

Eligibility

Determining Need and Meeting Expectations

Eligibility is the first step and a key component in implementing ERSEA services. These strategies and guiding questions will help you identify and enroll children and families with the greatest need, including children in [kinship care](#).

Building from a Strong Foundation

Eligibility services support your program's goal of reaching and maintaining full enrollment. Program leadership and staff receive ongoing training to make sure enrollment practices are consistent and appropriate. Policies and procedures address unique family situations and support the integrity of eligibility determination. Program staff are respectful of all cultures and lifestyles when collecting eligibility data.

Did you know?



Head Start Start programs serve children and families with the greatest need. The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) contain two exceptions that enable programs to serve families above the poverty level ([45 CFR §1302.12](#)):

- Programs may offer 10% of funded enrollment slots to children from over-income families who could benefit from Head Start services.
- Under certain circumstances, programs can fill up to 35% of enrollment with children from families with incomes between 100 and 130% of poverty.

Together, these two exceptions allow for up to 45% of enrollment to be allocated to over-income families when reporting requirements are met. However, in 2019, the two exceptions only accounted for 12% of total national enrollment. Only 3% of programs use more than 30% of their total 45% allowance. The HSPPS at 45 CFR §1302.12 outlines additional allowances and requirements for Indian tribes and migrant families. Is your program using this eligibility flexibility to identify and serve families in your community?



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, 80% of whom are living under 100% of the poverty level, are [categorically eligible](#) for Head Start services. Has your program identified SNAP recipients in your community for Head Start services?

A Systems Perspective: Questions to consider



How does your program's **recordkeeping and reporting** system use the [Head Start Eligibility Verification Form](#)? How does your program track Head Start's eligibility determinations? Are application forms available in multiple languages? Are application forms accessible to people with disabilities?



How does your program incorporate eligibility data into its **program planning**? How does this data guide the delivery of services that are strategic and responsive?



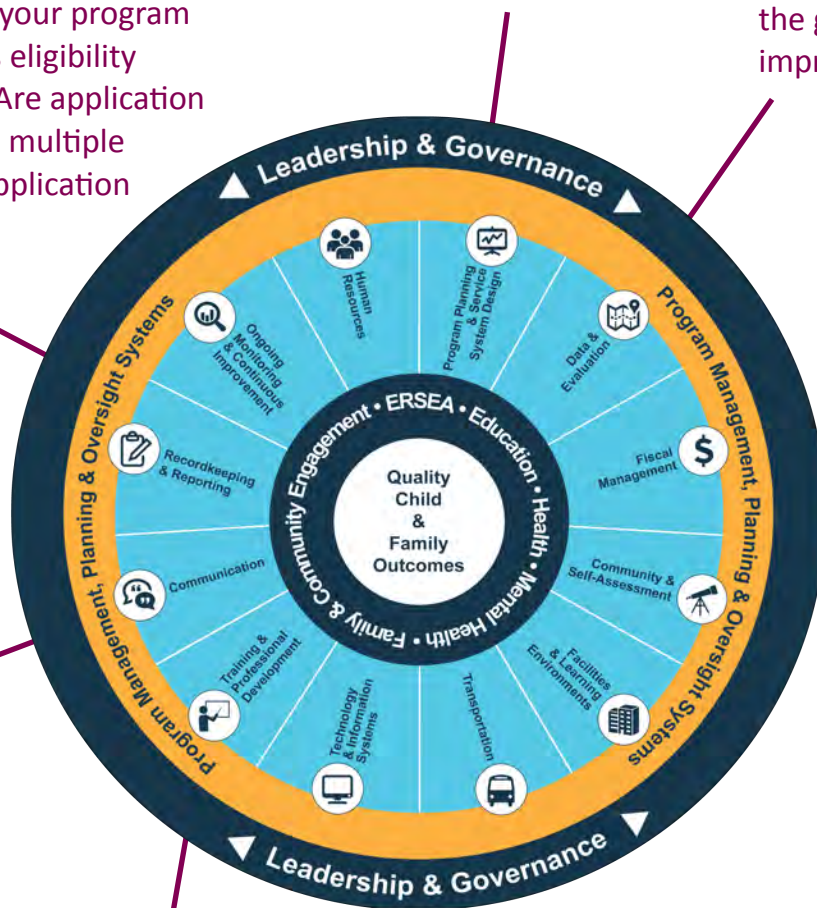
How does your program's **data and evaluation** system support the review and analysis of eligibility practices? Who is enrolling? Where are the gaps? How can you improve the process?



How is your program's **community assessment** data used to recruit eligible children and families? Does this data identify over-income populations that may be eligible for Head Start services?



How does your program's **communication** system support families who may be fearful of sharing personal information? Does your program communicate through a variety of platforms, like flyers, texts, and social media?



How does your program's **technology and information** system make sure staff have the intellectual and [analytic capacity](#) to maintain required eligibility documentation?



Does your program's **training and professional development** system provide appropriate ERSEA training for all stakeholders? How are staff trained to conduct culturally and linguistically responsive eligibility interviews?



Planning for Continuous Improvement



Ongoing monitoring ensures that all aspects of eligibility determination are working together to achieve and maintain full enrollment. Up-to-date community assessment data sheds light on demographic and societal changes that impact the eligibility status of children and families. Policies and procedures are reviewed and amended as needed to reflect regulatory changes, and to support staff to make decisions around eligibility determination. Ongoing review of eligibility determination records identifies areas needing improvement. Is the proper documentation on file? Are timelines reasonable? Are materials appropriate for all targeted populations? Leaders can use data to assess staff professional development, make enhancements, and provide necessary support.

Resource Spotlight

[ACF-IM-HS-19-03](#)

Children living with relatives or caregivers other than their parents are, in many cases, eligible for Head Start services according to the Head Start Act and HSPPS. This IM can help programs understand how to include this eligibility category in their enrollment and selection process. OHS encourages recipients to include children in kinship care in their enrollment and selection process.

[SNAP Eligibility for Head Start Services](#)

The interpretation of “public assistance” in Sec. 645 of the Head Start Act now includes receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. This policy change allows Head Start programs to coordinate benefits for families eligible for multiple programs. These ECLKC resources can help you understand and operationalize this eligibility category.

[Assessing Analytic Capacity](#)

The way that your program collects and analyzes ERSEA data makes it valuable. This is called analytic capacity. Use this resource to assess and improve your program’s analytic capacity.



ADMINISTRATION FOR
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