

STRATEGIC USE OF CONSULTANTS: AN INTERACTIVE GUIDE FOR HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START LEADERS

IMPACTING CHANGE ACROSS PROGRAM AREAS

USING CONSULTANTS TO IMPROVE CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PROGRAM SERVICES AND PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Head Start and Early Head Start leaders might seek consultants' support to ensure they are implementing culturally and linguistically responsive services and practices, including the full and effective participation of children who are DLLs and their families. Consultants might perform tasks to enhance planning, implementing services, and reporting such as:

- Guiding program leaders and staff through a self-assessment process
- Convening discussion groups to clarify program goals
- Working with a team to identify strategies for program improvement such as new staffing, changing curriculum, or choosing child assessment and screening tools

Consultants might also be engaged to provide professional development that focuses specifically on teaching young children who are DLLs—or that focuses on other topics such as STEAM learning that should also include strategies related to cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

In general, programs can engage consultants to perform any tasks that do not duplicate staff responsibilities to work with children and families. In all cases, a consultant's work should uphold the unique vision and spirit of each Head Start community. Staff, family, Policy Council, and board member buy-in is important for goals or program plans to be successful. For more information about using consultants to bring lasting change and quality improvement to programs, review [*Strategic Use of Consultants: A Guide for Head Start and Early Head Start Leaders*](#).

DEFINING DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

It is important that consultants and programs share an understanding of the meaning of the term “dual language learners.” In the Head Start Program Performance Standards, “Dual language learner means a child who is acquiring two or more languages at the same time, or a child who is learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. The term ‘dual language learner’ may encompass or overlap substantially with other terms frequently used, such as bilingual, English language learner (ELL), Limited English Proficient (LEP), English learner, and children who speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE).” ([45 CFR §1302.5](#)) This means that any child who is growing up with two or more languages is considered a DLL. For example, any child who may be fluent in English but has an additional language at home is a DLL. Any child who started with English and is now learning a tribal language is a DLL. This broad definition includes more than one-third of young children nationwide, so supports for children who are DLLs and their families are greatly needed and may take many forms.

USING THE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT (DLLPA)

Consultants hired to help programs improve culturally and linguistically responsive services and practices for children and families should be familiar with the [*Dual Language Learners Program Assessment \(DLLPA\)*](#). This planning tool may be used to assist Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, or pre-K programs in assessing their management systems and services to ensure the full and effective participation of children who are DLLs and their families. In Head Start, this comprehensive management system is referred to as a coordinated approach for DLLs. The DLLPA helps programs improve their coordinated approaches to promote school readiness for children who are DLLs and engage their families. The DLLPA can also be used to help a program make sure it has integrated

culturally and linguistically responsive practices for all children, including those who are not DLLs, and their families. The DLLPA has self-assessment questions to address four management systems and six program service areas, offering a wide base of options for consultative guidance.

Using the DLLPA with a team of program staff, a consultant might help the program determine opportunities for improvement of services for children who are DLLs and their families by enhancing management systems in one of the following areas:

1. Communication
2. Human Resources
3. Training and Professional Development
4. Program Planning and Service System Design

A consultant might also provide planning guidance or direct support in the DLLPA program service areas:

EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

5. Teaching and Learning Environment
6. Curricula
7. Child Screening and Assessments
8. Health Program Services
9. Family and Community Engagement Program Services
10. Transition Services

Consulting activities might include:

- Identifying program strengths
- Enhancing community assessment efforts and interpretation
- Identifying continuous improvement goals and strategies
- Planning and implementing training and professional development
- Writing reports
- Preparing suggested content for refunding applications and grant proposals
- Addressing findings from ongoing monitoring to improve program performance and ongoing monitoring strategies
- Determining progress during the annual self-assessment

DETERMINING THE NEED FOR A CONSULTANT

Before you commit program dollars to hiring a consultant, determine whether the support you need to serve children who are DLLs and their families effectively can be provided for free. For example, Head Start programs have access to regional program specialists (federal staff) and regional training and technical assistance (TTA) specialists (e.g., grantee specialists, early childhood specialists). Child care programs may have access to state child care TTA providers and local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies. Anyone can access the [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](#) (ECLKC) website, which offers many types of resources (e.g., print, video, recorded webinars, training materials) that address cultural and linguistic diversity and supporting children who are DLLs and their families.

However, you may also decide to hire a consultant to help you more fully address recommendations from the Head Start and child care specialists or to use resources from the ECLKC more effectively.

