Enrollment Forward: Recruitment and Strategic Approaches to Enrollment

Chanda Boone: Hello, and welcome, everyone, to "Recruitment and Strategic Approaches to Enrollment." I am Chanda Boone, and joining me today is Daniel Cilenti, and we are your web hosts. It is now my pleasure to turn the floor over to Dr. Bernadine Futrell. Dr. Futrell, the floor is yours.

Dr. Bernadine Futrell: Thank you, Chanda. Hello, everyone, and welcome to our Enrollment Forward webinar. I'm Dr. Bernadine Futrell. I am the director of the Office of Head Start. I'm a former Head Start child or a Head Start alumni, and a former assistant teacher at Head Start. And I'm someone who – I've committed my entire life to really moving forward what we refer to as the essentials of Head Start, which puts children and families in the center of all of our decisions, all of our work, and the things that we do. And in promoting that in my career, I'm grateful and thankful to be working with this dynamic team at the Office of Head Start to really continue to move forward the work of Head Start and the work that each and every one of you are doing and have done.

I want to acknowledge and thank you for all that you've done to really help support communities and families during these difficult times. I often hear comments and stories, and get messages about how Head Start programs are really impacting lives and communities, are providing hope or being a source of direction in this time of really difficulty, this time where we're trying to figure out where we are. I keep hearing from others about the strength of Head Start, and I commend each and every one of you because it's you, your leadership, your commitment, your passion that allows for the great work of Head Start to continue, even when we're up against all odds. Now is the time, as we work together, and we want to continue to move forward together by leaning into better understanding your experiences, what you've learned, what you've leaned into, and were able to discover in response to this pandemic that continues to keep children and families safe, and provide our comprehensive Head Start services.

That's what this webinar series is about. Our Enrollment Forward webinars really centers on the notion that we can do more when we come together than what we can do on our own. Doing that is what we're here to do today. We're going to talk about recruitment and strategies to approach enrollment. We're going to share some insight from the Office of Head Start, and we're going to highlight and share with you what we're hearing from our Head Start community about some effective practices that you've tried. I truly believe when something is effective and it centers children and families, that we should tell as many people as we can about it. And I commend you all for being leaders and allowing us to tell your stories, and also engaging with us in conversation and giving us feedback so that we can provide a Q&A that really addresses the questions we're hearing from you.

Today is webinar number two in this series, and we have more to come. And they will focus on different elements around enrollment. We know enrollment is not a one-word answer or even a one focused question. We know enrollment transcends every aspect of the work we do at

Head Start. And it is our hope that through this series – through this webinar series, that we are able to unpack with you all of the different components of enrollment within Head Start. I thank you again, and I welcome you to this webinar. I thank you for your leadership, your engagement, and your commitment. And with that, please join me as we welcome Gretchen and the Office of Head Start staff to kick off today's webinar. Thank you.

Gretchen Jurgens: Thank you, Dr. Futrell. I'd like to take just a minute to introduce our presenters today. Dr. Futrell started us off, and with us we also have Heather Wanderski, the director of Program Operations Division. Then, from the National Centers on Program Management and Fiscal Operations, we have Nicole Holman-Alexander, a management and governance specialist, and Karen Surprenant, who's also a management and governance specialist. My name is Gretchen Jurgens, and I will serve as your moderator today.

During today's webinar, we will be reviewing the Enrollment Forward campaign. We'll follow up on some questions that we received during the first Enrollment Forward webinar. We'll explore management systems and discuss the role community assessment plays, be introduced to a new ERSEA assessment tool, hot off the press, review the planning cycle for continuous improvement, and hear about resources that support ongoing efforts related to recruitment and enrollment. Heather?

Heather Wanderski: Thanks, Gretchen, and thanks, Dr. Futrell, for setting the stage today for our second webinar in the series. I just want to recap for those who may not have been able to join us during the first webinar. Enrollment Forward is a campaign that's really intended to provide support, strategies, and resources to the Head Start community in the areas of recruitment, enrollment, and workforce planning, since we have been hearing those are the significant needs and where we're seeing challenges.

Throughout the series, consideration is really going to be given to program structure; thinking about whether options are meeting community need; recruitment; identifying and implementing workable strategies; enrollment; are there barriers to family participation that could be reduced or eliminated; thinking about our workforce; rethinking marketing and recruitment of our staff and retaining the existing staff that we do have; health and safety considerations; making sure that we're being responsive to changing community conditions; and community need, which is often the driving factor in decision making. And it's important that program community assessment data is as current as possible.

And just as a reminder, this is not a restart of a full enrollment initiative, but rather a continued effort to move towards full enrollment and in-person comprehensive services across all program options. That includes center-based, home-based, family child care, and locally designed programs. I think really just, again, thinking about all the supports that we can provide to you now as we work through this. Now that I've recapped, Gretchen, I'm going to turn things over to you to get us queued up for some questions and answers.

Gretchen: Great, thanks, Heather. We've received many questions from the Head Start community from the first Enrollment Forward webinar. We'd like to just run through, Heather, if you're open to fielding some of these questions. I think one of the first ones that we heard a lot from the community is, can you talk to us about when the poverty guidelines will be updated?

Heather: Yes, Gretchen, and thank you so much because we definitely heard that on the last webinar. We also heard it even prior to starting the Enrollment Forward series. I think this is a big deal for a lot of our programs. I would like to say that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, our Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation recently released the 2022 poverty guidelines. The poverty guidelines are a simplified version of the federal poverty thresholds that our programs use for administrative purposes. For instance, in really determining financial eligibility for certain programs, like Head Start. The federal poverty guidelines are issued each year in the Federal Register, and there is a link on the slide here to talk more about the federal poverty guidelines and also to share the latest results.

But interestingly, what I want to say is that the latest guidelines that went into effect on January 12th of this year, it's one of our largest increases that we've seen in the poverty threshold. Typically, we see a 1 to 2% increase to account for inflation or consumer price index. But this latest increase represents roughly somewhere between 4 to 5%, which hopefully is good news for you all. I know that this has been something that programs have really been asking about. I was pleased when I at least saw – and we did a quick analysis of the rates on this and noticed that it was substantially larger in size than in prior years. Thanks. Great question.

