

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



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Program Management
and Fiscal Operations™

Choosing the Right Person

Interviewing Consultants: Questions and Tips

Sample Questions

Question: What experiences do you have with [the goal that you wish to engage the consultant around; e.g., the development of ongoing monitoring systems; identification of school readiness goals; reduction in childhood obesity rates]?

Listen for experiences that relate to your program's goal and evidence that the consultant's efforts resulted in positive changes and improvements.

Question: Can you describe your experiences working with [the primary audience for training and technical assistance (T/TA) visits; e.g., managers, teaching staff, governing body, Policy Council]?

Listen for examples of previous work with this population.

Question: Can you talk about how you have worked with the populations served in our program [e.g., AIAN, migrant seasonal, Spanish-speaking]? What lessons have you learned from these experiences?

Listen for evidence that the consultant is sensitive to the cultural implications of his/her work and is able to relate effectively to staff working with these populations. Ask follow-up questions to explore how the consultant plans to overcome any gaps in knowledge and experience.

Question: What T/TA strategies do you think will work best to achieve [the stated goal]?

Listen for evidence that the consultant has experience implementing T/TA strategies that align with adult learning principles. Come to the interview with ideas of the T/TA strategies you think will be most effective, and be open to any new ideas the consultant may present.

Question: How long do you think it will take to accomplish this work?

Listen for evidence that the consultant is competent in planning and carrying out goal-focused T/TA agendas.

Question: What experience do you have working with Head Start programs [e.g., Head Start grants management, Head Start financial management, Head Start monitoring]?

Listen for evidence that the consultant has knowledge of Head Start systems and services and is sensitive to the many demands placed on Head Start staff.

Question: How will you build upon the skills and expertise of our Head Start staff?

Listen for evidence that the consultant will fully involve staff in the T/TA process, and use staff knowledge and experiences to strengthen competencies and/or develop new solutions to existing problems.

Question: How do you anticipate that the Head Start directors and members of the management team can support your work?

Listen for evidence that the consultant plans to work hand in hand with program leaders and staff to (1) plan sessions that will meet the needs of the program, (2) plan for follow-up activities to reinforce lessons learned, and (3) ensure that the work of the consultant is embedded in systems and services.

Question: Can you summarize your knowledge of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, regulations, and policies; and can you describe how you will use this information in your work?

Listen for evidence that the consultant is able to draw upon his/her experiences and access current Head Start information, as needed, to use in the work ahead. Explore the consultant's familiarity with performance standards and definitions around school readiness as they relate to the program's T/TA goals.

Question: Can you describe any experiences where you have used data in your work?

Listen for evidence that the consultant has used data to inform his/her approach or has used sample data to engage in data analysis with his/her audience. Explore his/her familiarity with early childhood data collection systems.

Question: What experiences, aside from work with Head Start programs, will help you in this work?

Listen for evidence that the consultant has valuable experience outside of Head Start that can be applied to this work to strengthen the program.

Additional Tips

- Discuss with the consultant a plan to communicate information that emerges from the consulting work to staff, families, and Policy Council and governing body members for whom English is not the language in which they best learn.
- Explain that all work products that are developed with the consultant and related to the project will be the property of the Head Start program. Ask, “Does this pose a problem or ethical dilemma for you?”
- Distribute and review the program’s standards of conduct as well as program confidentiality policies concerning information about children, families, and other staff members [45 CFR 1304.52 (i)(1) (i) (ii)].
- Explain that you will be checking references as part of the selection process, and ask the consultant to provide you with a list of references.
- Ask the consultant to provide you with work samples to help you evaluate the quality of his/her work.
- Discuss any expectations you have for how the consultant will document his/her efforts.
- Discuss the consultant’s fee and the budget you have allocated for this service to determine if a match can be made.