

Get to Know Your Head Start Collaboration Office

Glenna Davis: Hello, and welcome everyone to the Head Start Collaboration Office, also known as HISCO, Informational Webinar. It is now my pleasure to turn the floor over to our Head Start director, Khari Garvin. Director Garvin, the floor is yours.

Director Khari Garvin: Well, Glenna, thank you so much. And greetings to everyone. Hello out there. Good afternoon to some, good morning to many others. I am super excited, I really am, and grateful for this Head Start Collaboration Office campaign kickoff and the focus that it will have through the course of this year to really bring some additional visibility to our Head Start Collaboration offices.

I want to thank all of you for carving out time to be with us today, for the launch of this campaign series. I just want you to be aware, and want you to think about, Head Start collaboration offices the way that we do, here. Head Start collaboration offices really are both an important and valued component of the Head Start system.

That Head Start system includes, of course, the Office of Head Start, the central office, and our regional offices: that includes grant recipients and includes our training and technical assistance network. It also includes our Head Start collaboration offices, which, by the way, have been instituted more than 30 years ago. That's even before the Early Head Start program was created.

Our collab offices have been around for quite some time. When you think about their name, collaboration, literally, is their middle name. When you consider it from that vantage point, Head Start collaboration office, and collaboration being the middle name for that group, those offices really do serve the critical function of sustaining and sometimes brokering relationships across state government and with state level partners, to facilitate Head Start and early Head Start programs' ability to coordinate with state systems and programs and initiatives, that assist programs with meeting the requirements of Head Start statutes as well as Head Start regulations.

They also work to help support the service delivery of programs for children and families, and help programs to meet the needs of children and families as well as their staff. Critical, critical function.

So, as a few examples, Head Start collaboration offices represent Head Start programs' interests at the state early childhood education policymaking table. They ensure that programs are fully considered when new policies are being created in states and territories. They also create linkages between programs and the state and sometimes national initiatives that can assist programs' goals for staff credentialing, for example, or maybe helping programs to expand children and families' access to certain services, and many, many more.

Head Start Collaboration Offices also serve as a central hub for external and internal stakeholders for data and other resources pertinent to states or territories' Head Start system. I really do have fond memories of the years that I spent working as a Head Start Collaboration Office Director.

This was almost 10 years, trying as best I could to help the North Carolina Head Start and Early Head Start grantees, to address the challenges that they were experiencing and the barriers that they were facing and trying to do the good work that they're funded to do.

During that time period when I was blessed to be a Head Start Collaboration Office director, during that period, the Head Start Act was reauthorized. This was back in 2007, I know many of you remember that. At that time, that reauthorization of the Head Start program included many new requirements, like, again, staff credentialing requirements, and there were more rigorous requirements for special populations of children, like children experiencing homelessness or children with special needs.

I remember with this new set of laws being handed down, I remember cultivating partnerships with entities like AmeriCorps, for example, and AmeriCorps initiatives, that were furnishing qualified subs for Head Start programs in North Carolina at really little or no cost to the Head Start program, to either help those programs to lower their staff child ratios in classrooms that needed additional support, or to create release time opportunities for regular Head Start or Early Head Start staff who needed the flexibility to be able to attend classes during the day to earn those credentials that the new law required.

I remember doing that. I remember brokering an agreement with a mobile dental van company in North Carolina to help some of our programs solve the dental home crisis, particularly for those programs that were operating in rural North Carolina. I remember working hard with my office of early learning colleagues to expand Head Start and pre-K partnerships across the state.

I remember partnering with the National Center for Homeless Education to support Head Start programs' ambitions to meet what was the new requirement to identify and prioritize children experiencing homelessness for our programs. I remember even funding a class quality analysis study for Head Start programs in North Carolina to really help to grow their ability to just do well and to perform and execute even better with that tool.

I'm just kind of going down memory lane, and I appreciate that. My point is really to magnify the kinds of things that our collaboration offices around the country are doing. Head Start collaboration offices all over the country, including, by the way, Puerto Rico, they are all fulfilling a critical role of support and advocacy on behalf of the grantees in their state or in their territory.