Gretchen: Thanks, Heather. I'm sure that this is welcome information for so many programs. The next question that we have I know is still on top of everyone's mind. Can you tell us when the Full Enrollment Initiative will resume?

Heather: Yes, the current flexibilities right now on the Full Enrollment Initiative are going to remain in place until further notice. The Office of Head Start is planning to provide recipients with plenty of advance notice when we do plan to restart, to allow for planning and preparation. This will include, obviously, the resumption of evaluating which programs would enter into the full enrollment initiative. But as previously stated, we're going to, right now at this point, just continue to review and monitor enrollment reports that are submitted in the Head Start Enterprise System, as we've done since September. And as needed, your program specialist is going to be engaging with you on any training opportunities or technical assistance needs that they may be able to offer to support you where possible. For right now, there's not a hard and fast date, but certainly we will keep programs apprised, and if that changes, we would certainly make sure to provide notice.

Gretchen: Thanks, Heather. In the previous webinar, we heard a lot about provisions of services, and we certainly know that programs understand how the expectations to return to in-person services apply to children attending centers. Do these same expectations apply to children enrolled in the home-based option?

Heather: Yes. The Office of Head Start has the same expectations for all of our program options, including the home-based option, our center-based, family child care, and locally designed programs. Programs should continue to work towards full in-person comprehensive services, as local health conditions allow, and based on the CDC, state, and local health department guidance, and in consideration of local school district decisions. This really includes engaging families and communities in recruitment efforts, while addressing their concerns, for sure.

Gretchen: We understand expectations for the home-based option are the same as they are for other program options, but can you talk a little bit about what Head Start programs can do to support safe home visits?

Heather: Yeah, that's a great question because I know that this has been on the forefront of a lot of peoples' minds. What I want to say is that for all Head Start staff engaged in home visits, whether it be a home visitor or other staff who make home visits, they really should be completing a personal assessment of their own risk of transmission, as well as assess any complications of risk if they were to get infected. They should also take note of any family members in the home for the same purposes. And I think really prior to the visit, the family should be contacted and asked a few assessment questions. Similar to what you would see if you were going into a medical office. I think people are generally familiar with assessment questions.

First one, is anyone in the family exhibiting signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as a fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath? And the second is really, has anyone in the family had contact with someone with COVID-19, contact with someone with known or suspected exposure to COVID-19, or is anyone ill with respiratory illness within the last 14 days? And if the response is yes to either of these questions, the home visit should not be conducted in person, but rather through alternate means, such as virtual or potentially through a telephone call. And the program really should continue to be in contact with the family to talk about when it would be safe and appropriate to continue in-person home visits and socializations. Programs really should stay up to date or may need to make sure they update their policies and procedures, and track the CDC, state, and local health department recommendations for changes.

As Gretchen is sharing here, if they responses are no to those screening questions, then certainly the home visit can proceed in person, as planned. But you're going to want to make sure that precautionary measures would continue, which would include maintaining six feet of social distance between the home visitor and family members; conducting the home visit outdoors if that's possible; making sure – using properly fitted masks; if you see anyone in the home that's ill, to make sure you exit the home immediately and notify a supervisor; minimizing contact with surfaces; making sure you have access to and use personal hygiene, such as hand sanitizer; and then of course, avoid touching your face.

As we said in other webinars and guidance, if a program can't conduct an in-person home visit, other alternatives should be considered, such as conducting business in a public location, such as libraries and community centers. Programs should also work with their local health services advisory committee and local health departments to determine community risk when making such decisions for home visits. I also want to note that most of the strategies that you see here also apply to center-based services, family child care, as well as locally designed programs as well. I think it's really important that programs have procedures in place that allow them the flexibility to make shifts and adjustments where needed.

Gretchen: Thanks, Heather. Staying on the topic of safety, what recommendations does the Office of Head Start have for safely transporting children?

Heather: Well, I think you have a link right there. Hot off the press today, the Office of Head Start issued an information memorandum that promotes strategies for Head Start transportation services and vehicles during COVID-19. As our programs are aware, school buses and allowable alternate vehicles are generally the safest mode of transportation for children and are often a necessity for our children and families for them to even participate in Head Start. There's a variety of steps that programs can take to mitigate risk with respect to school buses and allowable alternate vehicles for both staff, children, and family. And when thinking about and isolating just what some of those strategies for transportation staff could include requiring staff who are sick to stay home; sending staff home who are experiencing symptoms during work hours; making masks available and ensuring that they're being used properly; and keeping hands clean, which includes making those hygiene supplies available and making sure that they're being used per the CDC recommendations.

And then for children and families, these strategies would include following safe transportation by making masks and hand washing supplies available and encouraging their use; improving ventilation, which includes keeping windows open as much as possible; conducting health checks of all children and staff before they board the vehicle; distancing children from one another. That could include loading children on the back of the bus to the front, positioning children all far as part as possible, with one child per bench. Also helping children understand physical distancing. You may consider visual cues and offer gentle prompts. And then finally, wearing gloves. Staff should wear gloves if they're going to be touching surfaces where the surfaces are maybe contaminated by bodily fluids. And I don't think that that is different than any of our other safety concerns or what we have in the performance standards now.

But finally, I think programs really should be routinely cleaning vehicles between each use and at the end of the day. And if there's someone who ends up, either a child or an adult, who rode the bus and has reported to have tested positive for COVID-19, we need to make sure that the bus is cleaned and disinfected again before it is used. Programs should make decisions based on current experiences with staff, children, and families in your program. You should also be checking state and local health department notices about daily COVID-19 transmission rates and mitigation levels in the area, and adjust your operations accordingly based on the information that you're receiving. And as community conditions continue to change, some, I think, in response may need to adjust their operations of service levels. Based on local data and guidance, programs should be prepared to stagger routes, reduce bus runs, or even the option of temporarily ending runs for a period of time. But really, programs should be engaging staff and families when deciding to make changes to transportation policies because they do impact everyone.

