Head Start Forward: Moving Forward for ERSEA Success

Glenna Davis: Hello and welcome everyone to Head Start Forward, Moving Forward for ERSEA Success. I'd like to take a few moments to share some housekeeping items with you before we begin. All participants will be in a listen-only mode for the duration of this webcast. Please do not use the virtual raise-hand option as participants will not be unmuted. For the live participants, certificates of attendance will not be provided at the conclusion of today's event. If you are participating live with us, you will receive a thank-you email one day after this event has ended. Closed captions are also available for today's event. You can turn those captions on or off by clicking on the CC button near the bottom of your screen.

Also, if you would like to add to the discussion with our panelists and presenters for today, please engage in the chat function. To participate in chat, click on chat and add your comment to the chat area. I also want to highlight an area for Q&A. To ask questions, please use the Q&A pod. In order to submit that question, click on Q&A near the bottom of your screen and add your question. It is now my pleasure to turn the floor over to Dr. Futrell. Dr. Futrell, the floor is yours.

Dr. Bernadine Futrell: Thank you so much, Glenna and hello, hello, hello everyone. And welcome, welcome back to Head Start Forward webinar number two, where we are moving forward with ERSEA Support, ERSEA Success. We are so thrilled and excited that we are able to have these conversations together. Head Start Forward is about leaning in and coming together and moving forward toward getting back to in-person comprehensive services as we do this work ahead for children and families. It is my great pleasure to welcome everyone to this webinar and to salute and celebrate the wonderful leaders that we have from the Office of Head Start who you will be hearing from today. I just want to say before we get into this webinar, how grateful and how much we appreciate each and every one of you. We know that every single day you are getting up and doing what may feel like the impossible, but you do it each and every day. And for that we say, thank you. We are in this together Head Start, and together we will move Head Start forward. Now with that, it is my great pleasure to introduce, to start this webinar, Mr. David Jones. Thank you.

David Jones: Thank you so much Dr. Futrell, and of course, Glenna. So, let's begin with an overview of today's webinar. We're going to start with some questions and answers some of which are new while others we're carrying forward from the initial webinar. In addition, I'm just going to try to clarify a few things that we think would be important for grantees to know and understand. Afterward, I will briefly frame the content portion of today's webinar, and we are really excited that we have representatives from the PMFO and PFCE who are going to help us by building on the content and building our existing knowledge that's relevant.

So some of the key things that you're going to hear about today is we're going to enhance the understanding of building thoughtful and supportive systems. We're going to make use of the program, or we'll have you think more intentionally about how to make use of the program planning cycle as a tool that embraces the importance of data. We're going to elaborate on ERSEA as a continuum of services that reflects a systemic approach and emphasizes the interconnectedness. And that's a different way of thinking about ERSEA, so you're going to hear some important content related to that. We're going to emphasize the importance of building and sustaining relationships with families and

community partners. And we're going to offer some foundational and innovative strategies that supports our goal of being fully enrolled. After that, we're going to wrap up and we will close. Next slide.

So, we already heard from Dr. Futrell, and we again appreciate her opening remarks explaining the Head Start Forward campaign. We are also extremely delighted to have Ann Linehan and Heather Wanderski here with us to respond to those Q&As that I mentioned earlier. My name is David Jones, and I will be the emcee for today's webinar. I'm also excited to introduce Brandi Black Thacker, Nicole Holman-Alexander, and Karen Suprenant, who are here to present the content. So, let's get started with the Q&As.

And this first Q&A, the first question, rather, is going to go to Ann. If programs cannot accommodate all children with in-person five days per week, can programs provide some days in-person and some days remote/virtual for each child?

Ann Linehan: David, this is one that we are, oh, I'm still muted. Am I still muted?

David: No, we can hear you.

Ann: This is one that we are revisiting because folks still had a lot of questions, and I feel like I'm going to be the "yes, but" woman today. So the answer is yes, but with a big, big, but. Programs should absolutely be transitioning children currently served virtually or remotely into in-person services as soon as possible. And again, we're always going to say, add in the caveat, depending on local conditions. However, as we have said about this ramp-up period, and it should be in full-blown exercise right now, we are going to continue to allow some flexibility through the end of the calendar year. And during this ramp-up period, programs may deliver virtual remote services to enroll children to some enrolled children and families. Again, if local health conditions necessitate, or if the program is meeting an individualized need of a child. This includes options such as providing a combination of in-person and virtual services for individual children. If necessary, again, to meet the health and safety guidelines.

Something that is so critical throughout all of this ramp-up period is the need for grantees to continue to communicate with their program specialists, their fiscal specialist at the Regional Offices, and talk to them about their continued use of virtual remote services for some children during this ramp-up period. We anticipate, we are looking forward to our goal is that programs will be able to be fully returned to their preapproved in-person program options by January 2022. We have said this before again, in another Q&A, it is not allowable to have a program option run entirely by technology or through delivery of educational materials to children's home. Virtual and remote are absolutely the services were considered an interim strategy that we may have to employ in the future of another disaster, but they are not considered a locally designed program option. So, I think, hope I made that crystal clear.

David: You did. Thank you so much. Next slide please. And this one is for Heather. So, if a grantee is unable to serve its full enrollment in the fall, during the ramp-up period, does the grantee need to submit a temporary reduction in enrollment?

Heather Wanderski: Thanks for that question, David. The answer is no. Programs should not be requesting a temporary enrollment reduction in the event that they're not able to serve their full enrollment during the ramp-up period. Also, programs should not be requesting a temporary enrollment reduction nor a request to operate a locally designed program option if they want to do a combination

of in-person and virtual services. Really, I think that the focus is that, this time during the summer, programs should really be using that time to prioritize recruitment of children and families. And then in the event that you're unable to serve your full enrollment for whatever reason in the fall, that you should be in talks with the Regional Office about what the concerns are, where there are issues, and talk about additional strategies you might consider based on your individual situational needs. So, I think that that's really something important that we want to make note of here. Thanks.

David: Thanks so much, Heather. Next slide. And I think we say this a lot of times, but the Regional Office is such a valuable resource. And I think we just want to get people comfortable with sort of reaching out to their program specialists and the fiscal specialists and just make sure they can connect. So this next question, Ann, I'm going to toss it back to you. What are allowable virtual program enhancements?

Ann: Well, David, I know that our audience probably has seen this slide probably maybe two times before if not more. We wanted to revisit it, because I think if you take a look at the things that are highlighted on the right, we added a couple of more that we think are reasonable strategies that would be acceptable during this ramp-up period. But also they may be something that programs want to incorporate as they go forth. We just want to say, we have all learned a lot for this pandemic, and there are some techniques that we said, "You know what? We should have been doing this earlier." However, I do want to say just because we have Policy Council meetings on that right-hand side and say, "Hey, that might be a good idea to do indefinitely," this is a local decision.

For some programs, getting the folks in person, may be the right thing for them. And for other folks that have challenges, they may have better parent engagement and governing Policy Council engagement by doing it virtually. So, again, we just wanted to quickly revisit this to say, yeah, some things make sense going forward. And if you look on the left-hand side, these are the ones that are really limited to the ramp-up period, starting out with home-based socializations. And I know staff will have these slides, so we don't want to linger too long.

David: Got it. Awesome. Thank you, Ann. Next few questions, actually, are going to be for Heather. So I hope you're ready, Heather. If programs are serving a reduced number of children, is a program's over-income percentage based on the program's capacity or their total funded enrollment?

