the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*, and when appropriate, the Head Start Act. It may be necessary to make changes in a program's approach in order to successfully meet the *Performance Standards*. A Start-Up Planner's expertise can be an invaluable asset to an EHS program's success initially and beyond the start-up process.