Gretchen: Thanks, Heather. I know programs providing transportation have so many considerations to implement when it comes to ensuring that they're providing safe transportation for children and families. I'm sure everyone will be on the lookout for that. I am, and as you mentioned, the link is also included in the slides. One last question for you today. We know that there's a lot of planning that goes into a Change in Scope application. Is there a route that programs can explore that would allow a quick response to changing community need?

Heather: Surprisingly, yes. As programs, I would say any time they're contemplating a change, that they should engage in conversations with the Regional Office when it comes to either program design or service delivery, whether temporary or permanent. Any change, I think number one, first and foremost, you need to be talking with the Regional Office. But there are a few options that programs could consider that do not require a formal Change in Scope request or an application. The first is a shift of slots between existing approved program options, provided that the change does not discontinue an option that is currently provided, or that it does not add an option not currently approved. All approved options, your program options, are all listed in the remarks section of your Notice of Award. And it's going to be important to note, especially, that this does not refer to a virtual or remote option. This is really what's on your Notice of Award, which there would be one of four things or more than one. But it would include one or a combination therefore of center-based, home-based, family child care and locally designed programs.

The second would be a shift of slots within the designated service area. Again, the designated service area is listed in the remarks section of your award. And that you could make shifts within that approved service area if you needed to do so without a Change in Scope. But I think the critical piece in both of these scenarios is that the options and the designated service area must already be approved on your notice of award in order to consider these shifts. For example, if the only thing you had on your notice of award was center-based, there isn't anything to shift to. But if you had family child care and center-based, there could be shifts made between those options. Otherwise, if they're not already approved on your Notice of Award, it would require a formal change in scope application in order to consider that request.

But I think importantly, before any changes are made, programs must be thinking about and ensuring that anything that they're considering has to continue to comply with the Head Start Program Performance Standards; that all decisions are made based on community need. This, again, highlights the importance of having the current community needs assessment and making sure that we're using the most up-to-date data in order to make our decision; and that proposed changes are in alignment with your existing budget. Sometimes changes come with a cost consideration. Making sure that anything that you'd be doing would be still within what you have approved for your existing budget. But again, I can't emphasize enough that any considerations really must be done in consultation with the Regional Office. Thanks.

Gretchen: Thanks, Heather. We appreciate you taking the time to answer all of these burning questions for the Head Start community. As we move into today's Enrollment Forward topic, recruitment and strategic enrollment, I'm now going to turn things over to Nicole from the National Center to get us started. Nicole?

Nicole Holman-Alexander: Thanks, Gretchen. And thanks so much for all the information that you all have shared. You'll see on the screen the Head Start management System Wheel. Some are very familiar with this Head Start Management Systems Wheel, and we may have some newer folks that aren't so familiar with it. I'm going to take some time to just introduce our Head Start Management System Wheel to you. We at the National Center for Program

Management and Fiscal Operations know that taking a systemic view of the opportunities as well as the obstacles that come our way is critical to progress.

This Head Start Management System Wheel That you see is a visual representation of how our Head Start program structure is supported by a foundation of leadership and governance, program management and oversight, and services. The way these all work together are that leadership and governance provide leadership and strategic direction, and they also nurture the program management through planning and oversight of the 12 management systems that you see in the turquoise area, the pie pieces there that you see. Those are our 12 management systems there. The services, such as education, health, mental health, community, and family engagement, as well as ERSEA, which you see in the navy blue ring there, are how we connect our plans with the community and implement services to the families that we serve. Now, our ultimate goal is in the center white area, and that is to make sure that we are producing those quality child and family outcomes.

Today, we will look at ways to move enrollment forward through the lens of ERSEA. The strategic approaches to ERSEA that we will share today, we believe when implemented, support full enrollment and the return to in-person comprehensive services. Again, this Management System Wheel that you see helps us take a strategic look at ERSEA and plan that strategic approach. And to plan an effective strategic approach, it starts with data. When we look at data, data is oxygen that fuels management systems. And as we have really established on the previous slide, that management systems are critical components to services that lead to quality outcomes for children and families. Let's take a look at them a little closer. You will see fiscal management. You also see community and self-assessment. You see facilities and learning environments, program planning and service system design. You also see data and evaluation, human resources, and ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement. But that's not all, we have a few more. Transportation, technology and information systems, training and professional development, record keeping and reporting, and communication.

And again, those make up those 12 management systems that you saw before in that turquoise area. What we need to ask ourself, what makes these management systems run? It's data. Data is the thread that is woven into all aspects of our work, and the good news is that we here at Head Start have always and continue to collect from multiple sources a ... we really amass a wealth of data. When we think about technology and we think about reflecting on impacts of our work, we want to consider the ways in which data informs us and our needs to build a strong system to manage the data. In the session today again, we're going to look at that and how planning improves the ERSEA services. When we start with community assessment, and we know we're collecting a lot of data, right? The community assessment guides intensive recruitment efforts. It reaches families most in need of services. It identifies appropriate program options, it revisits ... It helps us revisit and establish the selection criteria that's going to work for us, and identifies community partners as well.

All recipients should update their community assessment to guide their intensive recruitment efforts, and to ensure that they are reaching families most in need of services. Again, at the National Center, we often get questions about how often this or that, and we know that our community assessment is required to be – a full community assessment is required every five years. And then you also want to review it annually and update it with the most important information. That's what we're required to do, but we want to make and highlight that having the most important and most relevant, most time sensitive data is important. As we stay on this for a little while, I want to make sure that you're aware that decisions about program options as a selection criteria, all the things which are mentioned here are what are driven by the data. For instance, as a result of this ever-changing pandemic, we know that businesses, organizations, and service options have changed in many places. Ask yourself what has changed. We know that some providers may no longer be in existence and/or they may have modified services that they offer. Do you know what services each of your partners still provides?

As mentioned on the previous OHS webinar entitled Enrollment Forward, where there was clarification of expectations for expanding reach in uncertain times, the Office of Head Start reminded us that we want to think about developing and refining collaborative efforts with other early childhood programs. What other programs are in your community? And know that now is a good time to rethink those existing resources, or think about some new ways of how you can look at the community and serve the needs of the families as well. When it's time to update the information or if you have a question of “when is it time” to update the information, is whenever you are making a decision and/or experience change. Just make sure that you let data drive your decisions and know that we have additional funds available. We have the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security – that's the CARES. We have those funds. And we have the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations – that's the CRRSAA, Act, as well as the American Rescue Plan, and that's the ARP. And those can and should be used to support the enhancement of community partnerships and related recruitment efforts.

We're going to take a look at the community assessment data and ERSEA a little closer. As you see on your screen, the community assessment data and ERSEA, it identifies eligible children. It also informs recruitment plans, supports the development of selection criteria, helps to establish enrollment priorities, and provides insight regarding attendance. We have to continue to ask ourself these questions: Is your community assessment data current and used to inform ERSEA practices? Do you have the most current, most up-to-date information to make decisions about these areas and these services in your program? If so, you are well on your way to something positive and great. If you need to look at that a little more, this is a really good time to get some more up-to-date information to drive the decisions that you need to.

Today, we want to focus on the “how” as well. Throughout this presentation, we will share concepts, practices, and other strategies and ideas for you to process with your team and decide if, when and how to implement them effectively in your program. I believe a link is going to be put in the chat for our assessment tool, but before we go to that, we want to make sure that we are answering the question for you, how do we continue our enrollment forward efforts? One of the ways that we offer today is, we have a new tool for you to assess your ERSEA services. I want to refer you again to your chat area. You will find that link there. A file has been placed there, and we want you to be able to open that and feel free to follow along with us as we unpack this tool a little more. What happened is, a few of us at the National Center got together to create and design something new for you, something a little fresh, something fresh around ERSEA. The tool that we have for you today emphasizes the use of data in strengthening ERSEA's services to support full enrollment. Each acronym for ERSEA includes a list of relevant questions and practices, indicators. This is another resource to support your program's return to comprehensive in-person services. And again, the name of the tool is the ERSEA Assessment Tool. Karen is going to unpack this a little more for us and give us some more details, and I hope you've had the chance to open the document so you can look at it as we continue on. Karen?

Karen Surprenant: Thank you, Nicole. That was a great lead-in to this resource that we're very excited about. Welcome, everybody, and thank you for joining us today. And as I'm looking at the previous slide with the word "how," I'm thinking, I want to acknowledge that in the past, I hate to say two years, programs have really used their creativity, their innovation, their skills, most importantly their dedication to develop so many “hows” to get us to continue to move forward in spite of all these obstacles. Like Nicole says, this is another tool in your tool kit, another resource, and we are glad that we can give it to you up front, like Nicole says, and take a look at it with us, but what we hope this tool does ... As we said, it helps you examine each of those ERSEA elements, each of those services to ensure responsiveness, but it facilitates dialog and exploration around the requirements and best practices. Those success indicators in each area are based on performance standards and best practices.

And I was thinking how Dr. Futrell said, "We can accomplish much more when we get together than what we could do on our own." Just having the opportunity to come together with additional eyes and maybe a broader team, let's talk about what's been happening and what's working well, what isn't, is so important in these times especially when ongoing planning is so critical, and that ability to pivot and develop contingency plans is so important. This tool helps to identify areas of strength, areas needing improvement. And I can see, if you can see the tool, if you haven't printed it out or checked it out, you can see that there's a little rating scale there. Can you see that on the slide, Nicole, our rating scale?

Nicole: I can! I can see the rating scale, and that first page, like you said, Karen, it just helps us give some instructions about how to use this tool. And we have those rating scales, and they include excelling, which is the practice is strong and has resulted in success. We also have a rating of progressing, which is stating that the practice is well underway. We also have starting, which is the practice is just being implemented, and then we also have the option of desired, and that is the practice is not implemented yet. We thought about this so that you can have different ways of rating this that kind of indicate where you need to put some action.

Karen: Yeah, we like these indicators, and we always say, if something is really strong, and you're excelling at it, you want to celebrate it, but you also want to think about, where can we replicate it? Can we do this in another area, tweak it a little and have another success there? At the end of this tool, I believe it starts on page seven, is an action planning section. You want to be able to do something with this conversation that you've had and these practices that you've identified as needing strengthening, so the action planning section allows you to identify some short-term goals, some more long-term actions you want to take, who might do it, what your timeline might be and what additional resources you need. We'd really like to have it be a roll-up-your-sleeves, a useful tool that generates data that you can use for planning and improvement.

Thinking about how this tool can be used or how you might see it used, you might see it as part of the technical assistance session that you engage in with your TNTA network. They may bring it to you and facilitate some work with you that way, or perhaps that you can use it as an ongoing planning meeting. I know when I was a director, our planning meetings were incredibly important. We came together with lots of different data to use to think about our upcoming year, so maybe this is going to generate some planning material data. Or perhaps it's an ongoing monitoring tool where, as focus of a meeting, you might take one particular area, say just recruitment, with the ultimate goal of eventually getting towards and completing each area. But the important thing is, you're generating your own data for internal program use. It isn't something that somebody is going to ask you to turn in or that you have to report on or that you have to get some sort of score. It's something for you to be able to examine what's happening and use it. Any thoughts on that, Nicole?

Nicole: No, I just love what you're saying about its focused on data. This is a tool that helps you collect more data and allows you, again, to rate that and also put some notes for you to look back on as well. I just love what we're seeing here about the variety of ways that we can use it, and I think using them in all those ways will really be beneficial.

Karen: Thanks. OK, I just want to take a look at the overarching concepts of each of the areas, , for example, for recruitment, are recruitment activities data-informed and measurable? And again, Nicole talked about the importance of the community assessment data but all of your data, that you're using all your data, your data around your recruitment materials and the audience they're focused on and what kinds of things they're generating and your practices within the program. How are you measuring them and seeing that they're effective? Are eligibility services designed to ensure identification and enrollment of families with the greatest needs? That's our ultimate goal. When you move on and look at the enrollment, do your systems ensure that the neediest families are enrolled in a timely manner to maintain full enrollment?

And again, that may mean looking a little deeper at your data, your policies and procedures, the way you train people, the types of services that you offer and how you're ensuring they're remaining responsive. That overarching concept, we get a little deeper into it in the tool. And do your selection policies and procedures identify children that would benefit most from the Head Start services? And of course, we also have a section on attendance because we know that children benefit the most when they have consistent attendance, and they develop habits that benefit them later on in school and in life. This is a critical time to be looking at how we're supporting children’s' attendance.

What we're going to do for the remainder of this session, we're going to take a look at just two sections of the ERSEA tool. You have it, and we want you to dig into it. We're going to look at recruitment and selection, and we're going to just take a peek at regulations and then take a look at that section of the tool. We see here where we have our regulation regarding the recruitment of children, which you're all probably familiar with, and it talks about how in order to reach those most in need of services, programmers develop and implement a recruitment process designed to actively inform all families with eligible children within the recruitment area. You want to tell them about the availability of services and encourage and assist them in applying. And it also talks about specific efforts to actively locate and recruit children with disabilities, other vulnerable children, including homeless children and children in foster care.

I'm really struck by the description that you're actively informing families. You're encouraging, and you're assisting them to apply. It's very proactive, and it really makes me think about equity in terms of your recruitment services in terms of access. Can people access it based on location, based on language needs or cultural needs? Thinking about your recruitment with that broader lens. Looking at the piece of the tool now, the next slide is going to show us ... This is the ERSEA Assessment Tool as it pertains to recruitment. Here are our success indicators which we said are based on both performance standard and best practice, and you see, we've numbered the RE for recruitment, and there's 15 in this section. And we use those numbers with the letters to help you when you think about the action planning refer back to the items that you're wanting to address. Without reading all of them, I just want to share some of the categories that are addressed, and of course, you'll find mention of up-to-date community assessment data in each of the five sections because Nicole showed us how community assessment data impacts all of those five areas of ERSEA.

In this case, the staffing looks at your recruitment efforts being adequately staffed with oversight, with operation responsibilities clearly delineated. Now, we know that there's staffing issues throughout the country. I don't want to make light of that, and I want to mention that our next webinar is on workforce development, but here is an opportunity to talk about what's going on and maybe make some accommodations or some planning or maybe talk about how you might use that COVID money to fill in some gaps or shifting. Whether it's an issue or not, it's important to have that dialog and that contingency planning. This section helps you examine your use of technology for reaching out into the community, your tracking and monitoring, your training. Many people, many programs express that they want to have that culture where everybody feels like they're ambassadors for the program, and they feel like recruitment is their business. How does your training, and how do you support that culture within your program? And, Nicole, there's also some things in there on partnerships and recruitment, right?

Nicole: There certainly are. As we mentioned earlier when it comes to the community assessment, we know we need to rethink our existing resources, or think about some ways that we can do things a little different and consider some different ways and take time to really develop and refine those collaborative efforts and throughout our community. Some of the things that we can point out when it comes to partnership on the tool which are questions and, again, those success indicators as well is one that I thought was sort of interesting is, the program has a developed system for inquiry. A lot of times, we get so busy doing what we're doing and just trying to get to, is it determining this and that? Make sure that your program has developed a system for those inquiries because when people – when you're communicating with someone, and they feel that you're responsive, they favor your work and what you're doing. That's a good way of staying in touch with that.

Some other questions that really stood out to me as we were developing this tool and looking over it as well is that the program's recruitment efforts include an audience-specific message that highlights its ability to provide safe and high-quality learning environments. That's important, and when we're looking at those partners, that they're educated on the programs, services, and avenues to enrollment. This tool really can help us identify these areas, and the standards are referenced as well, and they help tell us about the why, as well as it helps us update our policies and procedures. I'm thinking we will move on to looking at the selection process unless, Karen, did you have anything else you wanted to add?

Karen: Yeah, I just wanted to add, we talked about how this tool facilitates dialog, so when you think about, well, who should do it? And that certainly is different based on the structure of your organization. It's always great if you have an opportunity to have a diverse team because we talk about a different set of eyes who maybe doesn't even work in that particular program area can help shed some light on things. Ideally, it would be nice to have both leadership and line staff. Again, there's not a mandate, but if you want to think about what's best, who can we bring in? If I were doing it, and again, I was in a smaller program, but I probably would like to have some leadership staff, some policy counsel, some parents, definitely some line staff with those people who are doing it. But if you want that culture where recruitment is everybody's business and ERSEA is everybody's business, and they're representing your program, then the more people you bring in to understand what the challenges are, to understand what the successes are and what the work looks like that we do, then the better off that you'll be, and the more benefits you'll get from this tool. That's my plug for, “let's get everybody doing it.” Let's work together.

Nicole: Everybody! Yeah. You said ...

Karen: OK, on to selection.

Nicole: Multiple minds are good, different point of views and some different ideas, so I love what you're saying on that. When we look at the requirements, as we see on our screen, about the requirements around the selection process, it establishes ... We want to make sure that our selection process and our criterion is established annually, that it includes ranked criteria. It's based on community need. Again, we are definitely thinking about our community. We are gathering information from our community, and we're using that information to make sure that we are selecting the children and families with the greatest need. We also want to make sure that it considers all the requirement elements that are in the standards and that we are maintaining a wait list as well. As programs, we know that we must develop this at the beginning of the year and maintain it during the year, and that is the selection criteria, and it has to rank according to that program selection criteria. We always want to be ... When we're looking at our selection process and our criteria, we want to test that. You want to test and evaluate. You want to course-correct that.

Sometimes what we come up with our selection criteria may leave someone – an outlier – out. After you're testing those things, you'll see, " OK, someone is not rising to the top like we thought they should." You'll have to go back to the drawing board. Like Karen was saying, use a variety of people to see how you can get that and make sure it's ranked and that individuals are coming in appropriately as they should as the most needed families. Let's talk about prioritization. When we're looking at prioritization and those elements around it, we know that when we're looking at that selection criteria, again, it has to be developed annually, and it's based on the community needs that are identified. And some of those needs you see on the screen, for sure. Community needs. You see the family income. You want to make sure that you're prioritizing homelessness, foster care, the age that you are looking for in your program, eligibility for special education or related services and other relevant family or child risk.

When we're looking at, again, how we want to prioritize these elements, we're making sure that these come to the top and that the children with these needs, we are serving them, and we're identifying and serving them quickly. Karen, I didn't know if you had anything that you wanted to add to this. You're on mute.