Heather: Yeah. Good question. And I think we've been getting this one quite a lot. So, I'll circle back to what are our standards say. So, ultimately, that regulation states that, if a family does not meet income or categorical eligibility, a program may still enroll children who would benefit from services provided they only make up 10% of a program's enrollment. So, therefore, programs really should be using actual enrollment rather than funding enrollment to calculate the percentage of over-income children that can be enrolled. That said, we know many programs need to plan and that it could be difficult to potentially calculate how many over-income slots of program can accommodate on such a frequent basis, depending on how quickly programs are able to enroll children. And that it's probably easier to accomplish this by just anticipating what your funding enrollment is going to be, and then calculating the 10% off of that. But in most cases that would be totally sufficient. But in situations where it's anticipated that actual enrollment will significantly differ from funded enrollment, the number of over-income slots really should be based on actual enrollment to support the intent of the law. And I think the biggest piece I want to highlight here is that we know that there are a number of children and families in poverty and that that has grown significantly and that we really need to prioritize low-income families to make sure that we are serving those in greatest need.

David: Perfect. OK, let's go to the next slide. So, this question says, do unemployment benefits count as family income? And are the additional unemployment benefits provided through COVID-related funds handled differently?

Heather: Yeah, so we actually received quite a number of questions following that initial webinar that we did a few weeks ago. So I'm here to clarify that unemployment benefits do generally count as family income, but there are some situations where it might be reduced or eliminated. So I'm going to highlight those for folks. So, in 2020, the first $10,200 of unemployment benefits do not count as taxable income. So, if a family presented an unemployment statement in order to calculate income, you could subtract that first $10,200 since it would not have been counted as income on an IRS 1044. Like if they presented to you their tax documents or their tax forms, it wouldn't show up there to begin with because it's not considered taxable income.

Additionally, there's a $300-a-week federal increase in unemployment payment that is in effect through September 6th of 2021. I do want to make note, though, that this increase is not in all states. So programs will need to stay up to date on what their state is providing as far as unemployment benefits are concerned. But in the event that this additional increase is provided, this extra increase should not be considered or counted for income eligibility. One thing I do want to make note of is that the 1099-G forms do not differentiate between regular unemployment and that additional increase. So programs would need to calculate what that additional or that extra increase would be and subtract it from the overall unemployment amount. Ultimately, in both these situations, maintaining documentation of calculations is really going to be critical when we're talking about income eligibility and making those determinations, so I can't stress enough that having that documentation is going to be key.

David: Thanks so much, Heather. All right. We have one more for you and then we'll toss it over to Ann. How should programs verify that unemployment was due to the pandemic? And is a parent's attestation sufficient?

Heather: Absolutely. A parent's attestation is certainly a sufficient way to verify unemployment was a result of pandemic. As I just made mention, there's really no way to differentiate on a 1099-G form the regular unemployment from the federal increase as a result of COVID-19. So, therefore, programs are really going to need to rely on the attestation, and once you have that attestation, just maintain that documentation for your records.

David: OK. Thank you. Next slide. And we're going to now kick this one over to Ann. What should programs do if enrolled or returning families do not want to participate in in-person services?

Ann: So, this is really a hard one, David, and I think this speaks to the strength of a grantee's clear communication with parents and setting up realistic expectations. And if you take anything away from this slide, is it, I think Heather was talking about the number of families in need. We know we have hundreds of thousands of children on any given year that can't enroll because we don't have sufficient slots. We cannot go into this program here thinking that we can save or hold on to seats in classrooms because we have parents, we have families that are hesitant to reenroll their children or enroll their children in Head Start this coming fall. What we expect is that programs are doing everything they can with the addition, with the supplemental funds that they've gotten to introduce strategies, discussions, workshops, education, to make parents feel more comfortable about returning.

But if parents say, "You know what? I'd rather do virtual." Programs can continue throughout the fall to offer those hesitant families virtual, remote, but they cannot say, "Well, come January, we might have a slot for you," because you've got to fill those slots with children that are on the waiting list that are ready to come back in person. I know that this is a difficult issue. We don't want to be insensitive to families, but we have to ensure that we're maximizing our capacity to serve eligible children who are ready and able to come to in-person services.

And again, I would expect that programs are going to set up fantastic communication checking in with the families, how are they doing? But I think there can't be this false sense of hope that that slot is going to be saved for your child. We just can't do that, because we have so many kids that are not being served. And again, if you find out that when the parent's ready and the slots are all filled, then what you do with any family that doesn't have an opportunity to come to Head Start. You help explore alternative placements. This is a tough one, but I think our message is very strong and very consistent and thinking about how best we can serve as many needy children and families as possible.

David: And I just want to reiterate, to make sure that it's clear, on the program communications with families should clarify that these virtual services are a temporary approach for use during the programs ramp-up period. And that the goal would be to have them discontinued at the end of the calendar year.

Ann: Right.

David: OK. Thank you. Sure. Next slide. So, some programs have a particular challenge, as we know historically, in finding education, staff, teachers, home visitors, et cetera, with the right qualifications. How can programs thoughtfully and intentionally address this challenge?

Ann: I feel like I got the tough ones today because I think we can all resonate how challenging this is for communities. And we've been hearing this from grantees for a while. And certainly I think the whole COVID thing has just exacerbated the issue. And we know how much it matters having staff that have our high-quality staff, and what that matters in terms of the quality of the instruction, the teaching in the classrooms, and in other services. And we know how demanding it is, right? I hope, and I know this, I feel like we're preaching to the choir, but I hope programs do carefully examine what really are the factors that are leading up to the difficulty in finding educational staff. I mean, talking to current staff, prospective staff, staff that have left, and I certainly know folks are out there listening, saying, "She hasn't mentioned wages yet."

Well, we know that wages certainly are an issue. One of the things that we have seen across the country and I know that this was something that we have done for decades, but it's the home grown. I think we see many programs that really support parents in an upward trajectory of obtaining first coming in as maybe an assistant or assistant teacher or an aide, and working toward that CDA or working toward their AA and then how many teachers do we have that are former parents? So, I do think turning to the sort of, what can we do within our community to support the professional development of our parents, I think is one strategy that I think we could look at more closely. I also think looking with, partnering with the community colleges and universities to see how flexible we can make it for staff who really want to do their degrees, but it's challenging when you're a teacher, when you have a job, and you probably have children at home.

One thing that we do want to mention here, and I want to say this, you know that when we monitor programs, what we look for in a program is, true, we look at are they credentialed. And if they're not credentialed, what we've looked to see is, is there a professional development plan? And is the person enrolled in a program that's going to lead to the qualifications that they need? And when we say professional development plan, one of my colleagues reminded us yesterday. It's not a plan that just describes when they're going to complete the degree; it's a plan that is fully supported.

Programs have funds to support their staff when they're taking the courses, when they're obtaining those degrees. So if we see a robust system where those staff who may not have that credential but are in a professional development plan, fully supported receiving coaching, and in a program, that program is not going to be cited because they're doing everything they can to create that environment. That said, we absolutely want to support programs and whatever solutions they can come up with that they feel are going to get them to a place where they can maintain. It's not just hiring or recruiting. It's maintaining staff also. And I do want to say wages plays into that also. And we want to acknowledge that.

David: Thank you, Ann. Yeah, and when, I think, when we get into the content that the National Centers are going to present, we're going to hear a little bit more about that. Thank you. So, Heather, the next question is for you. Can programs use American Rescue Plan – ARP – or other COVID relief funding to support staff?