FINDING AND HIRING THE RIGHT CONSULTANT

Planning ahead to evaluate potential consultants is an important part of working effectively with an expert consultant. You want to hire a consultant with expertise that enhances the work that you and your staff do. Here are some questions you might consider when reviewing resumés and interviewing to determine if a potential consultant would be helpful to your program. Select a few that pertain to your project. Remember, you will also commit significant time and money to work with the consultant, so do not hesitate to ask them for documentation of their knowledge, experience, and expertise.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING:

- Can the consultant document effective professional development presentations, planning, and support of coaching on topics related to cultural and linguistic diversity?
- Can the consultant demonstrate an understanding of the importance of family culture and language as the foundations for children’s success in school and life?
- Does the consultant have expertise in the study of first and second language development and early learning?
- Does the consultant have knowledge of and experience in supporting children who are DLLs with suspected delays or diagnosed disabilities?
- Does the consultant express understanding of how children’s knowledge and skills in their home language can support acquiring a second language?
- Does the consultant’s work reflect the value of growing up bilingual?
- Is the consultant proficient in creating high-quality learning environments and experiences that support children to develop multiple languages and to function in more than one culture? Has the consultant done this work in the settings or program options your program offers?
- Does the consultant have expertise in evaluating, adapting, and implementing curriculum, ongoing child assessment, or screening for linguistically diverse children, birth-5?
- Does the consultant have experience/certification in using observation tools that measure adult-child or parent-child interactions (e.g., CLASS®, Quality of Caregiver-Child Interactions for Infants and Toddlers (Q-CCIIT), Home Visitor Rating Scale (HOVRS))?
- Can the consultant understand and speak the language of children and adults (e.g., if work involves communicating with staff and parents or using adult-child or parent-child observation tools)?

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT COMPONENTS:

- Does the consultant have experience in developing culturally and linguistically appropriate communication plans and services for early childhood programs?
- Does the consultant have demonstrated expertise in supporting human resource functions such as recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and onboarding bilingual staff?
- Does the consultant have program management experience in early childhood care and education in culturally and linguistically diverse environments?

A discussion with the potential candidate should include certain key elements to protect both your program (contracting agency) and the consultant. Some of the key elements are listed here:

- Objective or goal of the work
- Specific services the consultant will perform
- Terms of payment (e.g., hourly rate or fixed-price contract) and amount
- Description of the consultant’s roles and responsibilities
- Description of the project tasks or components
- Timeline with milestone completion dates and a final deadline
- List of any project costs for which the organization will reimburse the consultant
- “No conflict of interest” statement that protects the organization hiring the consultant
- Language requiring the consultant to abide by the program’s standards of conduct, as required in 45 CFR §1302.90(c), including the importance of maintaining confidentiality concerning personally identifiable information (PII) about children, families, and staff
- Requirement that a consultant undergo a background check in accordance with 45 CFR §1302.90(b)
- Termination clause that allows either party to terminate the contract for any reason within 30 days written notice
- See 45 CFR §75, Appendix II for other contract provisions
- Rights to retain ownership and control over the consultant’s work products
- Signature of chief operating officer or highest organizational official

- Is the consultant well-versed in federal Head Start and child care regulations, recommendations, and resources?
- Does the consultant possess knowledge of health services for diverse populations of young children and their families?
- Is the consultant experienced in supporting community and family engagement related to early learning for children who are DLLs?
- Does the consultant have knowledge of/experience with supporting transitions to kindergarten for children who are DLLs as well as transitioning into and within Head Start and child care programs?
- Is the consultant familiar with the program option(s) and community served by your program, as well as the context of the program (e.g., American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN), migrant and seasonal farmworkers, refugees, homeless families)?

Once you have identified the appropriate consultant qualifications, *recruited candidates*, chosen potential consultants, and contacted references, your next step is to have a conversation with the candidate about the tasks, timeframes, and fee structure to include in your contract; your program's team should prepare these details in advance. The greater the detail, the clearer the process will be. Always include options for revising and extending the contract. Successful consulting contracts include obligations of both the consultant and the client in support of this reciprocal relationship. For a consultant to provide effective support and guidance, program leaders and staff must buy into why the consultant has been engaged and be deeply committed to change and improvement.

If you are hiring a trainer, make sure your internal plan for using an outside trainer or consultant includes who will participate in the training; this will ensure appropriate implementation and follow-up. Make sure to communicate this to the trainer so they can plan content and format to meet the needs of the intended audiences. As demonstrated by the DLLPA categories, there is much more to ensuring the effective participation of children who are DLLs and their families than just focusing on teaching practices. In addition to teachers, home visitors, and family child care providers, consider including assistant teachers, coaches, education managers, child development specialists, supervisors, family service workers, and other staff in professional development events. Also consider what follow-up and support program staff will provide, with or without the consultant, to maintain gains. When hiring a trainer for a topic that is not specifically focused on children who are DLLs, it is still advisable to work with the trainer in advance to be sure the topic includes applications for linguistically and culturally diverse programs.

