


# Introduction Program Planning Topics in Head Start

The Head Start planning system and its related activities are an essential part of program operations. While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programming, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to a five-year project period. *Information Memorandum (IM) ACF-IM-HS-14-02* and the application instructions for obtaining a five-year grant require programs to

- describe the long-term goals they will accomplish during the five-year period;
- describe short-term objectives;
- describe the expected outcomes aligned with the goals and objectives; and
- define data tools and methods for tracking progress towards their goals, objectives, and expected outcomes.

Grantees report on this progress in their yearly continuation applications over the course of the five-year project period.




**Planning in Head Start**  
Topic #1: Understanding Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans

The Head Start planning system and its related activities are an essential part of program operations.

While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programming, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to one based on a five-year project period. The Head Start National Centers created this series of papers to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system and in making optimal use of the five-year period. This paper provides an overview of the terms and processes involved in program planning.

The terms “goals,” “objectives,” “outcomes,” and “action plans” are widely used in the research, evaluation, and education communities. The purpose of this paper is to define these terms in the Head Start context and to provide information that can help grantees develop program goals, objectives, expected outcomes, and action plans that result in more effective services to children and families.




**Planning in Head Start**  
Topic #2: Plans in Head Start

The Head Start planning system and its related activities are an essential part of program operations.

While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programming, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to one based on a five-year project period. The Head Start National Centers created this series of papers to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system and in making optimal use of the five-year period. This paper describes in particular the various types of plans used in Head Start.



Head Start programs develop many different types of plans. They each have different functions and are developed by staff and partners at varying levels of the organization. Effective programs integrate their plans and align them with their goals and objectives. This paper serves as a primer on the types of plans that Head Start and early Head Start programs most commonly create and implement and the processes used to create them.



**Planning in Head Start**  
Topic #3: Program Goals and School Readiness Goals—Understanding the Relationship

The Head Start planning system and its related activities are an essential part of program operations.

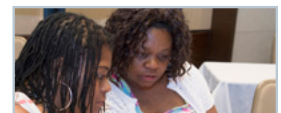
While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programming, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to one based on a five-year project period. The Head Start National Centers created this series of papers to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system and in making optimal use of the five-year period. This paper describes the relationship between program goals and school readiness goals.



**Planning in Head Start**  
Topic #4: Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans—Program Examples

The Head Start planning system and its related activities are an essential part of program operations.

While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programming, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to one based on a five-year project period. The Head Start National Centers created this series of papers to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system and in making optimal use of the five-year period. This paper provides two examples of hypothetical goals, objectives, expected outcomes, and action plans. Both examples also include data tools and methods for tracking progress.



**Planning in Head Start**  
Topic #5: Program Planning and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

The Head Start planning system and its related activities are an essential part of program operations.

While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programming, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to one based on a five-year project period. The Head Start National Centers created this series of papers to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system and in making optimal use of the five-year period. This paper focuses on special considerations for parent, family, and community engagement in program planning.

The Head Start National Centers developed this series entitled *Planning in Head Start* to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system. The series consists of five papers.

## “Topic #1: Understanding Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans”

defines goals, objectives, outcomes, and action plans within a Head Start context and provides tips for developing each. It emphasizes the difference between goals, which are

**BROAD** (Bold—Beyond current expectations, Responsive, Organization-wide, Aspirational, and Dynamic) and objectives, which are **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely).

**“Topic #2: Plans in Head Start”** is a primer on the types of plans that Head Start and Early Head Start programs most commonly create and implement. It explains the process for developing plans, common features of the various Head Start plans, and their different functions. The paper describes those plans that are tied to the planning process—five-year plans, annual action plans, school readiness plans, training and technical assistance (T/TA) plans, and written plans,—as well as a variety of other plans that programs develop: strategic plans, transition plans, emergency preparedness plans, and technology plans.