Heather: Absolutely. And I want to make note of, in particular, the program instruction that is referenced at the very top of this slide. That program instruction, Office of Head Start spent a significant amount of time identifying possible ways that our funds and other COVID relief funds could be used to support staff. The examples on this slide are just a snippet of what is included in that instruction.

I do hear, over and over again, that I think programs are generally concerned about staff wellness and mental health. And we know that our staff are going to need a tremendous amount of support. And I think increasing access to mental health consultation and therapy services will be important as we move back to in-person services.

Another one that many programs ask about is a temporary increase in pay for staff, which we'll address in a little more detail, but ultimately the answer is yes. Funds can be used for these purposes provided costs are reasonable and in line with their established policies and procedures. You'll also see here that we highlighted other staff supports, including the hire of additional staff to reduce group size and allow for additional breaks. We also added the vaccination support and highlighted on professional development and learning opportunities. So again, I think there's a lot of detail here in this slide, but also it's really good to go back to the original source document and that instruction for those additional examples and details.

David: Thank you, Heather. Next slide. Can programs use ARP and other sources of COVID relief funding specifically to provide hazard pay, temporary wage increases, or a bonus for a staff? And I think you kind of touched upon that a little bit.

Heather: Yeah. And we have seen this question asked in many different forms and iterations. And regardless of what you call it, a hiring bonus, hazard pay, stipends, et cetera, whatever that is, it's all covered by that regulation at 75.431a. Ultimately, compensation beyond regular salaries and wages is

allowable so long as it's reasonable and paid based on established A to Z policies and procedures. The same is also true of fringe benefits. But I think one point to note is that programs should be thinking about and addressing required withholdings for either a short-term or a one-time payment to staff. I also want to say that the Office of Head Start recognizes that recruiting and retaining employees is important to service delivery, but it will be particularly important to ensure that your program is adhering to fiscal regulations and general cost principles regarding allowability.

David: Uniform guidance, awesome. Thank you. OK. And we are going to wrap up this Q&A with Ann, for the final question. Next slide, please. What if some staff are hesitant to return to in-person services in the fall of 2021?

Ann: Well, I'm not going to say thank you, David, but I will … [Inaudible] This slide really should be side by side with the one that we asked, what if we have families that are hesitant to participate to return? And it's really the same theme here, folks. And again, I know that this is tough, but just as we said, we can't save slots for children, when we have to fill vacancies, and we can't save jobs indefinitely for staff that are hesitant. All that said, we get how difficult this is, we get that staff have been traumatized by their experiences. But again, what we would ask is, what are you doing now in this ramp-up period, with the funds you have to support staff, to gather staff, to talk about the mitigation strategies and the health and safety precautions that are going to be taken to ensure that their return would be safe?

That said, if there are staff who are reluctant and you are doing some remote services, virtual services in the ramp-up period, if it's appropriate, they may be assigned to those tasks. But we want folks to be careful, that if you are assigning someone to a temporary task during this ramp-up period, whatever you're assigning them to still has to have a direct benefit to the Head Start program in order to be allowable. And again, if there's some staff, this is where you get into policies and procedures, this can't go on indefinitely. And some staff, just as you're saying to families, the slot may be not there, you cannot hold a staff person's position indefinitely, particularly if it means you're not going to be rendering services which you otherwise could to eligible children and families.

And we're basically saying, if you take a look at that last paragraph, programs should not delay opening classrooms for in-person services if current staff are unable or unwilling to return to in person. Again, there's this ramp-up period, but we cannot be telling the story our programs are not open, the children are there, the families are there, but the staff they're just not ready to come back. It's just not going to be good for the families and it's certainly not going to be good for Head Start going forward. And if there's anything that you think that I missed there, David, please come back and … [Inaudible]

David: I will, Ann. And I think, I'm really excited we're going to now transition. Thank you and Heather so much. We're going to transition into my framing of the content before we hear from the National Centers. And I think there's going to be some reiteration of some of what you and Heather were able to cover. So thank you. Next slide.

OK. So again, this past year really has taught all of us, some very important lessons about our collective character and your dedication to the mission of Head Start. We had to contend with unprecedented service disruptions, but some of you were able to continue delivering services, while others found approaches that worked in your community. But what was immediately apparent, was the perseverance displayed by so many organizations, which was evidenced by your ability to pivot, refocus, and be resilient. When you look at the words on this slide, and you begin to think about the qualities of resilient

organizations, you may recognize traits that contributed to your responsiveness and your success during this past year.

And on behalf of the Office of Head Start, again, we just want to say thank you. In your efforts to be responsive, you rallied your staff, expanding opportunities for them to sustain employment. You created mental health moments and wellness initiatives, and you provided information on vaccinations. You showed commitment to families by delivering food to their homes and ensuring they had the resources needed to keep their families safe. You were thoughtful and innovative in creating opportunities to provide child development. Children and families benefited greatly from your efforts. And we are going to need you to redouble those efforts as we move forward. And now, it gives me a tremendous amount of pleasure to turn it over to Karen Suprenant.

Karen Suprenant: Thank you, David. Thanks for starting off our section on the National Centers. And thank you so much for that wonderful acknowledgment of all that we've seen in the field with Head Start programs across the country during these past 15, 16 months. And you're right. It's just, when you look at these words, these attributes of organizational resilience, they're really thought provoking. And I'm wondering if there's one word that stands out to you as being most important, especially these times for moving Head Start programs forward. Which one do you think, if there is one, is most important?

David: Wow. Karen, I think I would have to anchor on adaptability. Someone in the chat just said the same thing, quite a few people. And I think adaptability is key because it is going to be critically important for most organizations, as I shared, the need to kind of continue to pivot, be fluid, and of course adapt to the new circumstances. This is going to contribute obviously against their ultimate success. Yet Head Start organizations have created successful adaptations for years and doing it in the coming year is probably going to be met with some level of challenge. But I think they're going to be able to do it. And the goal is really going to be how they think about appropriately partnering, positioning themselves with families and also community partners, which they're going to hear a lot about so.

Karen: Yep. Thanks, David. And I see some of our participants weigh in there regarding the attributes also, but I want to hear from my team. Brandi, what do you think?

Brandi Black Thacker: Thank you so much for asking Karen. It's awesome to be with you guys today. Thank you for joining us. Well, this won't be surprising to anyone, Karen, but I hope I also get some support like David did in the chat. The terms that come to my mind most immediately are trust and collaboration. And I think both offer great opportunity going forward. Trust is certainly built steadily over time, but also can be tested when things get difficult. But I would humbly submit that these moments are opportunities for all of us as leaders. And to the collaboration notion, it not only speaks to the need for us to recognize the potential of working together, but that comes through not only our own individual strengths, but together how we can create solutions that might not be as evident if we tried to do it by ourselves.

Karen: Thanks, Brandi. How about you, Nicole? Do you want to weigh in? Nicole, you're on mute.

Nicole Holman-Alexander: Yes, Karen I'll weigh in. You all have chosen a few and again, like Brandi said, I'm so happy to be here with everyone today and talking about this topic. Since you've chosen a few,

that I may have thought about too, what I would think about is preparedness. Preparedness, I like it because we learned that strategy and preparation are critical in tough times, as we think ahead and we plan and we move our plan to move a few steps forward. When we're prepared as much as possible, we can sort of weather those calculated risks and even those unexpected ones that show up. So, and I see some people in the chat as well have said preparedness. So thank you all for chiming in on that too.