If you are hiring a technical assistance consultant, it is important to devote time over the course of your project to meet with the consultant and provide information needed to perform the agreed-upon tasks. It is equally important for others who will interact with the consultant (e.g., other program leaders, teaching staff, home visiting staff) to support the consultant's work as identified in your internal plan. Remember: Maintaining commitment is crucial to the success of your project. If the consultant is providing a written deliverable, review it carefully to make sure it reflects specific Head Start and child care regulations and relevant program details unique to your service area. As you review, look for stock wording or generic phrasing that does not reflect or describe your program, or goals and objectives you are unlikely to meet.

SAMPLE PROGRAM GOALS AND CONSULTANT ROLES

Here are some sample scenarios to guide your planning for working with a consultant to support children who are DLLs and their families.

1. **Program Goal:** Strengthen our program's systems and services for children who are DLLs and their families to improve children's achievement of school readiness goals.

Consultant Role: The consultant uses the [DLLPA](#) in consultation with program staff to gather current information regarding the program's existing systems and services for children who are DLLs and their families. The consultant also:

- Reviews the program's action plan for school readiness goals pertaining to DLLs and identifies strengths, challenges, and opportunities for developing a coordinated approach of support for DLLs and their families
- Engages a diverse group of staff, family members, and stakeholders in developing a plan for using data the program has gathered related to serving children who are DLLs, including information from the DLLPA
- Works with the management team, governing body or Tribal Council, and Policy Council in implementing and evaluating these new plans to understand the effectiveness of the program in supporting DLLs and their families and in achieving school readiness goals

2. **Program Goal:** Prepare education staff at all levels of our program to support full and effective participation of children with multiple language backgrounds and their families.

Consultant Role: In response to community assessment data that shows an increase in families who speak languages other than English and Spanish, a program hires a consultant with expertise in teaching multilingual children to work with program staff to revise their professional development plan. The consultant helps them create a more specific, multi-year plan designed to enable all levels of education staff, coaches, and education managers to work effectively with children and families who speak diverse languages. The plan includes steps to enhance the program's yearly self-assessment and is flexible enough to accommodate changes based on the findings. The consultant documents that the professional development plan is grounded in current research from the field; it also includes multiple, ongoing modes of professional development delivery, such as [Practice-Based Coaching](#), that integrate adult learning principles. The consultant incorporates messages, materials, and activities into the professional development plan that reflect:

- [Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs](#)
- [Professional Learning Guides to Support Children Who Are Dual Language Learners](#)
- [Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework](#)
- [Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework \(ELOF\)](#)
- Relevant state early learning guidelines

3. **Program Goal:** Enhance family engagement practices in support of children's home language, literacy, and learning experiences.

Consultant Role: The consultant recommends materials and resources from ECLKC for staff that reflect best practices and research findings, as well as the Office of Head Start's recommendations for working with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The list includes the [Building Partnerships with Families Series](#) and [Importance of Home Language Series](#). The consultant works with the education manager and family service manager on ways to use the resources with staff and families. Finally, the consultant offers a tiered system of support that is individualized to meet the capacity-building needs of staff, including a mentor-coach support model.

4. **Program Goal:** Enhance adult-child interactions to support children’s home language development and/or English language development

Consultant Role: The consultant assesses teacher-child and family child care provider-child interactions using a well-known measure (e.g., CLASS®, Q-CCIIT, or a similar measure). Based on the results, the consultant recommends materials and resources from The Big 5 for All and Strategies to Support DLLs sections of the *Planned Language Approach* for staff that reflect best practices and research findings. The consultant works with the education manager, child development specialist, and coaches on how to use the materials and resources to offer individualized support to teachers and family child care providers who speak the same language as the children and teachers and family child care providers who do not speak the same language as the children.

5. **Program Goal:** Enhance screening practices that identify language and learning needs for all infants and toddlers, including children who are DLLs.

Consultant Role: The consultant, in collaboration with program staff and families, develops a comprehensive screening plan that includes a process for identifying appropriate screening tools for infants and toddlers who are DLLs and collecting and analyzing data to identify the unique language and learning needs of each child. The plan outlines adaptations staff should make when valid, reliable, and linguistically appropriate tools are not available for all the languages children’s families speak. The consultant also provides a communication plan and tools that allow staff to share data with families, other staff, and stakeholders. To accomplish this work, the consultant uses her knowledge of the following:

- The Head Start Program Performance Standards for screening and assessing children who are DLLs ([45 CFR §1302.33\(c\)\(1\)-\(4\)](#))
- The program’s planned language approach, developmental screening tool, and screening practices
- Recommendations and guidelines pertaining to screening children who are DLLs from national organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
- Key resources on choosing screening tools for children who are DLLs, including [Special Considerations: Developmental Screening of Children Birth to 5 Who Are Dual Language Learners](#) and [Screening Dual Language Learners in Early Head Start and Head Start: A Guide for Program Leaders](#)

6. **Program Goal:** Implement our program’s preschool curriculum in culturally responsive ways.

