

<b>ACF Administration For Children and Families</b>	<b>U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES</b>	
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## **INFORMATION MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** All Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies

**SUBJECT:** Federal Oversight of Five Year Head Start Grants

### **INFORMATION**

The Office of Head Start (OHS) is transitioning grants to provide Head Start and Early Head Start services from indefinite project periods to five year project periods in accordance with Section 641 of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007.

Information Memorandum (IM) [ACF-IM-HS-13-02](#) described changes to funding practices and provided guidance on key elements of the five year award and post-award conditions. The purpose of this IM is to provide more detailed information on the system of federal oversight to assess performance, compliance, continuous improvement, and progress of grantees during the five year project period.

Federal oversight involves the review and analysis of data, program services, and management systems to ensure grantees establish and implement:

- Program goals, including goals for school readiness;
- Effective management systems, including data management and analysis, ongoing monitoring, and fiscal oversight; and
- Methods to assess progress on anticipated outcomes for children, families, and the community throughout the five year project period.

The implementation of this system of oversight includes ongoing communication and joint analysis of the grantee's plans and progress, and effective provision of targeted training and technical assistance (T/TA) and other supports. Key elements include:

- Five year grant applications
- Effective governance and leadership
- Program goals, activities, progress, and impacts, including school readiness and family engagement
- Program data and continuous quality improvement
- Program communication
- Training and technical assistance

The success of the five year oversight approach depends on the active involvement of grantees; Office of Head Start regional and central offices, including program and grants staff; and T/TA partners.

### **Five Year Grant Application**

The baseline, initial grant application establishes the foundation for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs in providing high-quality, comprehensive services to children and families. The intent of the baseline grant application is to provide a comprehensive description of the program design and plan each grantee intends to implement within its community. The baseline application also specifies the measurable impacts on children, families, and the community the grantee expects to achieve throughout the five year project period.

All grantees entering into a five year project period are expected to establish program goals, including goals for school readiness and fiscal operations; describe governance, organizational, and management structures and systems, including those for ongoing oversight; project anticipated impacts and outcomes for children, families, and the community as a whole; and define measures of program, child, and family progress throughout the five year project period.

Grantees are expected to measure and report progress on achieving the long-range goals, objectives, and impacts in each continuation application, including changes when applicable. The application criteria will be available in the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES).

### **Effective Governance and Leadership**

Effective governance and leadership are key elements of program quality and risk mitigation. These elements are evidenced in governing bodies that are engaged in and knowledgeable of the

program's services and operations, make well-informed decisions for the program, and exercise their legal and fiscal responsibilities.

Federal staff priority will be to engage each grantee's governing body through site visits to programs, including meeting with members of the agency's governing body and Policy Council, and to understand oversight procedures, assess management systems, and discuss fiscal procedures and internal controls.

### **Program Goals, Activities, Progress, and Impacts, Including School Readiness and Family Engagement**

Grantees are required to develop long-range program goals and short-term program and financial objectives that provide the foundation and resources to support the grantee's establishment and implementation of their school readiness goals. Attainment of all of these goals will ensure high-quality, comprehensive services for children and families. Grantee's tracking and ongoing assessment of progress made towards meeting goals are integral to their annual planning process over the five year period in order to measure and report their impact on children, families, and the community.

Throughout the five year project period, federal staff will maintain ongoing oversight of the grantee's establishment and implementation of school readiness goals, including the collection, aggregation, and analysis of child assessment and related data (e.g., teacher-child interaction, professional development, environment, curriculum fidelity); progress toward achieving these goals; and ensuring that the implementation of responsive program improvements occur.

In addition, grantees are required to track progress on established parent, family, and community engagement goals.

Federal staff will use information from ongoing communications with grantees and other data sources, such as grant applications and reports, to stay abreast of the grantee's progress in achieving its goals.

### **Program Data and Continuous Quality Improvement**

Program-level data provides a platform for determining national, regional, state, and grantee performance; informing policy; establishing priorities; and coordinating efforts to support grantees. Ongoing analysis of available data sources by federal staff provides critical information on grantee progress, success, and risk. Federal staff, T/TA partners, and grantees are responsible for utilizing available data to ensure continuous delivery of high-quality services and progress towards program goals.

## **Program Communication**

The purpose of ongoing program communication is to build and strengthen relationships among and across agency leaders, staff, and parents, and to gain greater insights into how the program operates. Ongoing communication between federal staff and grantees is also critical. Intentional planning between grantees and federal staff will ensure that accurate and relevant information is shared. Federal staff, to the extent possible, will conduct annual visits to hear firsthand from leadership, staff, and families about the program, and federal staff will also maintain, at a minimum, monthly contacts with each grantee.

## **Training and Technical Assistance**

Grantees are expected to provide high-quality, comprehensive services to children and families that result in children's readiness for school. Grantees are encouraged to make effective use of the three components of the T/TA system. Each Head Start grantee receives funds for direct T/TA. These funds are complemented by the state-based T/TA system of early childhood education specialists, grantee specialists, and the National T/TA Centers. Refer to <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system> for a more detailed understanding of available T/TA resources.

There is growing recognition of the critical role early childhood education plays in setting the stage for children's success in school and in life. The five year system of oversight and communication focuses on ensuring the services delivered by Head Start and Early Head Start grantees are of high-quality and comprehensive and allow Head Start to accomplish its mission.

Please direct questions to your OHS Regional Office.

/ Ann Linehan /

Ann Linehan  
Acting Director  
Office of Head Start