

Mindy Zapata on Consultants

Mindy Zapata: One of the times that our program has effectively used consultants in our organization was when we were initiating the implementation of having a culture of data in our organization and we engaged a data consultant to help us analyze what our needs were for implementing a technology plan to improve the training capacity of staff within our organization. They also helped us take a look at what our capacity needs would be to build a database to accommodate a lot of the strategic objectives that we had identified through this movement to creating a culture of data within our organization.

I think one of the most effective ways to find a consultant for your organization is to really do your homework, really look to other leaders in the field, sometimes going outside the context of what you might traditionally seek in the Head Start or Early Head Start arena. Really, doing your homework and checking both the resumes and recommendations of that consultant, to whom they've consulted previously and what the satisfactory experience had been like or not had been for that consulting organization.

And I think one of the most important things is to ensure that you're very clear and specific, I call it contracting and clarifying, as to what you're wanting that consultant to do. I think often in consultative situations in Head Start and Early Head Start it's somewhat vague, and so then by virtue of that it's very difficult for the consultant to meet the expectations of the Head Start organization that has engaged them. Well, I think any time that you would engage a consultant in your organization, you want to build in some metrics as to what you're wanting to achieve by having that consultant. You need to identify how long you expect to have this consultative relationship. I think as we analyze our human resource system within our organizations in Early Head Start and Head Start, you should have some very specific expectations of why you're going a consultative route as opposed to an actual permanent position in your financial and your human resource structure.

There should be a good reason for that and the answer should be is that it's a very short term need in your organization. And so, having some metrics as to what that short term need is for that consultation will make sure that it's a successful experience for both the consultant and for you as the Head Start and Early Head Start organization.