

EHS Grantee Start-Up Fact Sheet #2

Selecting an EHS Start-Up Planner to Meet Each Program's Needs

INTRODUCTION

The start-up process for newly funded Early Head Start (EHS) programs can be a rewarding and challenging experience. For EHS grantees receiving Federal funding for the first time, the start-up process will be different as compared to existing Head Start programs expanding to serve infants and toddlers or current EHS programs increasing enrollment. Planning is critical for all EHS programs in the design and delivery of high quality services to pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families. *While employing a Start-Up Planner to help with this process is optional, it is highly recommended by the Office of Head Start.*

An effective Start-Up Planner can be instrumental to the development of a solid foundation from which a program can evolve over time. EHS grantees receiving Federal funding through Public Law (P.L.) 111-5, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the planning and implementation period must progress rapidly. *The EHS start-up planning 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 which could extend well beyond the first year of services.*

In order to identify a Start-Up Planner who meets the specific needs of each program, an EHS program must assess and understand its strengths and needs. Some EHS programs will be serving pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families for the first time. They may also be new to serving special populations such as homeless families, pregnant teens, or children and families in the foster care system. Implementing new program options, such as home-based, center-based, family child care or a combination option, is another significant area where a Start-Up Planner can provide support.

This fact sheet is designed to help EHS programs consider key questions when evaluating whether or not a Start-Up Planner is suitable for their program needs.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What are the EHS program's specific needs in seeking a Start-Up Planner?

EHS programs interested in working with a Start-Up Planner are encouraged to assess their program's needs, strengths, and staff expertise. This process should include the management team, program staff, parents, and community members (e.g., board members, tribal councils, etc.) in determining what is needed in order to achieve the program's goals. For example, a Head Start program expanding to EHS may be interested in identifying a Start-Up Planner who has expertise in infant and toddler

development. An EHS grantee that is new to the Head Start community may need a Start-Up Planner to facilitate the development of their written service plans, positions descriptions, and other more basic needs.

Considering the skills and expertise of the EHS program staff, how can a program determine the areas of need that a Start-Up Planner might support?

After analyzing the program's needs, identify key areas where the program can benefit the most from a Start-Up Planner's expertise. Look for individuals who can best meet the program's needs. In addition to interviewing potential Start-Up Planners, checking references is highly recommended. Once a Start-Up Planner is selected, a contract with a detailed scope of work should be developed which may include:

- Roles and responsibilities of the Start-Up Planner and the program;
- Timeframe for completing activities and deliverables;
- Available resources and systems for use by Start-Up Planner (e.g., meeting space and logistics).

What qualifications or skills should EHS programs look for in a Start-Up Planner?

- Understands how to implement the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* in the context of the program's community;
- Recognizes the unique implications of serving pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families;
- Communicates effectively with management team, program staff, and key stakeholders such as an agency's board or tribal council in American Indian/Alaska Native communities;
- Demonstrates awareness and understanding of the needs of diverse populations and how they may impact services in a particular community;
- Displays experience addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities (e.g., dual language learners);
- Exhibits knowledge of working with EHS programs in various organizational structures (e.g., school district, non-profit, health organization);
- Knows when to seek additional support from a grantee's Federal program specialist or other consultants with specific expertise (e.g., fiscal management);
- Facilitates discussions among management team and program staff in making decisions on the effectiveness of their implementation strategies.

How can an EHS program find a Start-Up Planner?

An EHS program can:

- Contact other EHS programs within their local area, state or region to identify potential Start-Up Planners; or
- Contact your Federal Program Specialist to identify potential Start-Up Planners.

Creating or expanding EHS services can be incredibly challenging, and the support of a Start-up Planner can simplify and ease the process. Once an EHS program has determined areas of need and identified a Start-up Planner, the program can focus on implementing and strengthening high quality services for pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and their families.

CONCLUSION

All activities completed during start-up and implementation of program services must comply with the *Head Start Program Performance Standards*. A solid understanding of management systems, such as planning, communication, program governance, and on-going monitoring, will be helpful in the planning process. All Activities must include input from parents, Policy Council, and community partners. Start-Up Planners who understand the *Performance Standards* in terms of the relationship between systems and services and possess the ability to work effectively with diverse stakeholders can promote the EHS program's healthy development and ensure high quality services continue beyond the start-up period.