



# ERSEA: Prioritizing Eligibility and Meeting the Greatest Need

Eligibility is a critical component of and first step in the implementation of Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) services. Head Start programs must understand Head Start eligibility requirements which describe how to prioritize those most in need. The requirements also show how to identify the option that best meets child and family needs.

## THE GOAL

Develop and implement systems to ensure identification and enrollment of children and families with the greatest need for Head Start services.

### Questions to consider:

- Are you using community assessment data to identify and recruit all of the eligible children and families in the service area?
- Do your systems support appropriate data collection to ensure eligibility and timely updates to application information?
- Is your criteria for accepting over-income children consistent with the needs identified across your community?
- Are staff trained to conduct respectful and sensitive interviews?

Strong systems are critical for determining, verifying and documenting eligibility.

## PLANNING AND MONITORING FOR SUCCESS

Ensure that all staff responsible for eligibility verification are knowledgeable about Head Start eligibility requirements as well as those of subsidies being used in child care partnerships. Consider reaching out to your Head Start State Collaboration office for support in navigating child care subsidy information.

## Questions to consider:

- Have you created separate ERSEA training modules for staff, governing body/Tribal Council, and Policy Council that can be easily adapted or modified as needed? Consider including information on your program selection criteria.
- Have you developed your policies and procedures to be flexible to meet unique family circumstances across your communities?
- Do your eligibility policies and procedures align with the [McKinney-Vento Act](#)?
- Does your program have the human and fiscal resources to conduct eligibility verification in a culturally responsive manner, including trained staff and appropriate materials to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of families?
- Do your verification procedures clearly identify acceptable documentation?
- Is there a system for the ongoing review of eligibility records? Consider using random samples at various times throughout the program year.

Responsive training and professional development, strong recordkeeping and reporting systems, and comprehensive internal policies are critical components of eligibility verification and documentation.

## MAINTAINING THE COURSE

Use your community assessment data to monitor changing demographics that could impact your identification of eligible children. Understand your state's child care system to support full-day programming and other partnerships. Consider making the child care subsidy application part of the program's enrollment packet.

## Questions to consider:

- Have you worked to strengthen your partners' understanding of the Head Start mission and eligibility requirements?
- Are there opportunities to collaborate with other agencies for training staff on family interviewing skills?
- Do your policies address protocols for handling personally identifiable information (PII) and the retention and disposal of records?

Eligibility services provide a mechanism for ensuring consistent and appropriate enrollment practices. Comprehensive recordkeeping systems make it possible to monitor ERSEA practices. They also help program leaders use data to identify and evaluate necessary modifications. Staff who are knowledgeable of Head Start eligibility and child care subsidy requirements can initiate and support partnerships to meet family needs.



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