Karen: Yeah. It's certainly hard to pick just one and let's not forget responsibility. We haven't mentioned that one, about taking actions to improve the conditions, creating ways to make the work easier. And at Head Start we do that by creating supportive and respectful cultures within our organization. And knowing that our work is critical in advocating for our families, our staff, and our program, so we've really experienced that during this past year. And it's important moving forward. I invite the participants to think about these attributes and what they look like in our organizations. It's also fun to think about them in the context of the governing body and the Policy Council. How do we provide that culture that supports organizational resilience throughout the organization and leadership? Our governance structure provides that framework for collaboration, the commitment, and the connection between the governing body of Tribal Council, the Policy Council, and the management team helps us support organizational resilience. So having resilience includes getting out of reactive thinking and moving to a more holistic systems thinking approach.

In the next slide, we're going to talk about leadership, just a little bit. Leadership is so important for our supporting staff and these resilient organizations. Can we see the next slide?

So in PMFO, we like to talk about this concept of courageous leadership and what it entails, and that is an expression coined by author Nancy Koehn. And it really is relevant to these times and relevant to what Ann's been saying. But first of all, you want to acknowledge people's feelings, and we know staff are fearful and hesitant. So you want to acknowledge it. You can't pretend it doesn't exist, but you want to encourage them with resolve. You want to let staff know that you understand how they're feeling and that you're confident in their ability to move forward. You want to convey to staff how important their role is in the work that we do.

We want to make sure that they understand their role and their purpose that in the organization. And certainly we want to encourage experimentation and learning. And that's what we do in Head Start as learning organizations, right? We want to emphasize to everyone that individually and collectively that we're going to learn our way forward. We're going to experiment with new ways of doing things. We might experience occasional failure, but we'll pivot back on the path, and we'll figure out a way to get to this together. So it's about providing that support, but also that firm resolve, knowing what it is that you want to do as a leader and that you're going to get there. So it's about managing your own energy and other's energies and emotions, keeping your fingers on the pulse of your people's energy and emotions as needed. So leaders who exhibit these behaviors, foster growth in individuals and build that organizational resilience. That's so important as we move forward.

In the next slide, if we can take a look at the next slide, we're going to look at our management systems approach that we have in Head Start. Our management systems approaches outlined in that Performance Standards is critical for supporting and maintaining full enrollment. It provides that mechanism for developing program goals that meet our enrollment needs. Programs have to continually assess the needs of the community and make sure that the services, the facilities, the calendar align with those needs. So data is important to monitor the efforts and make those adaptations to continually improve quality and accomplish goals. And we know we talk about that concept of continuous

improvement. So those strong management systems support thoughtful adaptations based on solid data. And we certainly need this as we think about transitioning to moving forward. It's important to understand the community.

In the next slide, if we can move forward, thank you. Given where we've been and thinking about where we need to go, let's talk about the importance of the community assessment. And we've really seen it stressed in some of the program instructions that we have about moving forward. So we know that programs are doing that comprehensive community assessment every five years, and based on where they're at, they might not be doing the comprehensive one. But it's critical that programs update their community assessment to include up-to-date information on the changes that have occurred in the past year and the impact that this pandemic has had on our communities and on the families we serve. So what do we need to know about the community? Have there been demographic changes? Has unemployment rate changed in the community? Has there been a major loss of industry or perhaps new opportunities? Maybe there's resources for families, which could be new partnership opportunities for Head Start?

What does homelessness look like in our community? Are there families facing complex adversities that might not know about our services and how can we find them? Have certain populations been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic? How can we reach those that we most need to, that we need to reach? And how about our partners, our existing partners, what have they experienced in the past year? What data might they have to share with us regarding the community and how can we work with them in support of high-quality, equitable services? We'll talk a little bit more about [Inaudible] shifts later on in this session, but Brandi is going to talk a little bit about what we need to know about our families.

Brandi: You know Karen, this is one of my most favorite topics, all things family related. So let's unpack this a little bit. The questions that you offered us are so important, and I'm really excited to think with each of you about how we might post similar ones for and with our families. As you said, our main goal and our big focus, as always, is to be fully enrolled. And right now that community assessment offers us a much, much more needed, rich, exciting opportunity than ever before to get answers to some questions like these. Let's see if you guys have been thinking about these things. How have families been impacted by the recent events this past year and for months? What successes have they experienced? How do families feel about returning fully to the in-person services? And Heather unpacked a bit about that for us a little earlier. What kinds of services might they need? How are we finding families that might be new to us? God, I think this is a real opportunity.

There are families that might be newly vulnerable that we need to think and find quickly that don't know about the incredible impact our partnership could have. What if families are returning to our services that stepped away for a little bit? What do those look like? And where might we find them again? Are there more families experiencing homelessness than ever before? As Karen mentioned, we're going to unpack a little bit more of that later in our conversation. And if so, how are we reaching them and ensuring that we can find them and communicate in ways that are meaningful for those families? What program options are best suited for our families now, and are they the same as they were pre-pandemic? Or should we be really recalibrating what that looks like based on current day and what we know to be the strengths and needs now? And getting all that how do we even find all of those good things out there?

And Karen, I think all of these questions give us good food for thought. I know the Head Start community has already been deeply invested in finding out a lot of these answers, but it also means we have to be super intentional about how we get those answers through our data exploration. So tell us a little bit about what you're thinking Karen today about some data sources that we might consider and could be effective.

Karen: OK. And I think what we see on the screen there would have been new and existing data sources. That's the key, there is the word new. Some of the data sources that you may have been using in the past maybe won't cut it as we think about getting some real-time data about what's happened in that past year. So we might want to expand, but we will want to expand or widen your data sources. And you want to look at trends. We want to look compared this year with past years, perhaps explore monthly data from throughout the pandemic and see if there's a help organization, local coalitions that can help you, other agencies, homeless agencies, unemployment information that can help you access that information. And don't forget about your internal data. You've learned so much about the community and families during this past year, as you continue to offer services in a variety of ways. So use that data moving forward and identify what you've learned over the past year and how would you help where you're going.

So you want to think about these questions and as you think about them and the ultimate goal to be fully involved, we need to identify the most vulnerable families. We need to update the selection criteria to reflect our current situation and intensify those recruitment efforts. We want to be prepared and equipped to enroll families that are ready and able to join us on behalf of themselves and the children. And it's important that we think about equity throughout all aspects of … [Inaudible] And the effective way to do that is programmatically through a thorough comprehensive assessment. And thinking about that current-day data. The next slide please?

Going to just share a little bit about some potential data sources. And we've heard that out in the field, people are finding different ways to capture that data then work with their partners to get that data. Now we want to consider where we might find data to help us better understand the events of the past year. And as I said, our traditional methods may fall short. So it's important to think about new state or local sources of information. And as I've said, programs have been successful in getting up-to-date data about organizations from partnering organizations, trusted community leaders, and it can be through a variety of ways through surveys, focus groups, just simple interviews, or perhaps large group discussions where you bring the community together. Brandi?

Brandi: OK. And one of the things I want to bring up here is when we communicate with families. Not only in general, but how we're doing that in a way that are considering every family's culture and language. But also in what ways, as you're saying new and innovative, but also time tested and foundational so that we can bring forward the family's voices in a way that they deserve to be heard.

So I want to kind of talk through a couple of things here. Being able to use data in a respectful way and side note, I think we need to ask ourselves, are we doing that? Are we sort of checking our own pulses and sort of looking at again, how that really manifests itself in our programmatic operations? Are we collecting data respectfully? And today that for each family, we need to consider their beliefs, values, cultures in that the gist of it, it also reflects those same beliefs in the desire to lift up those family voices in the way that they hope to really illustrate what we all know to be true, which is each parent and family member is here to do their very best every single day.