Part of their strength, I believe, is the proximity they all have to both the grant recipients in their state or territory and the proximity to the emerging and shifting policies and regulatory climates of their states and territories.

This is especially true of our two national Head Start Collaboration Offices, each of them working across more than 20 states apiece to address and support the unique needs of our tribal programs and the unique needs of our migrant seasonal Head Start programs across the country. I'm just super excited about the Office of Head Start's Collaboration Office campaign.

I hope that everyone will take part in all the offerings of the entire series. Thank you again for making yourselves available. With that, I give you Dr. Omair Shamim. Omair, all yours.

Omair Shamim: Thank you so much, Khari, for laying out the foundation and talking about the important role Head Start Collaboration Office plays in their state, and thank you for sharing your own journey as a collaboration director in North Carolina.

Hello, everybody. My name is Omair Shamim, and I'm the liaison between Office of Head Start and State Collaboration Offices. I'm in this position since January of 2023, and before joining this position, I also worked as a Head Start Collaboration Director in the state of Idaho for about 9, 10 years. I work in the trenches, so I know exactly how much this position is important for the state, for Head Start, and for early childhood in general.

Let me tell you about the history of Head Start Collaboration Office, or we call them HSCOs, like, like Khari mentioned. With most policies being developed at the state level, a gap in the Head Start representation was identified, and the Office of Head Start has funded the Head Start Collaboration grants to create the capacity to support the development of multi-agency public-private partnership at the state level. Administration of Children and Families ACF funded the first wave of Head Start collaboration grants in 1990. Twelve states were awarded competitive grant at that time. In 1992, ACF funded a second wave of Head Start collaboration offices for 10 more states.

Till 1997, all states, including Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico, received the funding of state collaboration offices. In 2007, American Indian Alaska Native Program and Migrant Seasonal Head Start Program also received grants for their collaboration offices. The difference between those two HSCOs and the rest of us, the rest of the HSCOs—I still call myself a HSCO—is there is only one Head Start Collaboration Director who provides supports to all states that has AIAN program and similarly for Migrant Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Director.

The AIAN Head Start Collaboration Office work closely with the HSCOs in the states with tribal and Alaska Native programs. The Migrant Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office work closely with the states that have large population of migrant seasonal families. The AIAN and Migrant Seasonal Collaboration Offices regularly exchange state information among HSCOs in other states.

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So as Khari mentioned, that the Head Start Collaboration Offices were funded through 2007 Head Start Act, 642B to be exact. In the Act, it clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of Head Start Collaboration Offices. Along with the other roles and responsibilities, one of the most important responsibilities of the lead agency receiving the collaboration grant is to ensure that the collaboration director has a sufficient authority to fulfill all the legislative requirement laid out in the 2007 Head Start Act.

This means that the HSCO should be invited to the meetings where the decision of early childhood is happening and HSCO should have a clear voice to represent Head Start in those meetings. The state should make sure the HSCO has sufficient authority to fulfill all the legislative requirement of the Act. It won't happen if the HSCOs are not placed in the state agency high enough to have an impact on decision making or policymaking.

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Who decides where the HSCOs will be located? The funds goes to the governor's office, and the governor or his or her appointee decides where the offices will be housed. They can be in the Department of Education. They can be in the Department of Health and Human Services, or a university, or a governor's office, or any other place.

As you can see from this Venn diagram, that majority of the state collaboration offices are in Department of Early Learning or Early Education. This is the data we collect annually from the Head Start Director from their annual report. The location of the collaboration offices can also change when the state early care and education structures change, such as a consolidated early learning department is established, and the programs are moved from one department to the other.

When I was the Idaho Head Start Collaboration Director, I was housed in the Department of Health and Human Services. Childcare program, Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting program, MIECHV, were also in the Department of Health and Welfare. And it became very easy for me to just go down a floor to the CCDF administrator Office—CCDF Administrator's office, and talk to her about how Head Start can provide support to childcare program and vice versa. I even combine my advisory board with the Childcare Advisory Council to do the—to do mutual meetings and joint decision making. Once again, like Khari mentioned, collaboration at its best.

