



Program Planning in Head Start: The Program Planning Cycle

The graphic on page 3 represents the Head Start/Early Head Start planning cycle. The diagram consists of an outer circle connected to a smaller inner circle and to boxes that name each step in the cycle. Arrows lead from one step to the next, showing the sequence of the steps. Many of the steps happen repeatedly throughout the cycle. Below is a list of the steps in the planning cycle and a brief description of each.

Thoughtful planning is critical to successful programming. The Program Planning Cycle graphic illustrates how the required Head Start management systems are inter-related parts of a predictable planning process. Through this process programs develop goals, objectives, and expected outcomes and monitor and evaluate progress towards their program and school readiness goals.

To learn more about the planning process, follow the arrows around the planning cycle.

1) Begin at either **community assessment** or **Self-Assessment**.

- *New programs* begin at community assessment. They collect and analyze data about the needs and resources of eligible families, the program, and the community within the service area to inform their goal-setting.
- *Existing programs* begin the process with **Self-Assessment**. They take a fresh look at updated community assessment data, data gathered through ongoing monitoring, and other relevant data to make recommendations for planning and goal setting.

2) For their baseline grant applications, programs identify the long-term goals they will accomplish during the **five-year project period**. They also identify initial SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) **short-term objectives** linked to **expected outcomes**. During their **annual** planning process, they review their long-term goals and revise them as necessary. They continue to break down their goals into short-term objectives linked to expected outcomes.

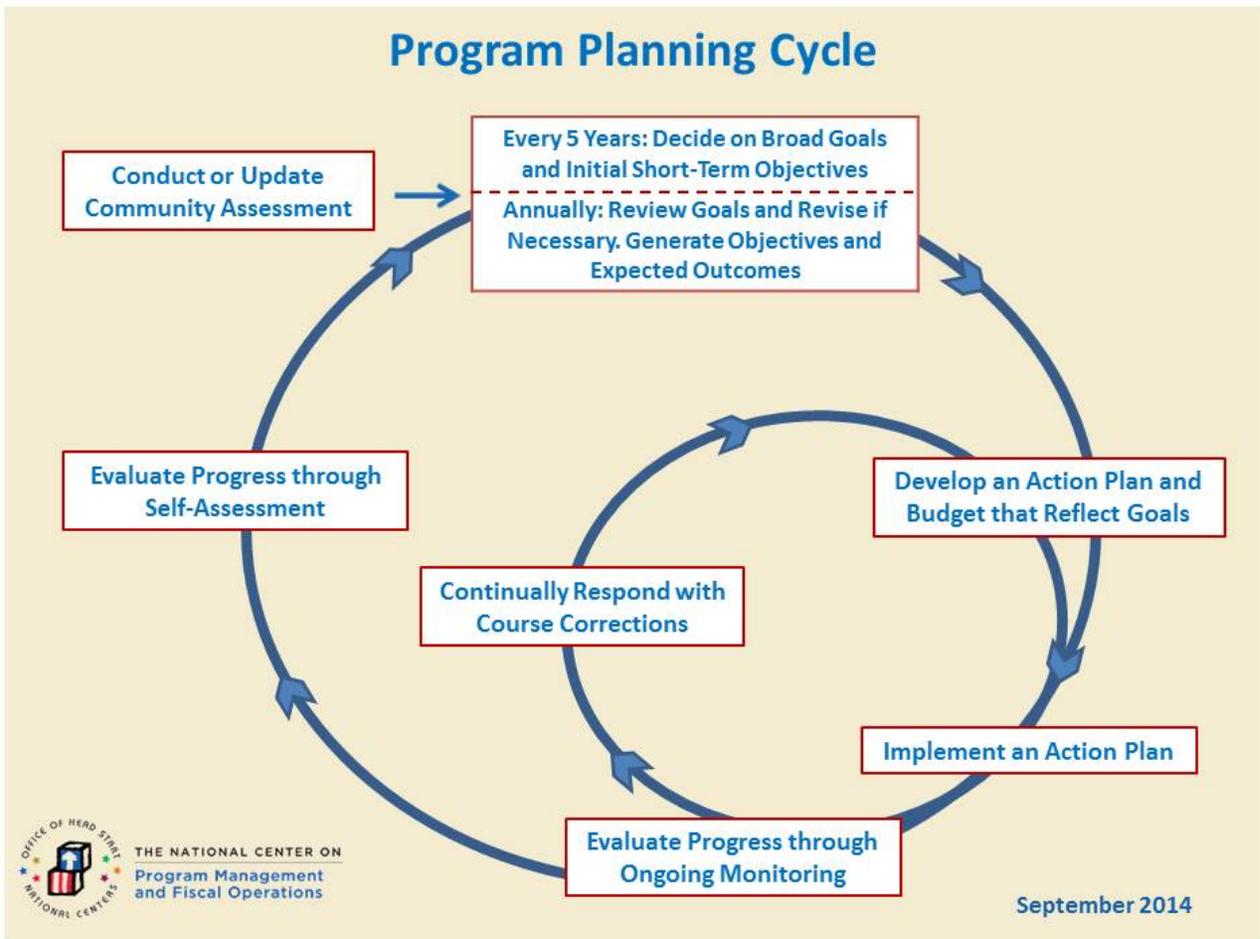
3) Programs develop an annual **Action Plan** which is a defined set of steps that outlines what a program will do to accomplish its goals and objectives. The Action Plan is supported by a budget that is aligned with the goals and objectives.

4) As the program **implements its plan**, it collects data through its **record-keeping and reporting system**.