**“Topic #3: Program Goals and School Readiness Goals—Understanding the Relationship”** addresses the importance of keeping goals “alive” and the frequently asked question about the relationship between program goals and school readiness goals. After citing the requirements in the Head Start Act and the Head Start Program Performance Standards for the development of these goals, the paper emphasizes that program goals and school readiness goals work together to ensure high-quality, comprehensive services for children and families. The paper addresses another frequently asked question about the number of goals a program should set by encouraging programs to look at this question through a systems lens. It concludes with a chart that contrasts the two types of goals.

**“Topic #4: Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans—Program Examples”** provides two examples of what a program’s goals, objectives, expected outcomes, and action plans could look like. One example focuses on strengthening children’s transitions to kindergarten, and the other focuses on an initiative to promote language and literacy development for all children.

**“Topic #5: Program Planning and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement”** clarifies the process for setting goals and objectives related to family outcomes. It includes tips and examples of related goals and objectives and suggests data sources and tools for tracking progress toward achieving family outcomes.



# Tips for Using the Program Planning Papers

- **Read the papers thoroughly and discuss them with your management team** to arrive at a shared understanding of the information and how you will use it. Talk to your T/TA providers and/or Program Specialist to clarify any questions you have or things that you want to know more about.
- **Share the papers with your governing body/Tribal Council and Policy Council.** Include the planning papers in your training plan. Since both your governing body and your Policy Council work together with staff to develop, plan, and evaluate your Head Start program, it is vital for them to understand the ins and outs of the five-year project period and program planning.
- **Refer to the papers when you are setting your goals, writing objectives and outcomes, and developing your action plans.** Understanding the definitions of goals, objectives, outcomes, and action plans can strengthen your planning process. You may find the templates and format examples useful.
- **Evaluate your current goals, objectives, and action plan** using the ideas in the papers as criteria. Focus especially on writing SMART objectives. Note in particular the “M” in SMART, which stands for “measurable”; the funding announcement and application guidelines require programs to report on their progress in each continuation application, and you can only point to progress on something you’ve measured.
- **Consider both “effort” and “effect”** when identifying the ways that you will measure progress towards achieving your goals, objectives, and outcomes. In addition to collecting data that shows how much your program does and how frequently it does it (measures of effort), think about measures of changes in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors (measures of effect). Measures of effect can help you understand the positive difference you are making for children and families.



# Program Planning Glossary

## Terms and Definitions

**Action Plan:** A defined set of steps that outlines what a program will do to meet its goals and objectives; a description of the activities, services, and other actions needed to accomplish goal(s). An *action plan* often includes measures of progress to help a program know what difference it is making; it includes what will be done, who is responsible, and the timeline for completion.

**Actions/Strategies:** An individual step that outlines what a program will do to accomplish its goals and objectives.

**Baseline Data:** An initial collection of information that can be used for comparative purposes. Baseline data can be used as a starting point to understand any changes that happen.

**Data:** Facts or information used to calculate, analyze, plan, or report something.

**Effect:** “Measures of effect” measure changes in knowledge or behavior as a result of the activity. They track whether a program’s activities have made a difference.

**Effort:** “Measures of effort” count what and how much a program provides. They describe whether and to what extent activities were carried out as planned.

**Goals:** Broad, inspirational statements that describe what you seek to accomplish; targets to be reached. In Head Start, program goals may include goals related to parent, family, and community engagement; finances; service provision; etc.

**Impact:** The influence or effect. Note: this term is often used to signify the findings from an experimental or quasi-experimental research study. *Impact* refers to how the program, children, families, and/or community changed over the five-year project period as a result of what the program did.

**Objectives:** Subparts of goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (**SMART**).

**Outcome:** Something that happened as a result of an activity or process; the actual results achieved each year. The term *outcome* is also used to refer to *expected outcomes*, that is, the results you *expect* to see because of an activity or process.

**Progress:** Forward movement toward the achievement of goals, objectives, and expected outcomes.

**School Readiness Goals:** The expectations of children’s status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve their readiness for kindergarten (45 CFR 1307.20).