THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
**Program Management
and Fiscal Operations**

The Head Start Program Planning Cycle
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. **How does the Program Planning Cycle relate to family services, health, and cultural responsiveness goals?**

   Goals that relate to family services, health services and cultural and linguistic responsiveness may be part of the program goals that are developed based on data that emerges from the community assessment (CA) and self-assessment (SA). That is, program goals may emerge from SA and CA results in any service area.

   For example, the program may learn from its community assessment that there are pockets of new immigrant communities in the service area and they may find this is substantiated through their review of child enrollment records which show an increasing number of children who are dual language learners. From this, the program may develop overarching broad goal such as "The program will connect with parents, families, neighbors, and staff to enhance their understanding of cultures, values, and beliefs within their community." As staff their action plan in relation to this goal, they are likely to realize that some of the activities that they carry out to achieve this goal would be handled by health services staff, others by family services staff, and still others by classroom teachers and education managers. They may choose to use the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (NCCLR) Program Preparedness Checklist to collect data throughout the year on their progress towards meeting the goal.

2. **How does the program planning cycle work when goals are developed mid-year?**

   Sometimes programs have the fortunate opportunity to begin a new initiative in the middle of the program year. For example, a program may receive special one-time funding from the Office of Head Start (OHS) or receive an unanticipated grant from its state or a foundation. In order to incorporate this new initiative into its annual planning cycle, the program will need to develop a goal related to the initiative and a plan of action for meeting the goal that includes how they are going to track progress towards meeting the goal. As staff develop the goal, they may want to revisit the findings of their previous CA and SA for relevant information that may affect their plan of action. For example if the special project relates to services to children who are dual language learners, the program will want to consult their CA and SA to find out if there are particular sections of their service area that would benefit from targeted services.

3. **How do service area plans fit into the program planning cycle?**

Service area plans are closely tied to the inner circle of the program planning cycle. Much of the data that Head Start and Early Head Start programs collect is operational data that relates to how the activities in those plans are being carried out. The data answer questions such as
- Are we completing our screenings in a timely manner?
- What percentage of our families has a medical home?
- Are we up to date in our home visits for each family?

Programs review this data regularly through their ongoing monitoring activities. Analysis of the data may lead to course corrections and new activities.

The service area plans also relate to the cycle in that the goals in service area plans are tied to the broad program-wide goals.

4. **How does the cycle relate to plans for individual children and families?**

While parts of the planning process for individual family and child goals are similar to steps in the program planning cycle, others are not. Because the steps for developing and tracking goals for individual children and families do not directly align with the program planning cycle, we do not recommend it for individual planning.