

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



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Quality Teaching
and Learning

Impacting Change Across Program Areas

Using Consultants to Impact Change in the Area of Quality Teaching and Learning

Head Start and Early Head Start leaders seeking to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning in their program should consider recruiting and hiring consultants who have the following knowledge, competencies, and experience:

- Knowledge of Head Start, the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, and Head Start's approach to school readiness
- An understanding of quality teaching and learning as essential for achieving school readiness
- A familiarity with evidence-based teaching practices in early childhood education, including effective practices for children with disabilities and other special needs
- An appreciation of teachers' knowledge as critical to quality teaching
- An understanding of the importance of effective, engaging interactions and environments in early childhood classrooms for supporting children's development and learning
- An understanding of how evidence-based curriculum and teaching strategies can be linked to ongoing child assessment
- Knowledge of the importance of data quality and how to achieve quality data (reliable, valid, accurate, and consistent) in Head Start and Early Head Start programs to support school readiness
- Experience in collecting, analyzing, and using data to inform instructional practices
- An understanding of teachers' need for intense, focused ongoing feedback on their teaching practices in order for change to occur

Sample Program Goals and Consultant Roles

1. **Program Goal:** To build the capacity of staff to create well-organized and managed classrooms that maximize children's learning opportunities.

Consultant Role: The consultant provides a series of training opportunities in developing well-organized and managed classrooms. Trainings focus on creating and implementing (a) consistent schedules and routines, (b) well-designed and engaging learning centers, (c) supports for preparing children for success (e.g., visual supports, teaching expectations), and (d) appropriate strategies for promoting positive behavior and redirecting misbehavior. The consultant supports staff in implementing recommended classroom changes that give children a sense of stability and predictability, which supports development and learning.

2. Program Goal: To increase social-emotional supports in classrooms

Consultant Role: The consultant provides training and follow-up support that focuses on specific strategies and practical ideas for increasing social-emotional supports in classrooms. Training and practice opportunities focus on

- establishing and promoting positive classroom climates through everyday interactions and relationship building;
- recognizing and labeling children's emotions as well as teaching children about handling difficult emotions;
- helping children learn to problem solve and resolve conflicts; and
- promoting positive peer relationships and redirecting challenging behavior.

3. Program Goal: To increase the skill of staff in using assessment and effective instruction for children with disabilities.

Consultant Role: The consultant works with staff to evaluate the usefulness of information obtained from current measures used to assess child status, progress, and school readiness for children with disabilities. The consultant helps staff to develop

- appropriate learning objectives that are tailored to individual children's needs (these might come from a child's individualized education program [IEP] or a behavior support plan);
- new skills and teaching strategies that are effective in meeting the individual needs of children;
- embedded teaching opportunities throughout the daily schedule; and
- frequent data collection opportunities to ensure that teaching and learning are on track.

The consultant also works with staff to examine data to see how well children with disabilities (those with IEPs) are performing in comparison to other children in their classrooms as well as across classrooms in the program.

4. **Program Goal:** To build the capacity of staff to increase their use of instructional supports.

Consultant Role: The consultant helps teachers reflect on how they are providing instructional support to children through problem solving, offering feedback to deepen children's understanding of content, and helping children develop more complex language skills. Trainings focus on

- the use of instructional supports and materials to engage children in interactions and conversations;
- strategies, such as asking questions, for extending conversations with children;
- ideas for helping children master key concepts and skills; and
- strategies for offering feedback in ways that acknowledge children's communication attempts and motivate their continued efforts.

5. **Program Goal:** To increase staff capacity to interpret and use data to inform planning and teaching.

Consultant Role: The consultant works with staff to look at *all* sources of data and to determine how this information is being used in planning and teaching to ensure that all children are making progress. The consultant uses examples of the program's current data to build training around meaningful classroom-specific content. For example, if program data show that participating children are not performing well in mathematics, training would focus on how staff can use specific data to embed learning opportunities designed to increase math skills. The consultant offers staff practice and feedback in using data to support long-term quality teaching and learning.

6. **Program Goal:** To increase the use of evidence-based coaching strategies to support teachers in using effective teaching practices.

Consultant Role: The consultant works with managers to carefully consider which evidence-based coaching model best suits their particular program needs. The consultant helps administrators to select skilled coaches and then trains the coaches using the selected coaching model. The consultant works with those administrators who will be supporting and supervising coaches to ensure the administrators' active involvement in the training. The consultant also helps

develop an infrastructure that allows for continuous quality assurance and monitoring of the coaching model to ensure improved outcomes.

7. **Program Goal:** To build the capacity of staff to prevent and address challenging behavior in children.

Consultant Role: The consultant provides staff training on the use of intentional strategies to teach critical social and emotional skills that help prevent challenging behavior in children. The consultant creates a structure for staff to practice effective behavior promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies. The consultant works with staff to identify tools and materials for successfully screening and identifying children who need individualized, focused support for their social-emotional development. The consultant trains staff on the use of a team-based process for developing an assessment-based, comprehensive behavior support plan. The consultant also can follow-up consultation with staff concerning individual children.

8. **Program Goal:** To design and develop an effective child assessment data system.

Consultant Role: The consultant works with relevant program staff to review the current child assessment data system in order to answer the following questions:

- Is there currently an assessment data collection plan in place? What child assessment information is being collected? Who is collecting the information? How is it being collected? What are the assessment timelines?
- Are staff appropriately trained to collect child data that are correct, complete, and consistent?
- How are child assessment data being analyzed? Who analyzes the data? How often?
- Are staff appropriately trained and supported in the use of child data to make data-based and learning-focused decisions?
- How are additional data sources, such as attendance and health, being used in relation to child assessment data?
- How are child assessment data being used to monitor ongoing progress for individual children? How are data used across classrooms/programs to monitor individual child progress? Who monitors this progress?
- Is the child assessment data system integrated with other elements of the program's data management system?
- With whom is information from the assessment data system shared?



Based on the answers to these questions, the consultant works with program staff to revise the existing data system or to design and develop a new child assessment data system. The consultant works with managers to build their capacity to provide ongoing training and support to teaching staff on using the assessment data system to ensure children are making progress toward meeting school readiness goals.