

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



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Parent, Family and  
Community Engagement

## Impacting Change Across Program Areas

### Using Consultants to Impact Change in the Area of Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

Head Start and Early Head Start leaders seeking to strengthen their program's parent, family, and community engagement (PFCE) practices should consider recruiting and hiring consultants who have the following knowledge, competencies, and experience:

- The ability to effectively support programs in advancing them along a continuum from parent involvement to family engagement
- The ability to utilize PFCE Framework language and verbiage (e.g., elements, indicators, family engagement outcomes, etc.) to assist programs in implementing enhanced engagement practices
- The ability to infuse engagement practices into the program through a systemic, integrated, and comprehensive approach
- The ability to connect the PFCE Framework's systems and services to family and child outcomes
- The capacity to successfully convey the philosophy that "family engagement is everybody's business"
- An expertise in sharing effective PFCE strategies in support of building positive, goal-oriented relationships with families and communities
- The ability to assist programs in "meeting families where they are" by individualizing services based on each unique family's culture, structure, and situation
- The ability to provide a wide array of resources to support programs in enhancing PFCE practice
- The skill to facilitate an understanding of the importance of collaboration within the program structure as well as with families to expand learning opportunities for children
- The ability to effectively support staff and families with diverse cultural perspectives
- An understanding of research as it relates to PFCE practice

## Sample Program Goals and Consultant Roles

1. **Program Goal:** To provide opportunities for the early childhood community in the service area to collaborate to improve services that respond to the culture, goals, and needs of families.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant works with multiple early childhood agencies in conducting local assessments and mapping existing programs and resources to identify strengths and gaps in services. The consultant produces reports and summaries to document and share the results of these local assessments and to determine opportunities for further collaboration among early childhood agencies. The consultant serves as a neutral facilitator to support agencies in sharing assessment data and establishing a community plan for improving services that respond to the culture, goals, and needs of families.

2. **Program Goal:** To implement a collaborative, decision-making system within the program that includes families, staff, and community stakeholders.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant provides training on group processes and best practices in collaborative or shared decision making. These trainings involve

- guiding staff, families, and community partners through activities that support an understanding of collaborative decision making and why it is important;
- coaching staff, family, and community partners in facilitation practices, meeting management, and decision-making agreements; and
- providing conflict mediation in situations with high conflict or potential for conflict.

3. **Program Goal:** To support families and staff in the effective use of data to support children's learning and development in the program and in the community.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant trains staff and families on the different types of data that exist and helps them to understand data, use data to inform decisions, and establish data-driven goals to best support children's learning and development. The consultant develops and supports the implementation of formal and informal systems to track, compile, and report on data, including assessment data, anecdotal data, individual child/family data, and related community data. In addition, the consultant

- provides training in conducting formal assessments and consultation support during the implementation of assessments, as needed;
- assists with data collection and organization;
- facilitates specific program groups (e.g., Policy Council, governing board, health advisory group) in analyzing data and identifying next steps based on results of the analysis;
- assists with transition planning and data sharing and facilitates conversations with families, staff, and community programs—including kindergartens, community child care, and home visitation programs—to establish effective community partnerships to support transitions; and
- trains staff and families on portfolios (or memory books) and how they can be used to document a child’s development, facilitate data-driven decisions, and support a variety of transitions.

**4. Program Goal:** To incorporate family engagement strategies into everyday practice (“family engagement is everybody’s business”).

**Consultant Role:** The consultant facilitates the creation of a comprehensive professional development plan for integrating family engagement strategies throughout the program. The consultant

- audits existing professional development activities for family engagement strategies and identifies strengths and opportunities to further integrate family engagement throughout the professional development system;
- provides professional development experiences for all staff that address family engagement strategies and skills;
- supports ongoing learning community activities that focus on incorporating family engagement strategies into everyday practice;
- coaches program leaders on how to support all staff in the use of family engagement principles and best practices; and
- assists with creating a reflective supervision system to support all staff in implementing family engagement strategies in their daily practice.

**5. Program Goal:** To create a physical environment that supports interactions and relationships that respect the language and culture of enrolled children and their families.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant collects data from families, staff, and community partners on what features they view as important to have in the physical space of the program and compiles this information into a report for

program staff, families, and community partners to review and use in planning. In addition, the consultant

- audits existing facilities and identifies areas of strength as well as opportunities to further create welcoming spaces for families, children, and staff;
- audits the outdoor learning environment for family-friendly spaces and engages families in the creation of new outdoor spaces;
- conducts formal program environmental assessments (e.g., ECERS, ITERS, FDCRS, and DECA);
- analyzes the results of formal assessments and provides the program with a report on lessons learned;
- guides the program in creating and implementing an improvement plan that enhances the program's physical environment; and
- designs or enhances the physical space in collaboration with families and staff.

6. **Program Goal:** To establish a comprehensive, continuous family partnership agreement process that supports families in leading the development of program plans with the help of staff.

**Consultant Role:** The consultant provides staff and families with information on family partnership components, the strengths-based approach, and the elements of effective family engagement practices that support the family partnership agreement process. The consultant also helps staff develop strategies for establishing goals with families and facilitating referrals for families. The consultant trains staff in communication skills that support authentic relationships and partnerships with families. The consultant

- provides examples of and facilitates discussions about family partnership agreements and processes used by other programs;
- establishes a programmatic accountability/tracking system that gathers data on family goals, needs, referrals, and outcomes; and
- assists with the creation of a comprehensive tracking system related to individual families that can be used to support day-to-day engagement with families among various staff and across a variety of roles (e.g., health, mental health, education, family support).