- 5) The program continually evaluates progress towards its goals and objectives by reviewing data gathered through the **ongoing monitoring system**. Effective ongoing monitoring enables programs to track progress towards their goals and objectives and ensure compliance.
- 6) Based on ongoing monitoring results, programs continue to implement their **Action Plan** as written, change the plan to **replicate best practices**, and/or make **course corrections** that may require changes in program activities or levels of effort.
- 7) Finally, the program comes full circle to the annual **Self-Assessment**. In this step, the Self-Assessment team uses its ongoing monitoring, community assessment, and other relevant data to assess the program's progress in achieving its goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, and to evaluate program compliance with federal requirements.

Two additional elements are essential throughout the planning process: effective use of data and communication with appropriate stakeholders at each step.

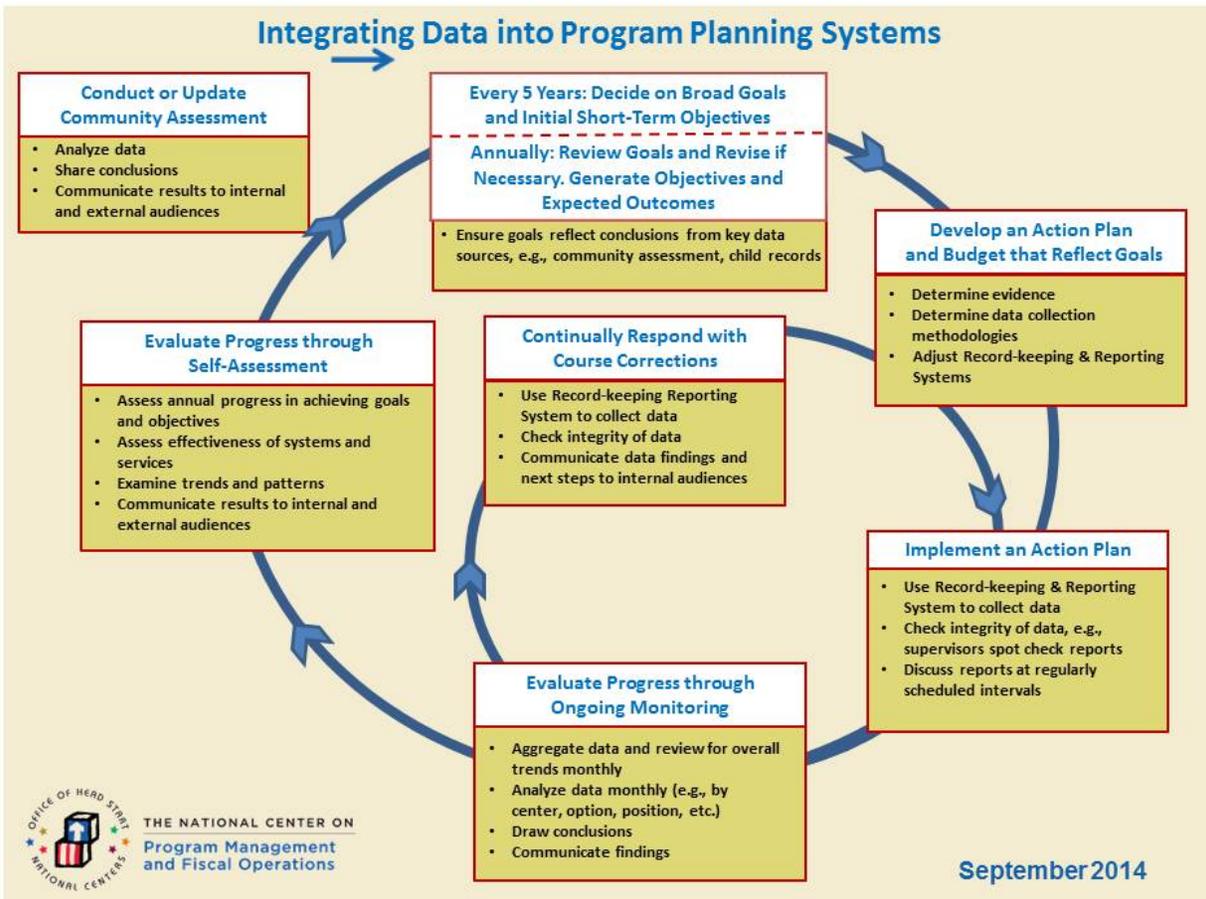
The Program Planning Cycle Diagram



The graphic on the next page, Integrating Data Into Planning Systems, illustrates how the use of data is integrated into each step of the planning cycle. Below is a list of the steps in the planning cycle, along with the data activities that occur at each step.

- Evaluate Progress through Self-Assessment
 - Assess annual progress in achieving goals and objectives
 - Assess the effectiveness of systems and services
 - Examine trends and patterns
 - Communicate results to internal and external audiences
- Conduct or Update Community Assessment
 - Analyze data
 - Share conclusions
 - Communicate results to internal and external audiences
- Every 5 Years: Decide on Broad Goals and Initial Short-Term Objectives.
- Annually: Review Goals and Revise if Necessary. Generate Objectives and Expected Outcomes
 - Ensure that goals reflect conclusions from key data sources (e.g., community assessment, child records)
- Develop an Action Plan and a Budget That Reflect Goals
 - Determine evidence
 - Determine data-collection methodologies
 - Adjust record-keeping and reporting systems
- Implement an Action Plan
 - Use record-keeping and reporting systems to collect data
 - Check the integrity of data (e.g., supervisors spot checks reports)
 - Discuss reports at regularly scheduled intervals
- Evaluate Progress through Ongoing Monitoring
 - Aggregate and review data monthly for overall trends
 - Analyze data monthly (e.g., by center, option, or position)
 - Draw conclusions
 - Communicate findings
- Continually Respond with Course Corrections
 - Use record-keeping and reporting systems to collect data
 - Check the integrity of data
 - Communicate data findings and next steps to internal audiences

Integrating Data into Program Planning Systems



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