

# Strategic Use of Consultants: An Interactive Guide for Head Start and Early Head Start Leaders



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Health

## Impacting Change Across Program Areas

### Using Consultants to Impact Change in the Area of Health

Head Start and Early Head Start leaders seeking to strengthen their program's health services to children and their families should consider recruiting and hiring consultants who have the following knowledge, competencies, and experience:

- An understanding of early childhood development and health—including physical, mental, and oral health, as well as nutrition and personal safety—as the foundation of school readiness
- Training and expertise in public health, nursing, health education, and/or maternal and child health
- Experience working with Head Start and Early Head Start and/or other organizations serving pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, including experience in group-care settings
- Certification as a registered dietitian or nutritionist if tasked to support the nutrition services in the program
- License or certification as a mental health professional if tasked to support the mental health services in the program
- Familiarity with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and the implementation of systems and services related to health
- The ability to demonstrate a philosophy that is consistent with the HSPPS, especially related to family-centered practice and a strength-based understanding of families' lead role in advocating and making decisions related to children's health
- Demonstrable respect for, familiarity with, and ability to effectively respond to the diverse cultures within the program's service area
- The ability to identify resources and collaborate with community services to ensure that services and resources are responsive to each family's interests and goals related to health

## Sample Program Goals and Consultant Roles

### **Impacting Change in the Area of Children with Special Health Care Needs**

1. **Program Goal:** To build capacity within the program, classroom, and home for the care of children with asthma.

**Consultant Role:** An asthma educator<sup>1</sup> or specifically trained consultant works with program administrators, health services staff, home visitors, classroom staff, and family members to develop appropriate services and systems to control and manage the frequency and severity of asthma attacks in young children. The consultant

- supports the utilization or development of an asthma action plan (linking home, program, and medical providers);
- provides or helps develop tools for identifying and mitigating asthma triggers in the program, home, and neighborhood;
- increases understanding of asthma, the recognition of its signs and symptoms, and the use of peak flow meters as part of a tracking and record-keeping system;
- enhances knowledge and management of and training for the administration of both control and rescue medications;
- supports the development of procedures for responding to an asthma emergency;
- shares linguistically and culturally appropriate educational materials and resources for staff and family; and
- observes and comments on current policies and procedures and assesses the degree to which they are disseminated and put into practice.

2. **Program Goal:** To facilitate the program entry and appropriate care of children with daily or urgent needs for special medical procedures (including but not limited to tube feedings, endotracheal suctioning, supplemental oxygen, postural drainage, catheterization, and blood sugar monitoring).

**Consultant Role:** Programs serving children who have complex medical conditions need specialized health education training, consultation, and

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<sup>1</sup> See the National Asthma Educator Certification Board ([www.naecb.com](http://www.naecb.com)), the Association of Asthma Educators ([www.asthmaeducators.org](http://www.asthmaeducators.org)), the American Lung Association ([www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org)), the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America ([www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org)), or the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program ([www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)).

monitoring from a qualified health care professional. Program administrators must ensure that the consultant they hire fulfills the requirements of their state's practice acts, particularly where such laws require Registered Nurses (RNs) or Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) under RN supervision to perform certain medical procedures.<sup>2</sup> To support lasting program change, the consultant

- explores with the program director the requirements for malpractice insurance to protect the program and staff in cases where a child is injured during a skilled nursing procedure provided by staff who were trained by a health consultant;
- works with the child's primary care provider, the family, and appropriate program staff to develop, implement, and/or review a plan of care addressing special preparation to perform routine and/or urgent procedures; this plan of care should include instructions for staff training in performing the procedure, a description of common and uncommon complications of the procedure, and instructions for what to do and whom to notify if complications occur;
- helps parents and guardians find free or low-cost sources for the necessary medical equipment for their children;
- offers staff training and advice on how much staff time will be required to carry out the necessary procedures; and
- conducts training on the use of universal precautions that will protect both the child and staff whenever they may be exposed to body fluids.

### **Impacting Change in the Area of Playground Safety**

3. **Program Goal:** To build the capacity of the program to maintain safe outdoor play spaces and reduce the frequency and severity of playground-related injuries.

**Consultant Role:** Programs engage a Certified Playground Safety Inspector<sup>3</sup> or Certified Early Childhood Outdoor Play Inspector<sup>4</sup> to

- identify hazards on equipment and the playground;
- rank the hazards according to injury potential;

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<sup>2</sup> Updated, written medical orders are required for nursing procedures.

<sup>3</sup> Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) program is offered by the National Certification Board in coordination with the National Park and Recreation Association ([www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org)).