So what that means for us as program leaders is that we have to model that same respect for beliefs, values, culture, and circumstances in the families, and even we ourselves as colleagues. And at the same time, we have to create opportunities for certain families to learn about how to use that data in their work together as partners. So we can share collected data and show how we reserve and revere those beliefs that our families bring to us and the experts on their children by making sure that they see their input prioritized. So, for example, and you guys do this so well, I really do feel like I'm preaching to the choir here, but you can communicate respect for families by presenting multiple data gathering methods. And I know Karen, this is where you were taking us. So things that we've always done together, like surveys or focus groups, some sort of assessment tools, if you will, but making sure that they're given and offered in languages that are spoken by the families in the program. And we were asking for feedback, whether that's answers to those surveys or out loud in meetings, for instance, we have to think that some families might not be as comfortable to talk out loud as others or that some families might prefer to offer their thoughts in writing in a short note. And that they know that we're always there to help them complete forms, we can do verbal interviews, if they would prefer, whatever works the best. I think our families have grown to know and love about us, that we are here to serve in whatever ways are most meaningful for them. And David, there is no exception.

I want to offer one last important point here. As we know equity and access for all families are priorities and they're core to just our absolute Head Start way as being. These are just a few ways that we can lift up the voices of the families we have the honor to serve, to ensure that we're using their input and their wisdom to guide our important work together and specifically now, as we're bringing them back or bringing them in for the first time so that they can help us find our path forward.

Karen: Thanks, Brandi. That's, great information. And I'm thinking about, what you're saying about the sensitivities of families and their needs and their abilities to dialogue with you. And, I'm reminded that all information is data. So it doesn't have to be an informal form or in a bar graph and the discussions that you have with families about what they're experiencing, that's data, that's up to the community assessment.

I'm going to move on to the next slide and just wrap up with a few final thoughts about community assessments and its importance. So it helps us to understand the strengths and needs of families. And this can help us in developing our enrollment priorities going forward, help us to make informed decisions about the service delivery here. Where we need to focus our recruitment efforts in that change. Is additional space needed to meet for enrollment and is that even available? Helps us to recognize demographic changes and address newly identified needs.

How could these changes impact service delivery or appropriate options? The community assessment helps us identify skills and competencies that are needed in the work place so that we can advance culturally responsive practice. And how might our partners help us with that training? And it helps us to mobilize those community resources and partnerships. And I want to really stress the importance of keeping the Policy Council, governing board, Tribal Council involved or understanding that we have to actually conduct the community assessment and keep them involved from an educational perspective, understanding and seeing that data and, most importantly, understanding the implications of what you have on your service delivery. So it's really important to build a partnership with them. Next slide, please.

You're probably familiar with this image of the Head Start planning cycle, and it demonstrates the concept of continuous improvement in Head Start. And we've talked at length about the community

assessment and the importance of updating that community assessment process. But the message that we want to stress here is using that data, that new data from the past 15 months from that update as you move forward. So how does it impact that our goals and our action steps, but it might not just be business as usual. We might have to tweak them. Ann talked about the staffing challenges. Perhaps we are going to identify a new goal around human resources that's going to help us identify and retain once they come on strategies for recruiting and retaining staff. But there may be other, other ones of your goals that you're maintaining, but you need to tweak those action steps.

You need to maybe identify some new data sources moving forward to make sure that you have captured the right data for monitor compliance. And then of course we have that inner circle that's so critical to continuous improvement, making those adjustments. But the other point I want to stress here is the importance of that self-assessment. You might not have done it in your usual manner, but it's really important to conduct it and consume that data from the past year. The data that we've talked about from staff, from families, from partners, data regarding service delivery from the past year. That self-assessment provides an opportunity to come together with stakeholders, look at it with a wider lens – program leadership staff, parents, and partners – and figure out how you can move forward with that information. Whether it be additional training for staff, support for staff, new recruitment strategies, maybe focusing their recruitment strategies on educating those hesitant families. So there's something else looking at your data and making the plans to move forward based on the here and now, so important at this time. I'm going to turn it over to Nicole to talk to you about ERSEA as a continuum of services.

Nicole: Thanks, Karen. So yes, when we look at the next slide, and we know that ERSEA is a continuation of services. It reflects both a systemic approach, as well as the interconnectedness of activities. The interconnectedness of activities includes recruiting eligible children and families, determining eligibility, and prioritizing and selecting children and families that are most in need of our services. We know that promoting and tracking attendance is critical to our return to full in-person services and to meeting funded enrollment. So in order to do that, we have to focus our efforts on all the different interdependent and interacting aspects of ERSEA as a service.

As you heard before, Karen mentioned that ERSEA begins with determining what's in the community assessment. So when we're doing that, we can ask ourselves what we need to consider as we move forward in ERSEA services. So I think that it's a good way for us to do that is to sort of conduct a quick self-assessment of our own and this is just for ourselves and our program and review what we do know. So let's do that quickly, let's just figure out what do we know. We know that most or more families may be eligible due to the economic changes that we've experienced over the last 16 plus months. We know that families are experiencing a change in income, that changes in housing status and also some alternative custody situations may be on the rise right now. And Brandi's going to talk a little bit more about that soon.

We also know our recruitment strategies need to be thought out in different ways and with more intentionality. So we can ask ourselves, what do we need to do differently? We'll share some recruitment strategies today as well in just a little bit. We also know that an updated selection criteria that reflects the impact of COVID on children and families may be appropriate based on our community assessment and our community needs. So that's something that we know as well that we can start with. We also know that from the questions posted by you in the past and also today, and addressed earlier today, we know that enrollment goals may be impacted by the need for additional space and the need for additional staff as well. So we need to ask ourselves, what is our contingency plan? Do we have a

plan A? Do we have a plan B? Do we have a plan C? And sometimes we may need to merge some of those together that keep it going right? But we know we need to think about planning.

So we want to make sure that as we're planning and we're looking at a continuum of services that we're thinking and we're focusing on funded enrollment and full in-person services. So we know that our families right may be hesitant, we've talked about that, in returning, but we also know that research informs us that early attendance can predict attendance in later years, and regular attendance can help children learn to read and succeed in school. So we want to communicate these findings and stress the need to return to full in-person services and to forming good habits now that produce quality results in school and in life later. As we do this, we continue to look at our resources both financially and in human capital, as well as anything else we can really get our hands around and make this work, right?

So we are asking ourselves, how do we use the resources that are available to us in the best way to get us to the goal that we're trying to accomplish? Again, ERSEA is a continuum of services, it reflects a system approach and interconnectedness of activities. Through a comprehensive planning and the use of the systems approach, we reach children and families in need, and we continue to provide full in-person services and high-quality results. So anyway, it's just so good when we get a chance Brandi and Karen to really highlight how systems approach and services connect. So Brandi always, I just love hearing you talk about parent and family and community engagement. So I'm thinking, I just want to ask you where are some of your thoughts on what programs can do with this ERSEA continuum?

Brandi: Gosh, Nicole thank you so much. I, too could listen to you guys all day long because the synchronicity between what we think about in parenting and community engagement and that integration of the systems and services features are critical to this conversation. So let's look at the next slide and let's think about some specifics together.

All right. So Nicole, I'm going to take a few things that you said with me, and the first is how you described ERSEA as a continuum of services. And I wish I had had that in my mind when I was a Head Start director, I would say way back in the day, but let me just say back in the day, because I love the way that connectivity really works and that connectedness of how those individual pieces work together to reflect this larger systemic approach toward that goal of full enrollment.

So what I'd like to do is take our attention to how these concepts might manifest in our program policies, especially as we explore what is most helpful for our families right now. And that's the part, too, that I think is really key right now. So let's think about this, as we've discussed the ERSEA procedures and how they're developed by using the all-important community assessment data and engaging former and currently enrolled families, our colleagues, community partners. These policies and procedures help our programs to provide services for families who may need them the most. The intention here is to address those specific challenges, such as our families experiencing homelessness, and again, we're going to go in a bit more detail around recruitment for those families here in just a bit, but how those kinds of things could interfere with consistent access to services.

And we really have to be thoughtful about how we are integrating those pieces and reaching out in ways that we might not have ever before. This means that this will, again, be no surprise because I feel deeply steeped in relationships, but that means that building and sustaining those relationships with families is more critical than ever. Thank God, there are so many reasons, but the trusting, respectful, goal-oriented relationships between staff and parents helped to strengthen family well-being. We've been through some things together over these last months. We need, now more than ever, to have that

connection and that tie to each other, as we travel forward through what well-being means to each of us.

These relationships can not only improve the wellness for us as individuals and as colleagues and Head Start programs, but certainly impacts families in a meaningful way. It reduces isolation and stress that some families and maybe even our colleagues might experience. So this is critically important all the time, but it feels like it takes on a larger significance today. All of that to say that those relationships develop over time, as we all know, and I would humbly submit that we are the best at doing this around relationships and connections, but it begins right here in the ERSEA piece, in that continuum of services that Nicole gave us straightaway. Let me give you some real examples here. When I was a director, I grew up, using air quotes, in a community action agency and often there's a process and community action agencies called a centralized intake. And that's where every family that comes in to apply for any services under the umbrella of the community action agency goes through one person or point of contact.

Well, isn't that a big responsibility? You can imagine how that that person needs to be ready to make a great first impression while having the ability to simultaneously build and sustain relationships. So our goal that we're holding together today and always of getting to that full enrollment depends on it. [Inaudible] are extra critical, given all these questions that we have for each other around enrollment in how we want to do a great job, and yet there are uncertainties, there are questions, there things that we're holding that can feel very personal. For instance, we ask families those real questions, and some of those feel sensitive. So we want to make sure to honor not only who we are and what we need to do in terms of building relationship, but certainly always remember how this must feel for families, especially if they're families that haven't ever noticed before.

They're just a couple of thoughts. I think confirmations, because honestly we're really good at this, just for folks to consider as we step into this period. So a question here, so what now? What can you do? Let's talk about some real strategies here. First and foremost, let's train each other as colleagues on respectful and sensitive interview techniques and ways to have conversations, I'm going to call these "connected conversations" because anytime that you can have a dialogue with someone and it pulls you closer to them in relationship is a good day. And when you can do that in ways, even as you're talking about sensitive things that bring you closer, even if there's vulnerability present in the relationship in that moment. So thinking together about what that looks and sounds like as families come back to us fully in person, making sure always that we utilize the knowledge of family cultures and languages and how that we can do that in ways that are responsive in terms of our recruitment materials and all of our interactions.

And making with families about their comfort level to return to in-person services, I know many of you have already been thinking and talking with your families about that and what kind of information they need in terms of making a good, informed decisions for their family as they consider returning to us or even partnering with us for the first time. This is one of my favorites. You guys were so good at this during our COVID time together, you got incredibly creative in how to reach families. And I think we can stand in that space and perhaps even do more. Focusing on widespread and proactive use of multiple media to get the word out to families. Parent-to-parent power is real everyone. If we can lean into the families that we've had the honor to serve before, to help us reach families that maybe we never have before, they are our best ambassadors.

So if we can tap into them as they're ready to help us get the word out, it's an incredibly powerful tool. Word-of-mouth campaigns through Policy Council. Don't forget about Part B and C your community and making those connections. When we can lean in and honor those families' reflections related to the trust that they have in our program, it's incredibly powerful and meaningful and a huge tool to really celebrate who you guys have been and continue to be in this whole period of time. Also looking at our enrollment criteria and maybe finding sufficient points for vulnerable families who are experiencing complex adversities, again, such as homelessness, substance use, domestic violence. We want to make sure that we're able to serve the families that are before us in our communities. And again, that community assessment is going to be critical, especially when there is weight lift.

A couple more and then I'm going to turn it back to Nicole, but I want to offer these last couple because I can't talk about PFCE without the C, that's the community part. So we want to make sure that we're not only checking our relationship with our families and that more micro application of how we do what we do in our interactions, but we also want to think about the macro application to look at establishing, leveraging, and strengthening partnerships that you all built in the pandemic. We heard all your incredible stories and who you worked with in food banks and technology companies and faith-based organizations. We're wondering if we can keep those relationships alive, for instance, for our recruitment and enrollment purposes with those community service providers, school personnel, health clinics, health departments, local markets, food pantries, diaper banks, and of course those faith-based entities. One last thing, Nicole, before I turn the mic back over to you, we certainly want to think about how to be as flexible as possible in our enrollment practices.

There's one little saying that I have, and some of you may have heard it before – but I don't believe there are hard-to-reach families. It's controversial, I know. I think that maybe we can be the hard-to-reach one sometimes. So being able to conduct enrollment offsite to make it easier for families who might not be able to get to us or come to the program, being able to think of ways that we are more and more visible, sort of a back to the basic application of how we've always done what we do, but to be as visible as possible through all the partnerships that we've built in the community and otherwise so that we can reach the families who are ready to partner with us right now. All right, Nicole as promised, let me transition back to you as we move along.

Nicole: So, thanks so much, Brandi. That's such good information. I mean, you're really saying, stay present and know what's going on in your community and apply it to all the ERSEA services and elements and you'll see more success. And so I love what you're doing there. So as we transition to our next slide, which is an ERSEA word cloud, what words come to mind first for you when you see this? Something is coming out to you first. And so what we see on here is a variety of different words. We see eligibility, we see enrollment, we see care, we see income guidelines, we see a 100% exceptions, allowances, we see the word verify. So all of these things, and there's more there too, that may be reaching to you, and that's what it's here to do is just really look at what we see when we're talking about ERSEA. These are some words that go along with that, but they're typically specifically related to really the eligibility part of ERSEA.

So these words, these words are here to remind us that as we engage in the practice of determining and verify and documenting eligibility, it's important that we keep our regulations in mind. Head Start eligibility requirements describe how we prioritize those most in need, as well as guidance on how to identify the way the options that will help meet those needs of our families best. Programs must continue to determine eligibility, we have to continue to do that, do it well. We need to verify our information, and we know we have to create that eligibility determined risk among other things.

So, as we're trying to strengthen that eligibility piece of ERSEA, let's think about a few things. You want to review the policies and procedures to make certain that they adhere to the guidelines and include all the necessary elements and information required to properly document the process and the eligibility determination that's been made. Staff and leaders want to know what has changed. Make those items clear as well as what items remain the same. It's important that staff understand our ERSEA policies and procedures. And we know that adequate training is an ongoing process.

So we have to remember that we must train management and staff members who make eligibility determinations within 90 days, that's three months of hiring the new staff, and we also need to train our governing body and Policy Council within 180 days, that's six months of the beginning of their term or a new governing body and Policy Council term. In addition to those trainings, we want to make sure that we want to include, but it's not limited to it, just a few things, those methods, as Brandi talked about, on how to really work with families and those strategies for treating families with dignity and respect and for dealing with possible issues that the families are facing.

We also want to make sure that we have the methods to collect and complete, accurate eligibility information from families and from third parties as well. So again, as you look at this word cloud, it has a lot of information on there, it's busy just like we are, but it has some great things and takeaways for you today, as you consider what you're doing. We are going to move on to recruitment and provide some strategies, some of those you have provided, you've heard today, all ready. We may be reemphasizing those, but we hope to give you some new strategies as well. So, David, I'm going to turn it over to you.

David: Thanks, Nicole. I just can't tell you how much I'm enjoying listening to you guys present this content and also trying to sort of look at some of the questions that's coming in through the chat. We are going to, in a very respectful way, look at these questions, evaluate these questions, and respond to these questions. So we are hoping that there may be a post-webinar FAQ just to clarify some of the things that's coming up. There are a lot of different things. But as it relates to recruitment, the one thing that I really want to do is I want to sort of underscore Ann's earlier point because there's a lot of questions coming up related to that.

You know, as much as grantees might like, you cannot hold slots for families that might be reluctant to return. And again, during the ramp-up period, there's some flexibility with respect to that. It's equally important, we know all of the challenges around staff hires and recruiting, qualified staff, and ensuring that they're on a PD plan that's going to take them to a trajectory where they're meeting those educational requirements. But again, you cannot hold positions for staff that may be reluctant to return, sorry. Your programmatic and HR policies and procedures should really help you in your decision-making. You know, we never want you to be in a situation where education or family support services are compromised. And with that, I will kick it back to Nicole.

Nicole: Well, thank you, David, for clarifying that and reiterating some things. I think that's very helpful that you're doing and that people are hearing what they need to hear. And again, knowing that we will look at that information and get back to them. So when we're thinking about recruitment. Recruitment sometimes feels like it's something we're doing all the time and it's the same thing and it's this and that, but we want to be creative about this. And so, we got to keep a lens on this. And what we want to ask ourself is what is the data telling us, telling us about those recruitment efforts? So where are we at? So when we look at running the numbers and knowing where we can improve, we might be looking at we're at 10%, we're at 30%, we're at 85% of funded enrollment, and we need to make some decisions about that.

We know we can look at, we have so many families enrolled that are experiencing homelessness or so many families enrolled that are experiencing the foster care system or receiving public assistance. And what we want to do is focus. We want to focus our efforts, and the data helps us do that. So as we ask ourselves the question, what are the recruitment strategies that we can consider to meet funded enrollment and have a robust waiting list? We know that programs have intensified their recruitment efforts, and they've done it in new and creative ways. For example, one program leased a van to drive into neighborhoods to share information with families. As we think about leaving no stone unturned, your regional TA specialists, as well as many of the grantees throughout the nation, have shared some recruitment strategies for you. And I want to take a look at these strategies that are, some are new and some of them are tried and true.

So I'm just going to start off with them. I'm just going to keep rolling through them. Is everyone OK with that? All right, here we go. When approaching recruitment, instead of using must language, use more engaging, inviting language that is sensitive to relationship building. Consider communication in languages other than Spanish, English, for recruitment. And consider populations that speak language other than English and Spanish. Brandi and others today have talked about that equity lands and inclusion. And so we want to make sure that our information, our resources are thinking of that and looking through that lens around language and in just culture and just programming in general. One flyer doesn't market to every neighborhood. So consider community differences and use community assessment more strategically. We may want to make our flyers digital. We want to have online applications. We want to think about those things. What can we enhance?

Think about who might be fearful and have that sensitive lens. One of the suggestions was a live Facebook tour of classrooms. So just to show our community what we've done to make sure the children are safe. I mean the children aren't there while you're doing the live Facebook, but you could definitely show the cleaning process and how things are going on. You can show the markings of social distance that will help them feel comfortable about what they're doing. We want to highlight success stories. Use parents' word of mouth. As Randy mentioned, the governing body, the Policy Council, and staff volunteers. We want to make sure that they're spreading the word. We want to consider recruiting families and children as a whole. So for the children, we're thinking about the classroom and for parents, we're thinking about them maybe as teachers, as Ann mentioned earlier.

So we're looking at a career track that will support them. And we can actually recruit that element as well. So we're marketing it. And as you know, recruitment is so important to retaining those qualified staff. And so we need to look at it from two perspectives, there we want to look at. Broadcast and advertise where families go and listen, connect the dots between Head Start families, support organizations, and frequency locations in the community. Recruit all and continue to gather data on additional connections. Use recruitment videos, advertise on city buses, on libraries, in library computers, and on library computers. Communicate through local mediums. That includes your local papers or TV stations. So you want to go on air if you can. Interview with your local news stations, the morning news, the news shows. You can do Facebook advertising. You advertise at movie theaters and promotions.

And as Brandi mentioned, as well about the families, peer to peer, we want to make sure that we're looking at that. We're developing some tip sheets that that help drive us when we have those high recruitment times, and there's ongoing recruitment times. We can include T-shirts and buttons and things that we do. Magnets on cars. Just a variety of different things. We can just keep thinking about this. You may want to have a list. A lot of times we have those lists right in our programs that say what

we've done and what we're doing. Keep a list that's what have we done new. And ask everyone to focus on those and add to that list and try them. So, again, as we talk about leaving no stone unturned, Brandi, do you have some other recruitment tips you want to share with us related to families?

Brandi: I do, Nicole. And as we look at the next slide, I'm specifically going to talk about some ideas for families experiencing homelessness. And guys, I think we have a real opportunity here to make sure that we find the families that need us the most as we always do. But specifically as it relates to that McKinney-Vento Act definition, families may not even realize they qualify by their living situation. So we have to be ready to help guide them through that in a way that is respectful and honors where they are in their journey with no stigma or no judgment. So let's think about a couple of things. First and foremost, in the systems level, we want to incorporate data about families experiencing homelessness in our community assessment process. So protocols to prioritize those families are informed by our community need. We also want to work super closely, as I know you guys do with our LEAs and specifically the McKinney-Vento homeless liaison to make sure that we're identifying eligible families that are experiencing homelessness and want to make sure our protocols for verifying living situation have been updated. That way when families experiencing homelessness may not disclose their living situation, or even see themselves as homeless, we can really be in our understanding about that McKinney-Vento Act definition and its application, because it's critical.

The other piece in terms of recruitment that I want to just say out loud here is that a lot of times families who are experiencing homelessness can be invisible in our communities, which means the typical types of recruitment and outreach efforts may not get to them. Many of our families that are experiencing homelessness don't live in shelters, and they move frequently. So we want to make sure to seek resources, support, and assistance to meet their basic needs in places that they already are such as motels, food pantries, soup kitchens, and thrift stores. We want to use our widespread and proactive use of multiple media and marketing promotion campaigns. Now, I want you to keep that in your mind, this marketing campaign notion, because I'm going to come back to that quickly in just a second.

Ways that we can get the word out to families experiencing homelessness. Web-based parent education and information strategies may not be effective for reaching these families because they might not have internet access, computers, mobile phones, or other electronic devices. They may not even have a reliable way for us to contact them. And if family members are hesitant to provide an address, because they're not sure where they're going to be in the next little bit, whether that's weeks or months, because they don't know how long they might be staying there. And Nicole, I really want to emphasize something important here because Heather brought it back to our consciousness at the front of our time together, which is that program instruction that really sort of nudged us toward the American Rescue Plan or the ARP funding increase. And I'm just going to offer an idea here.

Being that previous Head Start director that I mentioned a couple of times, I know that I didn't automatically, way back then, have a budget for marketing promotion for outreach. But I wonder if that's not an exciting way that you guys could propose to your Regional Office, for instance, to think about ways that that money could be put to work for you in and with the goal of that full enrollment piece. And I'll know if you have any questions about those kinds of expenditures, and David mentioned a little earlier, you can always look at that uniform guidance. But you also always have your Regional Office, federal leadership for that kind of instruction as well. One last thing for me Nicole, just quickly, I can't, again, leave without the C in the PFCE, which is that community connection.

We want to make sure that we're strengthening partnerships through local housing authorities, shelters, homeless service providers, CCDF lead agency, again to the Part B and C providers but also laundromats, 24-hour businesses, and the faith-based entities. Any kind of coordination that we can do with local homeless count teams to include Head Start information in their packet of resources that are given out to homeless families in those nights where they bring folks together is always a benefit. So not only the distributors to open the table, like we always do in our community, but also making sure that we're at tables that might not have us yet so that we can have that reciprocity to serve families in the way they deserve to be. That was a lot from me, Nicole. Let me turn it back over to you. So you and Karen can tell us more about those partnerships.

Nicole: OK. Well thank you so much, Brandi. I mean, we have so many recruitment strategies. We've got individuals using QR codes on their grocery bags and totes and just doing some really cool things. Like you said, with putting our flyers and information and food at the food bank and where food distribution is happening in your community. Those are some things as well as, you know, just going where our families go, like you mentioned. Where they're getting their COVID vaccines and where they're getting those health needs met as well. So we know where our families are going, and this is what we're saying. And Karen's going to talk to us a little bit more about just partnering and keeping that in mind. Karen you're on.

Karen: Thanks, Nicole. Such great ideas, such great things to think about, creativity here. If we could advance to the next slide, we're reaching our home stretch here. So we're going to have to sadly condense our talk about partnerships a little bit. Sadly, because right now, programs have several resources to do some enhanced work with partners and intensified recruitment. So we want you to really think outside the box about what you can do. We have a long history of partnering at Head Start for quality services, and we can see some of the reasons on the screen that we partner.

But focusing just on the ERSEA piece, partners are critical for getting the word out about your programs and services. And the more that they understand the services, the better. So if we want them to be advocates, they really need to understand what it is that we do. So they can support your recruitment efforts with collaborative outreach campaigns. This is possibly the time that you could hire someone in partnership with other organizations to develop marketing materials, conduct that outreach, promote each other's services on your websites, even partner together to hire outreach staff enabling them to support varied language and cultural needs. So we know that it's takes time. It's hard work. But communication is key as is periodically evaluating the partnership to make sure that it's fruitful. And Brandi is going to give us the cliff note version of leveraging partnerships. You're muted Brandi.

Brandi: Thank you for that, Karen. I noticed that you told me cliff notes, you guys know who I am. I'll keep it concise, I promise. So a couple of things that we can do in terms of the how here to leverage these partnerships. First of all, we want to identify strategies and actions that address families' current day strengths, needs, and the community partners that can support it. Again, I would humbly submit that what we knew a year and a half ago may not be what's going on right now today. So we want to make sure that we don't take for granted what we've always known to be true, that we need to really seek out and be good consumers of what's happening currently so that we make sure that what we're building together, for everyone to come back in person to, is something that actually fits right now. So for instance, you know, we've had a lot of folks reaching out to health clinics and their health departments to educate staff and their families in a myriad of ways through articles, blog posts, social media messages. So again, all of those wonderful modalities.

Making sure that we're partnering with families all along the way, not only to make those connections to other families, but also to access community resources. I don't know about you guys, but anytime I've ever worked in a Head Start program, or with Head Start programs, our families are our biggest breadcrumb trail like advocates. They know with and for us what new services are out there, what things are effective and to be able to, as they're ready and willing, to tap into their wisdom is critical for how we move forward in a meaningful way.

David: Sara, can you please advance? I'm sorry, Brandi. Please advance the slide. Thank you.

Brandi: Thanks, David. So again, just a couple last quick points. Given where we are, we want to make sure that we're strengthening those community partnerships in support of the data that's in our community assessment. Making sure that if we have seen an increase in families experiencing substance use that we seek out providers specifically to support families in that journey. And if there's any way to think outside of the box to access services outside of our communities, many of you have been able to do that through tele-health. And some of those things might be able to be sustained through the funding that is before you and through your innovative creative ways. Lastly, we want to make sure that you're evaluating and that the services and the community partnerships that you have are still fruitful, that they are still being delivered in a high-quality way, that they're meeting the needs that our families have, and that they are celebrating in the spaces where our families have made those progresses. So I think what I would say here, Karen, is if something is working, celebrate, if it's not, recalibrate. Part of the charge that we have.

Karen: We may have to make this next slide our last one, but I'll defer to David in a minute. And some of you might have seen this slide in our recent Fiscal Institute. And we tweak those words, those ideas, if you will, to really relate to ERSEA in this ramp up to full in-person comprehensive services. So we want you to just think again, think outside the box. We had a recent PI on expectations for programs in the upcoming year that told us that funds could be used to support enhanced partnerships and related recruitment efforts. So how might you use those funds for new partnerships? I just want to ask my colleagues as we close, what stands out for you on this? What's kind of exciting for you? Brandi, what do you see?

Brandi: Well, you know how I am Karen community partnerships and family support check and check.

Karen: How about you, Nicole? What stands out for you?

Nicole: Well, you know, training is something that stands out for me and we've talked about just having those sensitive interviews and complex conversations to better understand a family situation for determining eligibility. So that's what sticks out. Also, as we think about additionally, just technology, hardware and software and, and what's needed to really get the information we need for ERSEA services. And if there are consultants that are needed to help us maximize what we're using or learn more about something we are newly introducing. So that's what stands out to me.

Karen: Absolutely. And think about that temporary staff, either through the ramp-up period and beyond around data. Staff people that can help you with data, marketing, web design. All of those can play a role in giving back to fully run summer programs. We talked about a summer ramp-up, we had mentioned that today. If people see you up in action, even if it's a small summer program, they know your back and the word gets out that way. Extended-year services and summer programs helping reach

people. But there will be other things that are unique to your organizations, and we just wanted to give you some ideas here.

We can go to the next slide. I'm going to, again, like I said, at this time point, I want to know with David, are you thinking you want to close us out? Or how do you want to go forward here? I will mention that this is a wonderful resource list that we've done collaboratively between VMFO and PFCE that you will get with all the links to some ERSEA resources that are really specific to what we talked about: community assessment, surveys, focus groups, outreach to families. OK. I'll stop David.

David: Yeah, we want to get people out of here on time. So these are resources. You're going to get this at some point, it's going to be up and available for folks. Glenna has put it in the chat box. Next slide. Nicole was going to do this, but Nicole I'm just going to run through it. Basically, we need you to remain relevant and resilient and responsive, continue building those relationships, and encourage current day innovation. Move to the next slide. We want to promote the ongoing series of webinars. You have the dates, you will again receive these slides. And to the last slide.

Obviously, we wish we had more time. We want to thank senior leadership for the policy clarifications. We know we have a lot of questions that we weren't able to get to, but I promise you, we will be responsive to the field and get those out to you in some way. And we have high expectations and a lot of work to do together. It's going to take resilience and that same intense focus that you've displayed in the past as you work to identify, enroll, and serve as many children and families as possible in a manner that we know best works for them, in-person comprehensive services. The Office of Head Start and our entire T&TA system is here to support you in your ongoing efforts to move forward for ERSEA success. Thank you all, and have a great day.