

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



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Cultural and Linguistic
Responsiveness

Voices From the Field

Enhancing Services for Dual Language Learners

Program:

Marin Head Start/Community Action Marin, San Rafael, CA

Contact:

Kay Wernert, Head Start Program Director

Brief Program Description:

Marin Head Start provides Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) services to 414 low-income children and their families living in Marin County, California. The program runs 11 HS classrooms at nine sites and 12 EHS classrooms at eight sites. Eight of the HS classrooms are located at schools, one EHS classroom is located at a high school, and one EHS classroom is located at a residential drug treatment center for women with young children. The program also operates one HS/EHS classroom at a homeless shelter. Four of the EHS classrooms offer the combination option, and a HS classroom in the rural area of West Marin also offers a combination option. The program provides a HS/EHS home visiting option that includes pregnant women.

Program Improvement Goal:

To provide comprehensive and effective services for dual language learners (DLLs) by developing a language policy specific to supporting dual language learning.

Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Plan:

The program management developed a T/TA plan to engage a consultant to work with selected program personnel in developing a language policy that supports children who are DLLs and addresses the role of staff and parents in supporting dual language learning. The consultant was expected to integrate the diverse ideas of the language policy development workgroup, introduce pertinent research, synthesize information, and—based on his or her expertise—assist the workgroup in developing a customized language policy and plan. The program was interested in hiring a consultant with both knowledge of best practices for supporting DLLs and expertise in facilitating groups with a similar goal/purpose.

Consultant Qualifications:

The consultant was known in the community for his expertise in developing extensive trainings for bringing to HS programs best practices in working with DLLs.

Consultant's Work:

At the start of the process, the consultant introduced to program staff a body of research and best practices for working with DLLs. Then, over the course of a year, the consultant facilitated the language policy development workgroup, kept the management team informed regarding the workgroup's progress, collaborated with the workgroup to develop the language policy, and presented the final policy to the management team, Policy Council, and program staff. The following year, the consultant worked with the program to implement the new language policy. The implementation included mentoring teachers, home visitors, and family advocates; it also involved integrating the policy into other initiatives and projects in the program.

Outcomes:

- A written language policy for DLLs that was shared with all program staff, Policy Council members, and parents
- Support for staff in acquiring the skills necessary to implement the policy in the classroom, on home visits, and with parents to help them support their own children

Advice to Others:

- **“Figure out a match with the culture of your program.”** A program needs a consultant who has the needed content knowledge and is also familiar with—or is able to make himself or herself familiar with—the program and its current initiatives, priorities, and conditions.
- **Define what you are looking for in a consultant.** A program should articulate its specific goal or purpose for hiring a consultant and then develop a set of interview questions that will lead to the right match. “At different times you may be looking for different things.”
- **Be clear about what you want the consultant to do.** Sometimes you want a consultant to help you set and achieve a goal, but other times you might want someone who can analyze how well you are meeting an established goal.
- **Be cognizant of the fact that “you may not like what they tell you.”** Depending on the project or goal, the program (director, management staff, program staff, Policy Council, etc.) needs to be open to listening to the consultant and then confident in making informed decisions about next steps.