<sup>4</sup> Certified Early Childhood Outdoor Play Inspectors are trained through the National Program for Playground Safety (<http://playgroundsafety.org/>).

- recommend appropriate elimination of hazards; and
- assist in the establishment of a system of equipment and playground inspections and maintenance.

The consultant also observes the program's facilities and operations to ensure that playground equipment is age appropriate and properly maintained; adequate surfacing exists under equipment; all hood and neck drawstrings are removed from children's outerwear; children are actively supervised at all times while on playgrounds; staff are trained in emergency first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR); and injuries are documented and analyzed. The consultant works with the director, health manager, and other staff to design a system that ensures that playground safety procedures are clearly communicated to and implemented by all current and new staff. In addition, the consultant identifies materials and resources to educate families about playground injury prevention.

### **Impacting Change in the Area of Mental Health**

4. **Program Goal:** To assist children, families, and staff in coping with the psychological impact of a recent natural disaster.

**Consultant Role:** A specially trained disaster mental health consultant may be contracted to supplement and support the program's mental health consultant and/or local area mental health resources. The consultant's specialty training guides post-disaster intervention with a variety of services, including but not limited to

- consultation to the program's leadership on how to support children, families, and staff;
- group debriefing;
- a compassionate, supportive presence;
- education and resource information; and
- triage and referrals for individuals who may benefit from specific interventions or follow-up.

The consultant also works with the program to ensure that its emergency management plan includes memorandums of agreement with mental health consultants or agencies that are well suited to providing mental health services as part of a crisis response plan.

5. **Program Goal:** To build staff capacity to identify, understand, and effectively respond to an increased prevalence of substance abuse in the community.

**Consultant Role:** A mental health professional trained in substance abuse treatment assists the program in assessing staff members' current knowledge and skills related to identifying and discussing substance abuse with families. Based on this assessment, the consultant develops and provides ongoing and/or periodic staff training to build staff capacity to discuss and explore the topic of substance abuse with families.

6. **Program Goal:** To facilitate support in the grieving process and to assist children, families, and staff in coping with the loss of a staff person.

**Consultant Role:** A specially trained grief counselor may be used to supplement the program's mental health consultant and staff's capacity to facilitate the grieving process for children, families, and staff. The counselor/consultant provides a range of services, including but not limited to

- resource and education information;
- staff training on how to talk with children and families about death;
- guidance on facilitating children's expression of feelings through art, music, or memorials;
- opportunities for staff and families to talk in small groups or individually;
- referrals for families and staff to access additional support; and
- a review of program policies related to grief support for staff and families.

7. **Program Goal:** To increase the program team's capacity to work with a child diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Consultant Role:** A child's own therapist may serve as a consultant to provide information to staff on behavioral and therapeutic techniques that will most effectively support the child in the classroom. The therapist/consultant organizes a meeting that includes all staff who have contact with the child, including the program's bus driver, receptionist, kitchen staff who deliver food to the classroom, on-site mental health consultant, supervisor, family advocate, and teachers. The therapist/consultant shares strategies that the child's family and program staff can use to provide consistent approaches to facilitating the child's growth, development, and resilience. The therapist/consultant meets with the program's ongoing mental health consultant and/or other staff for periodic consultation to determine if the suggested approaches are being implemented successfully and having a supportive impact.

## Impacting Change in the Area of Emergency Preparedness

8. **Program Goal:** To develop a comprehensive Emergency Preparedness Plan that prescribes how to keep children and staff safe during all types of emergencies (those identified in the program needs assessment) that may impact the program.

**Consultant Role:** An emergency planning consultant works with program staff to help them better understand emergency preparedness and ensure that all of the critical elements are included in the Emergency Preparedness Plan. To do this, the consultant performs the following:

- Provides information on potential emergencies that could impact the program's community and region
- Offers training on emergency preparedness in out-of-home child care
- Explains emergency preparedness terminology
- Assists in the assessment of potential hazards to the program and recommends ways to mitigate potential hazards before an emergency occurs (e.g., methods for securing loose items on the playground that could become "missiles" during high winds)
- Identifies the supplies necessary for protecting children and staff during an emergency
- Assists in identifying potential evacuation locations in the community and surrounding area
- Defines staff roles for each type of emergency
- Identifies categories of children with special needs and specific safety requirements for each category in an emergency
- Screens for the mental health needs of children who have been exposed to the trauma of emergencies
- Describes ways to mitigate negative mental health outcomes for children and staff prior to an emergency
- Recommends roles for program staff in the development of the Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Designs schedules for practicing for emergencies
- Develops a resource list of child-level materials/books for each type of emergency
- Assists in the development of a directory of Head Start and community professionals who can assist families and children in recovering from emergencies
- Identifies categories of local contractors who are available to help the program recover from emergencies

9. **Program Goal:** To develop a logical timeline for the review of the Emergency Preparedness Plan and to design a series of questions to use when updating the plan.

