

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



EARLY HEAD START  
National Resource Center

## Voices from the Field

### Initiating Early Head Start Services

**Program:**

Warren County Head Start, Glens Falls, NY

**Contact:**

Mary Hafner, Executive Director

**Brief Program Description:**

This Head Start/Early Head Start program (HS/EHS) is located in rural, upstate New York. With a funded enrollment of 232 in HS and 50 in EHS, Warren County Head Start offers home-based and center-based services at six locations, including a local community college. Here, EHS and HS are offered on campus, allowing parents who are enrolled at the college to attend class. During summer break when the college is out of session, the EHS program offers home-based services.

**Program Improvement Goal:**

To open an EHS program and offer EHS services rooted in a solid foundation and understanding of EHS best practices and requirements. The goal was for Warren County Head Start staff to acquire the best knowledge and understanding of how to provide quality EHS services within the context of the community served.

**Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Plan:**

The program's leadership team developed a T/TA plan that included hiring a consultant to provide training for staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of EHS. The consultant was expected to

- support management staff in developing timelines for planning and opening an EHS program, and
- support management in designing, scheduling, and conducting training for current and future staff to enhance their skills and knowledge of EHS, including the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) specific to EHS.

### **Consultant Qualifications:**

The program management was anxious to add EHS to their services in response to community need but wanted to do so only after gaining a strong foundation and internal expertise in services to infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. Program leadership sought a consultant with a proven track record and strong reputation, not only locally but nationally. They wanted someone with knowledge and experience in both operating an EHS program and working with a management team to support it in start-up planning. In addition to hiring a lead consultant to work with the management team over time, Warren County Head Start also engaged local consultants familiar with the community to provide professional development to staff.

### **Consultant's Work:**

Under the contract, the lead consultant performed the following tasks:

- Met with the management team to establish short-term and long-term goals and timelines
- Supported the management team in identifying and prioritizing training needs
- Worked with the management team to design and schedule a year-long training plan that included follow-up activities

### **Outcomes:**

- Management team and program staff received the necessary grounding to begin offering EHS services.
- Program staff gained an understanding of the HSPPS as they relate to EHS as well as the goals of EHS.
- Program leadership put a training schedule in place to ensure ongoing professional development that focused on content knowledge and teaching practice related to serving infants, toddlers, pregnant women, and their families.

### **Advice to Others:**

- **Seek the best training possible.** When developing a budget, reserve enough T/TA money to enlist highly qualified consultants.
- **Learn from others' experiences.** Reach out to other programs and ask them to recommend their best consultants.
- **Act locally.** Utilize local consultants and trainers when possible (e.g., certified mental health consultants, early intervention specialists, public health professional, state department of health staff). This "staying local" strengthens community partnerships because the consultants come to your program with an understanding of the community and leave with a better understanding of EHS and all that the program has to offer.