

# 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

### Characteristics of Highly Qualified Consultants

Before interviewing candidates for a consultant position with your Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) program, identify the knowledge, competencies, and experience you seek in a consultant. Listed here are characteristics of highly qualified consultants that you can draw upon when developing your own criteria for selecting the right person.

#### Knowledge


- An understanding of and familiarity with the Head Start Act, Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), fiscal regulations, and Information Memorandums and Program Instructions and how to use this information to guide the work
- An understanding of the diverse Head Start and Early Head Start systems and settings that serve infants, toddlers, and their families and the unique characteristics of each, including center-based child care, family child care, and home visiting programs
- An understanding of the legal requirements and ethical practices applicable to the consultant role in all interactions with infants and toddlers and their families
- An understanding of consultation as a capacity-building process and knowledge of the strategies that support program capacity
- An appreciation of strength-based relationships as the foundation for effective consultation
- An appreciation of the importance of cultural and linguistic sensitivity throughout the consultation process
- An understanding of current research and trends and their relevance for best practices in infant/toddler early care and education
- An appreciation and understanding of all aspects of systems change, including systems development, documentation, training, and ongoing monitoring
- An understanding of the knowledge and skills needed for the consultation role, such as observation, assessment, relationship-based practice, adult learning theory, facilitation, and evaluation

## Competencies

- Follows established professional, ethical, and legal standards and respects and maintains confidentiality of children, families, and clients at all times
- Demonstrates active listening and adjusts communication style when gathering information and responding to program needs
- Adjusts approaches for the context of the program: culture, language, demographics, policies, procedures, and organizational structure
- Uses an appropriate consultation process that includes establishing a productive relationship, assessing a client's willingness and commitment, and identifying the purpose and focus of the consultation
- Models and encourages reflective practice
- Integrates current research and trends about young children, adult learning, capacity building, and change into the consultation work
- Appreciates and capitalizes upon diversity, is aware of and acts to reduce personal biases, and employs culturally sensitive pedagogy
- Demonstrates excitement, enthusiasm, and optimism for the people, content, and context of the consulting-teaching-learning process
- Identifies and uses resources in effective ways and helps practitioners find and use resources and informal supports
- Takes time consistently to evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation
- Gathers and analyzes relevant data to inform decision making
- Engages in collaborative problem-solving with staff, parents, community members, and program planning and governance groups

## Experience

- History of working for or consulting with HS/EHS programs and/or other organizations serving pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers
- Familiarity with the different cultures served by the HS/EHS program
- Experience in collecting, analyzing, and using data to inform practices
- History of collaborative decision making and client-centered consultation
- History of applying adult learning theory to consultation practice
- Experience with effective group facilitation and individualized coaching/mentoring
- History of working with clients with diverse cultural perspectives
- History of completing consultation contracts on time and within budget
- Track record of helping early childhood programs implement organizational change and lasting program improvement



## References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2011). *A Guide to Effective Consultation with Settings Serving Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families: Core Knowledge, Competencies, and Dispositions*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2011\\_effective\\_consultation.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2011_effective_consultation.pdf)

Strategic Use of Consultants Workgroup members, representing the Early Head Start National Resource Center; The National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness; The National Center on Health; The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement; The National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations; and The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning.