

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
	1. Log No. ACF-IM-HS-09-07	2. Issuance Date: 09/22/2009
	3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start	
	4. Key Words: Centers of Excellence	

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees

SUBJECT: Centers of Excellence in Early Childhood

BACKGROUND:

Section 657B of the Head Start Act authorizes Centers of Excellence in Early Childhood to recognize programs of exceptional quality that can serve as exemplary models for other programs. The Centers of Excellence program has been allocated \$2 million as part of Head Start's FY 2009 appropriation [Public Law 111-8]. This Memorandum introduces the Centers of Excellence and explains how a Head Start or Early Head Start grantee will be able to apply for this designation.

The Centers of Excellence program will recognize Head Start and Early Head Start grantees that are performing at the highest levels of quality. Excellent and effective programs are those that have achieved and are actively building upon full compliance with the Program Performance Standards. These are programs that are implementing comprehensive, innovative and targeted approaches to enhance program services. Such programs are producing positive, measurable outcomes for children's school success; families supporting children's learning, and increased staff competency.

The recognized Centers will provide all Head Start programs and other early childhood organizations opportunities to benefit from the practices that guided them on a path to excellence. Programs receiving Centers of Excellence grants will be required to use at least 15 percent of the funds to disseminate best practices.

Sample Areas of Excellence

The Office of Head Start looks forward to seeing both the breadth and depth of excellence that will be represented among the Centers of Excellence. Some areas where programs may be able to provide evidence of demonstrated excellence include:

- Demonstrating the use of on-going program improvement through self-assessment, community assessment and other program data to improve practices leading to staff competency for positive child and family outcomes;
- Implementing established public-private partnerships that leverage additional support for innovative or effective ways to serve children and families;

- Implementing innovative evidence-based curricula and teaching practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive and recognized for their effectiveness in demonstrating Head Start children are ready for continued school success;
- Demonstrating model collaborations with schools, child care and other community providers to deliver a comprehensive, holistic approach to better meet the needs of children and families including children with disabilities, children ages birth to five and effective transitions to Early Head Start, Head Start, other placements, and to school entry;
- Implementing established innovative, culturally and linguistically responsive parent and family practices that lead to improving parent-child relationships, health and well-being and educational outcomes for children;
- Creating innovative learning opportunities, such as an “outdoor classroom” that supports the domains of learning and connects children with nature and their culture;
- Implementing exemplary partnerships with the child welfare system and/or other systems to better meet the needs of children and families;
- Implementing management systems that include family support practices that effectively address the needs of children and families experiencing homelessness and remove barriers adversely impacting their participation in the program;
- Demonstrating on going relationships with health care providers that lead to all families, including children with disabilities and special health care needs, receiving on going medical, dental, and other necessary health care; and
- Implementing a Learning Communities Model that has impacted staff competency, responsiveness to children and families, or other program improvements.

Application Process

Each Center of Excellence applicant for the national Head Start competition must first be nominated as a prospective Center of Excellence by their State’s Governor.

American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN) grantees and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) grantees must be nominated by their respective ACF Regional Offices.

Each Governor’s office will be informed in a separate communication of this process and of the role they need to play, including the statutory requirement that any grantees they nominate will be determined through a competitive process they design. AIAN and MSHS grantees will be informed of the Regional Office nomination process in the near future.

Any Head Start grantee that can demonstrate that it is a program of exceptional quality is encouraged to apply during the competition that will be coordinated by the Governor of each state. Each grantee must be willing to establish collaborative partnerships with other providers of early childhood education, and meet the requirements of Section 657B(c)(B) of the Head Start Act, and ultimately be able to disseminate their best practices to educate others.

Instructions for submitting the full application, once nominated, as well as what must be included in an application will be available on the Grants.gov website, by using the "Find Grant Opportunities" feature of the website. We will alert all grantees when this application is available on Grants.gov. The Office of Head Start looks forward to working with the designated Centers of Excellence.

/ Patricia E. Brown /

Patricia E. Brown
Acting Director
Office of Head Start