



ERSEA: Maintaining Full Enrollment

Head Start's mission is to serve the neediest children and families, promote school readiness, and foster the self-sufficiency of low-income families. Programs must maintain their funded enrollment level and fill any vacancy as soon as possible. Any unenrolled slot is a lost opportunity for a family in need and does not maximize federal funds. Use this tip sheet to identify ways to better reach and maintain full enrollment.

THE GOAL

Ensure Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) systems are in place to enroll the neediest families in a timely manner and maintain full enrollment throughout the program year.

Questions to consider

- Are your management systems supporting your ability to adapt to changing family and community needs?
- Is the community assessment updated and used to monitor changing demographics and family needs?
- Do your internal technology, recordkeeping, and professional development systems sufficiently support the enrollment process?

Programs need to use various components of their management systems to generate timely, reliable data that will inform their decision-making. This will allow them to better meet the needs of families over time.

PLANNING AND MONITORING FOR SUCCESS

Maintaining full enrollment requires targeted strategies for identifying and addressing current and future community, family, and child needs. It is important to adopt a systems approach when assessing programmatic strengths and needs. A strong community assessment process with regular updates is critical. It provides the information required to understand family needs and shifting demographics. Cultivating a nurturing environment is also important for retaining staff and keeping families enrolled.

Questions to consider

- Do you have adequate partnerships to spread the word and support service delivery?
- Do you have practices and policies in place that support staff retention and address staff turnover?
- Do your program options, schedule, and calendar meet the needs of families?
- Do you have a good understanding of the early childhood services offered in the community and how to partner with them?
- Do your recruitment strategies target vulnerable populations?

MAINTAINING THE COURSE

Maintaining full enrollment may mean making programmatic changes to address shifting demographics. Ongoing monitoring of program services, self-assessments, and updates to the community assessment provide the data needed to plan and implement thoughtful adaptations to ensure responsive programs.

Questions to consider

- Have you established goals related to full enrollment based on the needs identified in your internal and external data?
- Are you working with governing body/Tribal Council and Policy Council members, community partners, Regional Office staff, and training and technical assistance (T/TA) providers to establish and implement enrollment strategies?
- Have you implemented systems to support regular attendance and ensure that staff understand the connection between attendance and enrollment?
- Do you understand the financial implications of maintaining full enrollment?
- Are you monitoring the effectiveness of your program's data system in supporting enrollment strategies, including staff data collection and analysis capabilities?
- Are your marketing strategies effectively reaching your key demographic and emphasizing the importance of an early education experience?

Enrollment services are an important part of the full array of Head Start services and need to be included in planning and evaluation systems. As with all Head Start services, data is critical for understanding needs, making decisions, evaluating services, and planning for continuous improvement. The ability to respond to changing community, family, and child needs is a key factor in maintaining full enrollment.



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