**Consultant Role:** An emergency planning consultant assists in developing criteria and a reasonable timeline for reviewing the Emergency Preparedness Plan. The consultant identifies national, state, and local trends in emergency preparedness and presents them to the plan's developers. The consultant also identifies structural changes in the neighborhood and program building that have occurred since the plan was developed and ensures that those changes are incorporated into the updated plan. The consultant assists in developing procedures for checking expiration dates on emergency supplies and also communicates with the local emergency management (EM) office to verify that (a) the EM staff have a copy of the Head Start Emergency Preparedness Plan, (b) the EM staff are aware of where the plan is filed, and (c) the plan the EM staff have is the most recent version.

10. **Program Goal:** To develop an understanding of the role and importance of community partners in developing and maintaining a quality Emergency Preparedness Plan.

**Consultant Role:** An emergency planning consultant assists in identifying local community partners who should be involved in the development of the Emergency Preparedness Plan, defines why working with community partners is critical to a successful Emergency Preparedness Plan, and assists with the first meeting among the community partners and Head Start staff regarding the Emergency Preparedness Plan.

### **Impacting Change in the Area of Oral Health**

11. **Program Goal:** To improve and maintain the oral health of pregnant women and children enrolled in the Head Start program.

**Consultant Role:** An oral health professional (e.g., dentist, dental hygienist) or specifically trained health professional (e.g., physician, nurse practitioner, nurse, physician assistant) provides assistance to program administrators, health services managers, family service workers, home visitors, and teachers to develop systems or strategies for improving and maintaining the oral health of pregnant women and children enrolled in the program and their families. The consultant

- assists in the development of a comprehensive oral health program;
- assists in the development of program-based prevention programs (e.g., fluoride varnish, tooth-brushing protocols, oral health considerations for children with special health care needs);
- provides and/or assists in the development of case-management programs, including the identification or development of tools and protocols to help parents identify and utilize oral health services in the community;
- identifies dentists and dental hygienists to serve on the Head Start program health services advisory committee and provides them with training on Head Start; and
- develops memorandums of understanding between the Head Start program and dentists and dental hygienists to provide care to pregnant women and children, especially children with special health care needs.

12. **Program Goal:** To improve the oral health literacy of program staff and pregnant women and children enrolled in the program and their families.

**Consultant Role:** An oral health professional (e.g., dentist, dental hygienist) or specifically trained health professional (e.g., physician, nurse practitioner, nurse, physician assistant), health educator, or health literacy expert provides assistance to program administrators, health services managers, family service workers, home visitors, and teachers in the area of oral health literacy. The consultant

- identifies and assists in the development of evidence-based curricula, trainings, and education programs focused on oral health that include culturally and linguistically appropriate content for use during staff trainings, parent meetings, and in-home and classroom activities;
- links the Head Start program with dental and dental hygiene schools to provide education programs for pregnant women and children enrolled in Head Start and their families;
- provides training to improve the ability of staff, pregnant women, and parents to identify signs of tooth decay and other oral health problems, as well as to emphasize the effectiveness of tooth brushing; and
- ensures that oral health messages are included in the nutrition curriculum.

13. **Program Goal:** To reduce oral health disparities among pregnant women and children enrolled in Head Start through increased community collaboration and resources.

**Consultant Role:** An oral health professional (e.g., dentist, dental hygienist), specifically trained health professional (e.g., physician, nurse practitioner, nurse, physician assistant), or health educator assists in identifying and leveraging community partners and additional funding for oral health services to reduce oral health disparities in the Head Start community. The consultant

- collaborates with dental and dental hygiene schools to provide on-site prevention (e.g., fluoride varnish, dental sealants) and education programs for program children and their families; the consultant designs these learning experiences to increase awareness of the Head Start community's oral health needs;
- recruits oral health professionals to serve pregnant women and children from families with low incomes;
- increases access to oral health care among Head Start children and their families by leveraging additional funding (e.g., Title V, grants, in-kind donations) to provide reimbursements for clinical oral health services to pregnant women and children without insurance or who are underinsured; and
- builds relationships with local oral health professionals to increase their involvement in the Head Start community.