Karen: Just thinking about, yeah, when you see right from the standards, the other relevant family or child risk factors, we certainly have been experiencing other relevant family or child risk factors, and the message has come from OHS to make sure you consider the impact of the pandemic when you develop those selection criteria.

Nicole: OK. That's great. We also want you to take into consideration additional allowances. When we're looking at additional allowances, when developing that program selection criteria, it's important to be aware of this allowance for enrolling children above the federal poverty guideline. In addition to the 10% over income that we're allowed, programs may enroll an additional 35% of participants with incomes up to 130% of the federal poverty guidelines, provided that the program has established and implemented outreach and procedures to ensure it is meeting the needs of those below the federal poverty guidelines, and that it also establishes criteria that ensures pregnant women and children eligible under the criteria in the paragraph are served for disabilities and other things as well. We want to make sure that when we're looking at that additional allowance that we're keeping all of the things in mind that are important to our requirements for Head Start which is that we're serving the neediest of the needy, and we have a way of making sure that we're doing that.

We're going to continue to look at this just a little more. When we talk about additional allowances ... We have a poll for you, and the poll is about choosing the 130% option. And if you choose to use that option, what is required to be reported to the Regional Office? We're going to launch that poll now, and I see the poll is there. It's asking additional allowances. What must programs report to the Regional Office when using this allowance? We want you to choose one of those things that are listed. The list includes, how are you meeting the needs of income-eligible families? Are you including outreach and enrollment policies that ensure meeting those needs? Are you including current enrollment and enrollment for the previous year? Are you including eligibility criteria for each child on the waiting list? Or is it all of the above?

You have a few choices there that you can select from, and we're going to give you just a couple of seconds here to continue to make your choices. And while you're continuing to make those choices, again, we want to make sure that you're aware that this allowance is available to you, and you just have to have some reporting requirements around it. I think we can close the poll now and see what the results are. Karen, what are we seeing?

Karen: It looks like this group is really on the ball there. We have 82% with the "all of the above," so, yes. Those are your reporting requirements. I'm thinking about how the intent here is, again, to make sure that we're always serving the neediest of the needy. And you mentioned how in our assessment tool, we do help programs to consider how the selection criteria is addressing that. Is there a way to measure those families that are over income and up to 130% of poverty and if they are in most need of the Head Start services? [Inaudible]

Nicole: Yeah, that's so important. Again, you all came up with it. You definitely selected it. You want to make sure that you are communicating with your Regional Office how the program meets the needs of eligible families. You have to communicate those outreach efforts, also the current enrollment for previous years, and you want to be able to show that you have a waiting list and that that is an active waiting list as well. Keep that in mind if you're going to use that allowance and make sure that you're keeping information and documentation on all those things so you can report that.

Karen: Yeah, Nicole, I see some questions. People should go ahead and carefully read that language if there's questions about it, with the percentages, and talk to their program specialist also. And I've seen some. We're going to mention as a resource MyPeers, but I have seen some programs talk about how they rank their over-income families in terms of the most need because our standards don't prescribe how that selection criteria should work exactly. There's some great examples on there.

Nicole: That is good, and you mentioned MyPeers, and that is an excellent resource for you to ask other programs questions of how they're doing this. Just keep in mind when you're communicating with MyPeers, you still want to make sure that you're doing your due diligence to make sure that you're meeting the requirements for your program and the choices that you've made in your program as well as how you're going to move forward with that. But MyPeers is a great place to really toss this around with others, get some examples of what they're doing. And we also want to make sure that when you're looking at these things, you make sure that you are definitely exploring your options of what all you can do because this is a time of really, if you have the opportunity to do something a little different, try that. Try it out. Just make sure that it meets the requirements, and it doesn't go against them in any way. We're going ...

Karen: I saw some Q&A around change of scope, and again, I think the message would be, communicate with your Regional Office, with your program specialist and have that conversation about change of scope and that up-to-date data that we keep talking about, that is going to help you figure out what you need to do.

Nicole: All right. We will move on to selection. We have some selection indicators here for you. The ERSEA Assessment Tool, we're bringing you back to that. Again, we're here. It's here to support you in identifying those ERSEA services that you want to focus on where you have your strengths, so we're coming from a strength-based perspective and also identifying those needs as well. What you'll see up here on your screen is the selection success indicators include data-informed criteria that includes all elements, scoring for over-income. It also includes record-keeping and communication systems, arranged waiting lists and also, as we mentioned before, that validity testing. Karen, I want to ask you if there's anything you want to add before I go into some specific questions on this area.

Karen: Regarding the tool, we forgot to mention at the bottom in each section ... You see on this screen, "selection resources." We always have a link first to the standards for that section, and then we have one or two resources there. And after the action planning, there's a couple of additional resources. Those are live links there. And the tool, it's a fillable form. You can enter in. You can work on it right on-screen on the computer if you want.

Nicole: That's right. That's right. When we talk about some of the questions, I want to pull some of those out in this section. One of them is that the program uses up-to-date community assessment data to establish the selection criteria. It's updated annually, contains all of the required elements and includes scoring, again, for over-income applicants to ensure that the neediest families are served. We also have some questions about the inner internal technology, record-keeping and communication system support, the selection criteria process. Monitoring systems are in place to ensure how these systems support selection criteria. And again, we're talking about a ranked waiting list is actively maintained and used to fill openings in a timely fashion. You want to make sure, again, as we mentioned, that there is that validity test, that you're checking on things. How is it working? What do you need to tweak a little bit to make sure something goes to where it needs to go and gets the ranking that it should get, and it identifies that area as one of the most-needed areas?

And these are just a few examples for this section of the selection criteria for you to consider as you're looking at this tool and using it, as Karen mentioned, to move forward with an action plan to identify some next steps and timelines, and who's going to be responsible in that area. What we're going to do now is, we're going to move on to the how of things, and it's really ... We talked about before. We want to answer that question for you of “how,” and how do we continue our enrollment forward efforts? And today, we know that after you complete the assessment tools, and it shows those strengths and needs, and it's identifying the things that come to the top around this tool, that you'll have a better understanding of where to focus those ERSEA services. And it will move you toward full enrollment, and it allows that the rating and also the notes and the comments and things like that, and Karen is really going to take this “how” to the next level of really showing you how to look at the program planning cycle and an example around that and how we can enhance our enrollment outcomes. Karen?