Consultant Role: The consultant collaborates with team of program staff and parents to review the current curriculum to ensure it is responsive and appropriate to the cultures of all enrolled children, their families, and staff. The consultant facilitates the review through a systematic process that involves key program and community stakeholders and includes using the [Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Express Checkout Worksheet](#) and the [Curriculum Consumer Report](#) to evaluate the curriculum. Based on the review results, the consultant recommends significantly adapting the curriculum ([45 CFR §1302.32\(d\)](#)) and offers specific suggestions for how to approach the work, including where changes could be made to the learning goals, scope and sequence, and content in specific domains to better reflect the cultures of children, families, and staff. The consultant talks with the team about next steps, timelines, and identifying an outside evaluator who will assess whether the adaptation facilitates children’s progress toward the program’s school readiness goals.

7. **Program Goal:** Deliver home-based education services that emphasize the importance of home language and culture in supporting each child's early learning.

Consultant Role: The consultant works with a team of program staff and parents to review data on how the home-based curriculum is being implemented, with an emphasis on cultural and linguistic responsiveness. The consultant looks at curriculum fidelity and home visitor coaching data, and home visit planning forms to see how home visitors have modified the curriculum. Based on the review, the consultant identifies some strengths and areas for improvement and provides additional recommendations for modifying the curriculum. The consultant also does the following:

- Helps the home-based supervisor determine ways to integrate the 15-Minute In-Service Suite, A Culturally Responsive Approach to Implementing a Curriculum into their training and technical assistance efforts.
- Shares *Brilliant Bilingual Babies* with the home-based supervisor and brainstorms how home visitors might use the information as they implement curriculum during home visits and group socializations.
- Collaborates with the home-based supervisor and coach to record a professional development webcast that can be translated and used by new and experienced home visitors to enhance their abilities to support culturally and linguistically responsive practices in the home and during group socializations. The webcast will be available for asynchronous, on-demand training.

8. **Program Goal:** Recruit, hire, train, and retain qualified bilingual education staff for our Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program.

Consultant Role: The consultant partners with program staff to review strengths and weaknesses of their current staffing practices and develop an improvement plan to ensure a more stable workforce of qualified bilingual education staff. The consultant uses the DLLPA to facilitate discussions among staff, leaders, and community stakeholders around problems and solutions for recruiting and hiring qualified bilingual staff. The consultant also works with staff to network with other MSHS programs through MyPeers and online meetings to find strategies that work for updating staffing plans, onboarding, and ongoing support to ensure retention and continuity of staffing. The consultant compiles findings from these discussions and networking interactions to create a policy guide that includes suggestions for advertisements and interview questions, onboarding content and process, and regular staff feedback to support continuing implementation.

9. **Program Goal:** Integrate our tribal language and culture in developmentally and culturally appropriate ways that support school readiness goals.

Consultant Role: As part of the program's tribal language preservation efforts (*45 CFR §1302.36*), program staff engage a consultant who has worked with other American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start programs to help them integrate *Making It Work* into their program and curriculum. To prepare, the consultant reviews *Implementing Cultural Learning Experiences in AIAN Settings: A Webinar on Making It Work* as well as the Steps and Introduction to Making It Work *guide* and *training guide*. The consultant then meets with a team of program staff, classroom teachers, tribal language and cultural educators, parents, and community elders to gain the following information, which the consultant will use to develop a multi-year implementation plan:

- Program options and settings in which Making It Work will be implemented
- The program's curriculum, ongoing child assessment tools, lesson plans, and cultural and tribal language
- How the program uses practice-based coaching and other professional development efforts
- How well the program has aligned their curriculum, ongoing child assessments, school readiness goals, and professional development with the ELOF
- State and tribal standards staff implement

The consultant, accompanied by the education manager and one of the tribal language and cultural educators, also observes classrooms to gain a better understanding of what teachers currently do. The consultant suggests starting with a pilot of three classrooms—one infant, one older toddler, one preschool—and with the approval of the team, incorporates this into the multi-year implementation plan.

RELEVANT HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Personnel policies, 45 CFR §1302.90

- (c)(1)(iii) Standards of conduct
- (d)(1) Communication with dual language learners and their families

Staff qualifications and competency requirements, 45 CFR §1302.91

- (a) Purpose

RELEVANT FISCAL REGULATIONS

- *Contract Provisions for Non-Federal Entity Contracts Under Federal Awards, 45 CFR §75, Appendix II*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Strategic Use of Consultants: Resources

Leadership Teams: Working With Consultants to Support Meaningful Change

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2015/working-with-consultants>