

Technology in the Wild

In 2018, the Head Start National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations (PMFO) conducted a study of how programs use and manage technology. The following comments and recommendations were made by executive directors, program managers, and program coordinators.

“While it's important to have IT experts, it does not relieve management's responsibility to understand, be proactive, and hold IT responsible.”

— *EHS Grantee Program Coordinator, Region III*

“It is important to have someone available during the regular working hours to respond to things that just come up. We tried using just a consultant in the past and it didn't work. The large installs and upgrades, etc., can be scheduled with a consultant, but so many of the issues are small things that need immediate attention.”

— *Executive Director, Region IX*

“The IT department has been consistent in assisting in the development of systems over a long period of time. The key to the program's success has been effective and responsive communication.”

— *Early Childhood Division Director, Region V*

“The most helpful thing has been learning how to build regular replacement costs and upgrades into the system and to anticipate technology and IT infrastructure needs before they become critical.”

— *Program Director, Region VII*

“Get all of the training you can get on the front end of adopting new systems. You pay a lot of money to subscribe.”

— *ECE Manager, Region II*

“Moving as much as possible to the cloud has been very helpful.”

— *Executive Director, Region X*

“Systems are developed within each agency program and the IT manager works closely with department heads. It would be beneficial to know in advance the skill level of department heads in order to best develop systems that are clear and user-friendly.”

— *Executive Director, Region III*

“Leave room for the changing demands of the program. The need for programs to be data-driven means a need for more accessibility.”

— *Quality and Program Outcomes Manager, Region V*

“Ensure everyone understands the value and purpose of IT for tracking, monitoring, follow-up, etc., for measured outcomes and impacts.”

— *Program Manager, Region IX*

“Create simple, concise, written processes and ensure more than one person in the agency has the IT knowledge necessary to keep it running smoothly.”

— *Executive Director, Region VIII*

“Have technical experts advising program experts. Both have a say in balancing out what is best for our programs that provide direct services to kiddos and families.”

— *Director, Region X*

“Have a holistic perspective. It's not just the tech side, it is the people side, customers, etc. And ensure that there are useful reports from whatever systems you are using.”

— *CEO, Region XII*

“Include IT in management meetings, track technology-related tasks that involve (all) content areas, and ensure the policies and procedures include technology-driven components.”

— *Head Start/Early head Start Director, Region IV*

“We use pilots of new technology to make sure they work as desired/planned and so we have a chance to address ‘bugs’ before we take the technology to scale.”

— *Program Director, Region VII*

“Be willing to abandon old systems; be open to the merits of some technologies; be willing to ignore the myth of sunk costs.”

— *Information Technology Director, Region VI*

“Provide clear training options and ongoing support for staff who have minimal skills.”

— *Director, Region II*

“Have an understanding by all involved regarding the expectations of the technology and how to use it. Have a plan for the technology implementation and clear expectations/job description of the technology manager. Plan for training as well.”

— *Head Start Director, Region VI*

“Create systems to monitor connectivity and capacity issues; have adequate financial resources to address systemic concerns that may arise.”

— *Chief Financial Officer, Region VI*