Karen: Yeah, let's put the how. You've done this tool. You've identified some strengths, some areas you want to focus on. Hopefully you've celebrated those strengths. You've educated their teams, which is a really important piece. Sometimes that dialogue and that education is in itself helpful for moving forward. I want to show you one example about how you might create a goal as a result of some work that you did looking at using the ERSEA assessment tool. This is a program, a fictitious program that's used the tool, and they have noticed in their internal data, the external data as part of the community assessment process that their recruitment materials were not reaping the results that they wanted. They weren't ... I should notice here that I think you're all familiar with the planning cycle. It represents our continuous improvement and the activities that we engage in for planning and assessment in Head Start. I apologize for not saying that first.

But, again, up in the upper left-hand corner, they noticed that their recruitment efforts were not reaching our big target areas in populations. As a result they created a goal, a program goal, and it was to strengthen recruitment efforts to generate increased number of applicants at all site locations and in multiple income categories. They wanted to pull in more of those applications from that group up to 130% of federal poverty guidelines. They needed to create some smart objectives that would guide their action plan. And for example, one of those smart objectives was to increase the applications at all locations within the next year. It was more targeted messaging to increase applications at all locations within the next year. They also had action steps around developing more partnerships, around enhancing their staff training to create some of those benefits that we talked about before.

They had to carry out that action plan. They had to develop data sources for each action step in order to monitor and measure progress. They needed to determine how they would track their recruitment efforts. They met regularly to monitor the compliance on their goal by looking at data and providing opportunities to analyze and interpret that data. And when they saw something was not going well, or as they were planned, they identified and implemented some improvement strategies, and that's that inner circle that we have. It's, “Well, things aren't happening with these partnerships that we thought. This particular partner hasn't followed through. What else can we do?” They tweak those action steps, that plan, also tweaking what they used to monitor success with that inner circle. And then they bring all of that data at the end of the program year to self-assessment for review with a broader audience.

And I think I saw in the chat somebody talking about, could you use this data generated with the tool in self-assessment? And I would say you use the activities that you have planned as a result of using the tool and measure those to go into self-assessment. They're reviewing all that data, creating that improvement plan, and continuing on a cycle again for planning for the next year. That's an example. Everything you do with this tool is not going to result in goals. We didn't want to suggest that you must do that, but we wanted to give you an example. But it certainly, might guide your goals that you're developing for your program. Thoughts, Nicole?

Nicole: Well, I just think that ... My thought is that this program planning cycle, again, as you mentioned, most are familiar with it, but we do have some that are new to it. It's just an excellent “how”. It's an excellent of how we implement the data that we can collect from the ERSEA assessment tool that we're collecting from our self-assessment in other areas to then, like you said, establish the goal. One of the hot topics that we know comes up often and is often asked of us at the National Center is about over-income. We have families that are over-income for one reason or the other, but we know that the minimum wage has been going up. In different places, that has been put in place. We're having some more challenges maybe finding families that are eligible. How would you use that? That could be another example, that we use with this program planning cycle.

You may ... You're looking that you see that the families are over-income, and then you're basically, you know that you want to, as far as a goal, you want to identify children and families that are income-eligible, and you may want to have a date around it, prior to the school year, whenever that time is. But your objective is that you would, of course, want to have enrolled, your full enrollment and 100% of them, if possible, income-eligible. But we have some other allowances with that, but that's something that we might – we want to aspire to. If we're doing that, we would need to, as we move around this cycle again, we're saying we've got to complete an action plan after we've taken that data, established a goal and our objectives around trying to reach that. Then we've got to look at the action plan and the budget around those. We have to implement that plan. We've got to analyze and track and report the opportunities that we see available to us.

And even when we're thinking about that plan, some things that we may want to think about is we know we have to collaborate with agencies that focus on families that are receiving TANF, SSI, children in foster care and in homeless recipients. And one of the things, as we're looking at, as we're a program, these community action programs are organizations that have the ability to serve a variety of members in the community. We may want to even think about making sure that we become a direct provider and provide additional services to targeted populations, such as that. Because it really feeds that right into your Head Start program if you're already providing services to that community. You can also see families and children that are eligible as well.

Once we create those action plans and those steps, and we get real creative about how we can do that and still identify some other things, we know we need to course-correct. And as you see this planning cycle, that center, Karen, that part that just loops, that's so important because that really is talking about the ongoing monitoring aspects of things and course-correcting and just really finding out, what can we do better? And then from there, we're asking the question on our self-assessment, and we are getting another lens. I think this is ... You asked me what I thought about it, Karen. That was a lot, but it's just a great tool for really coming out with the outcomes that we want, which is quality outcomes for children and families.

Karen: And we get really excited about this. Don't we, Nicole?

Nicole: [Laughter] We do! We're sort of ERSEA nerds, so we ... [Laughter]

Karen: OK, I'm going to move us on and just a little bit more about this, wrapping up this concept on the next slide of continuous improvement. And, again, our planning cycle that we love demonstrates that cycle of continuous improvement in Head Start, and it also supports or facilitates what we see in the performance standards, which talk to us about monitoring. Programs must monitor their performance and continuously improve by collecting and using data to inform planning by quickly implementing those course corrections immediately – as soon as possible by implementing procedures that prevent recurrence, and throughout the whole process working with governing bodies, tribal council, and policy council. There's that process of continuous improvement.

I'm going to look at it one more way and ask you a question on the next slide. We see continuous improvement is about identifying program strengths and needs, developing and implementing plans that address those needs, and continuously evaluating for both compliance with our standards. We're using that data to check for compliance and progress towards achieving program goals. But there's something that we need in order to do all of these things, and we want to ask you with a poll what it is we need to do to carry out these activities. What must be used to carry out these required activities? Is it a specially designed computer software program? Is it an advisory committee? Or is it data? Go ahead and vote. I think you might get this one as well. I see somebody writing it in the chat, too. I'm just going to take 10 more seconds, and can we show the results?

