

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



EARLY HEAD START  
National Resource Center

## Impacting Change Across Program Areas

### Using Consultants to Impact Change in the Area of Services to Infants, Toddlers, Pregnant Women, and Families

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

- A history of consulting with Head Start and Early Head Start programs
- An understanding of the multiple service areas of Early Head Start (e.g., health, family engagement, etc.)
- An understanding of and demonstrable familiarity with the application of the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)
- The ability to work effectively with diverse cultures and perspectives
- The ability to work collaboratively with staff, parents, community members, and program planning and governance groups

#### Sample Program Goals and Consultant Roles

1. **Program Goal:** To increase recruitment of eligible pregnant women to Early Head Start and to improve the design and delivery of services for pregnant women.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant supports the development of strategies for recruiting expectant families to Early Head Start through such activities as identifying programs in the community that provide services to pregnant women and encouraging partnerships with these programs in order to ensure necessary health and social service support. The consultant also works with the program's health manager and family engagement staff to increase their understanding of the HSPPS related to services to pregnant women and to appropriately market, design, and deliver services to expectant families enrolled in Early Head Start.

2. **Program Goal:** To develop a practical transition plan for families with children transitioning to Head Start and/or aging out of Early Head Start.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant works with the Early Head Start program director to locate and build relationships with local Head Start programs and other community preschool options that would be appropriate for Early Head Start families. The consultant increases staff awareness and understanding of options for families as they transition out of Early Head Start, including transportation, health, and social services that are available for families who may no longer qualify for Head Start. The consultant also works with staff to help them understand the necessity of facilitating open dialogue with families regarding the importance of transition and developing future plans.

3. **Program Goal:** To increase staff understanding and awareness of infant-toddler mental health and strategies for supporting it.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant supports the mental health coordinator in helping staff understand how important it is for infants and toddlers to have healthy relationships with parents, families, teachers, and practitioners. The consultant provides information about resources designed to support staff in their efforts to enhance the social-emotional development of infants and toddlers. Consultant activities may include recruiting a trainer from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and/or facilitating some CSEFEL online training modules as a part of staff meetings and professional development activities. The consultant also provides staff with information about recognizing warning signs in infant and toddler behavior that might indicate a need for mental health consultation.

4. **Program Goal:** To increase staff understanding of infant and toddler development, curriculum, and school readiness.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant supports the program director and education coordinator in discussing and observing with staff in different settings (classroom, home, or family child care) how infant and toddler development is integrated across domains. The consultant provides training and consultation to staff on how to use ongoing observation and assessment to plan, adapt, and individualize care and curriculum for each child. The consultant also helps staff understand the distinctions between curriculum for infants and toddlers and curriculum for preschoolers. Finally, the consultant trains staff on how to link child-level data with program data related to school readiness.

5. **Program Goal:** To improve services to special populations, including teenage parents and homeless and refugee families.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant works with the program director and other staff to develop a timeline and action plan for gathering and utilizing information specific to serving special populations. Reviewing grantees' Community Assessment and Program Information Report (PIR) data is part of this process. Other consultant activities may include organizing a listening session or other opportunity to hear directly from a specific population how Early Head Start can better serve them, such as how it can better serve teenage parents as both teens and as parents. The consultant also helps program staff to identify strategies for working with special populations that enhance the parent-child relationship, support parents' ability to remain in school or employed, and positively impact infant and toddler health and development.

6. **Program Goal:** To strengthen the staff's capacity to design and deliver quality infant and toddler services across different program options.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant facilitates the program director's and managers' understanding of the Head Start Act, the HSPPS, and Part 1306 in 45 CFR as they relate to services that support infants, toddlers, and their families enrolled in all program options. The consultant supports the staff in enhancing their understanding of the various Early Head Start program areas (e.g., health, parent and community engagement, etc.) and their relationships to one another as the staff develop plans to deliver comprehensive services to children and their families in center-based, home-based, and family child care settings. The consultant helps program staff to recognize the differences between the roles that parents play in the home and the roles played by adults in group care settings (e.g., center-based and family child care), and to incorporate those differences in the design of all plans, including those related to infant and toddler school readiness.