Yes, and some of you may have computer software programs or an advisory committee, but basically, we want to just drive home that point that data is the key element here of a planning. We can close that out, and I'm going to read one more, take one last opportunity on the next slide to recap the importance of data. We know that data should be used to identify a program's strengths, their needs, to help them to create those plans, help them to measure for compliance and for progress. That was just a recap of what we're talking about, and many of you know that and are doing that and doing it well. Nicole is going to bring us down to the home stretch now.

Nicole: Well, and I just want to mention as we're talking about the using data for continuous improvement, I want to just remind you all of something we said earlier, and it's that data is oxygen. We use it to fuel those management systems, and we know that when we focus on continuous improvement, and we course-correct, we get to our ultimate outcome again of a quality child and family outcome. As you see on your screen, we are talking about strategies for enrollment forward. We want to recap for you those strategies for enrollment forward that we want to make sure you walk away with, and you see them on your screen. You want to use up-to-date data for planning. We talked about the community assessment data along with your internal data regarding your ERSEA services. And you just need to know, and we all need to remember that they are instrumental for moving forward and strengthening those ERSEA services.

Secondly, we want to examine ERSEA services to ensure responsiveness. We use the new ERSEA assessment tool to help to identify the how, again, of how we can do that. We're collecting that up-to-date data. We're using it to plan, and we are using our tool to do all of those things as well, and then we also had the program planning cycle, too. Thirdly, we want to monitor services for compliance and continuous improvement. We know that ongoing monitoring helps us to ensure that we stay on track with our ERSEA service delivery, and it provides us a way to plan for those course corrections when needed. This is really the key to maintaining quality, and that of course is one of the things or a few of the things we want to make sure that you walk away with, and we'll recap those again before we finish.

But we're going to move on to telling you about some resources here. Some resources that are definites that we want you to check out is the Community Assessment: The Foundation for Program Planning in Head Start. This is a great resource that's available to you all on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. It really gets to the heart of the community assessment, the requirements around it, how to conduct it. What are the benefits? And you'll see also on the screen and the appendices all the information that it contains. There's a matrix there. You have a reporting checklist. You have worksheets that you can engage in. You have questionnaires, all of those different things. You have the requirements that are important that we know about and additional data and different sources that you may be able to get additional data from. We really wanted to recommend that you look at that source, and you use it as you continue to build your community assessment.

All right. Let's see the other thing we want to point out is successful ERSEA strategies. This is also on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. And as you see on your screen, these are great tip sheets. It's a really good foundation – it lays a really good foundation by asking probing questions. Some of the things and topics that it's going to cover – it's going to cover the different services of ERSEA and those different elements around it, which you'll see we have tip sheets on maintaining full enrollment. We have tip sheets on prioritizing eligibility and meeting the greatest need. We also have tip sheet on developing effective recruitment services. We have a tip sheet on encouraging and supporting regular attendance and one on the thoughtful selection policies and procedures and how to build those things. And as we mentioned before, Karen, the MyPeers community is a great place for us to continue to use as a resource as we're talking to individuals about what they're engaging in or how they do things in their program.

Again, we need to come back and say, "Is this something that we want to do in our program? Does it meet the requirements?" Karen, you also mentioned as well, we've got to make sure we're staying in touch with the Regional Office, and we are staying in line with those local procedures as well as state guidelines and local guidelines as well. Those are just some things on that, but I want to ask you, Karen, did you want to mention any other resources or any other information here?

Karen: How did you know? You read my mind. [Laughter] We did not mention signing MyPeers. If you have not, if you go to the ECLKC on the home page, if you go all the way to the bottom, over to the right, you'll see a little link, MyPeers, and you can sign up that and see the different groups, and people can even start a group.

Nicole: And join. Join and start talking, engaging, sharing and learning there. It's a really great place for you. We have some final reflections. And some of this you have, of course, walked away with, but just to make sure that you walk away with these key points, too, I want to mention some final reflections to you. Today, we explored how to continue enrollment forward. We looked at recruitment and strategic approaches to enrollment. OHS has addressed questions that they received by you on program structure, recruitment, enrollment, workforce, health and safety considerations, and community needs as well. We have emphasized that data is oxygen that fuels management systems, and the way you want to use that data is, you want to use up-to-date data for planning, planning in your community assessment, and also you want to use the most up-to-date information when you're making decisions in your programs.

And we shared two strategies for how to continue to move enrollment forward, and it included the new ERSEA assessment tool, and it also included revisiting the program planning cycle as a strategy to use the results from the assessment tool, other data that you have internally or that you collect to plan and implement effective strategies. And lastly, we want to make sure that we reiterate the need to monitor services for compliance and continuous improvement. Gretchen has more information for you, so I'm going to turn this over to her to close out. Gretchen?

Gretchen: Thanks, Nicole, and thank you to Nicole and Karen, Heather, and Dr. Futrell for joining us today as well and sharing their thoughts. Promised you we'd have some additional resources hot off the press. This is one of them. Equity Considerations for Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance resource will be included in the chat for today. This resource can be used to identify your program's current strengths and areas of growth. It will help you put equity into action in your ERSEA activities. By prioritizing equity in

ERSEA activities, your program becomes more accessible and available for families who need services the most. A focus on equity will also ensure that support to families from the moment they enter the program until the moment they transition out is culturally and linguistically responsive.

Some reminders about the ERSEA Enrollment Forward series: Our first webinar is now available on demand, and today's webinar will be posted shortly. We look forward to having you join us again on Tuesday, February 22nd, for the third webinar in the Enrollment Forward series, Intentional Workforce Planning, again on March 15th to hear recipients share successful strategies from their programs. And then finally, a fifth webinar has been added to the series and will be held on April 12th when the Office of Head Start leadership will respond to frequently asked questions from throughout the Enrollment Forward series. And then finally, the National Centers will host the ERSEA Institute 2022 April 5th through 7th for Head Start and Early Head Start program directors, staff, and parent leaders. The institute will focus on community assessment and eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment and attendance best practices, and registration will begin in February.

With that, that concludes our presentation today. We thank you for joining us, and we look forward to having you on our next webinar, again, Tuesday, February 22nd, where we will explore intentional planning for workforce development. Thank you.