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A little bit about the demographic of the HSCOs. Despite of the importance of their work, the turnover is very frequent among Head Start Collaboration Office Directors. About 14 Head Start Collaboration Offices Directors are new to this position since a year, year and a half. As a matter of fact, Hawaii has just hired their Head Start Collaboration Office Director.

The position was vacant for quite some time. Knock on wood, at this moment, we are 100 percent staffed, all the Head Start—all the states have Head Start Collaboration Office

Director. But, as you can see from this map, that there is some longevity in, in this position. Some of the Head Start Directors are even here more than 15 years.

One of the biggest challenge of HSCOs or the Head Start Collaboration Office phase is the fixed grant funding. The HSCOs' grants are fixed by the 2007 Head Start Act. Hopefully it will be addressed when the Act is reauthorized in future. Most of the Collaboration Offices are only a staff of one, in which the director, him or herself, is there.

Some programs or some states are lucky enough to have admin support, or a deputy, per se, to, to—depending upon how that state contribute to the grant that ACF gives for the collaboration offices. But majority of the states have only one person in office.

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Why are the Head Start collaboration offices important? Despite its federal to local program structure, the Head Start community recognizes that the states play an important role in the formulation and implementation of policies and initiatives that affect low-income children and families. Collaboration on behalf of children and families is one of the Head Start's highest priorities.

So let me dive in some details of why the HSCOs' work is so important. So HSCOs work—I'll touch on some of the points on this slide, I will not give all the detail, but some, just highlight some of the important points—the HSCOs work tirelessly to strengthen the early childhood system in their state.

How do they do that? They facilitate partnership among early childhood programs, agencies and stakeholders such as Head Start, childcare providers, state education department, health agencies. They also do policy alignment, collaboration office work to align policies across different early childhood program and agencies.

They do resource coordination, although HSCOs have a very limited resources, but collaboration offices help coordinate funding and resources from other sources such as federal, state, local, maximize their impact on early childhood program and services. They improve access to services and support.

How do they do that? They do outreach, they do education, they provide support to Head Start agencies to do the outreach efforts to educate families about available services and supports in the state. They do resource mapping: collaboration offices conduct resource mapping to identify available early childhood services support in there within the state.

This information is then used to create comprehensive directories or databases that families can easily access to find relevant services. Going back to my HSCO day in Idaho, I worked in Department of Health and Welfare—Health and Human Services, and the Health and Human Services Department was creating a web portal for the families.

There was one portal that has all the early childhood programs. So, I provided [unintelligible speech due to network issue] they are, they, they should be, in different committees, and one of the committee that they should be participating on is the Early Childhood Advising Council, so they should be part of that. So they provide support, they—some of the states are even, some of the directors are even leading that Advising Council.

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So, who the Head Start Collaboration Office work with? As I mention that they work with state agencies. State agency, some of the department or some of the programs and state agency can be child care, home visiting—maternal infant early childhood home visiting program—family support services programs, such as SNAP, WIC, CSCFP, EPSDT, Medicaid. Going back to my days in Idaho as a lab director, I worked—because of my health background—I worked very closely with those, with those health agencies such as Medicaid, EPSDT, CSCFP, to provide support to children and families, not only served by Head Start, but all the children in the state.

The—the HSCOs also work with other stakeholders in the state, such as Office of, Office of, Office of Refugee Settlement, McKenna Winter Liaison, Early Learning... They also help in—and I'll talk about a little later about development of early learning guidelines—they also work with other coalitions. They work with school district.

Head Start is very big on transition, so they provide support to families and children from transition from, school district to kindergarten. They work with disability partners, Office of Special Ed Programs, Part C, Part B, Infant Toddler Program, and of course they work with the local Head Start program in their state. They are the main clientele of the Head Start Collaboration Office.

Head Start Director, Collaboration Office Director meet with them on a regular basis, during their retreats, to gain knowledge: what is going on in their program and how can they better serve the local grantees. They work with state and National Head Start Association, very closely, attend their annual meetings to align their strategic plan with that.

Not so the—not to duplicate the effort, but to complement each other's efforts. They work with regional Head Start offices, so, that is, definitely, an important piece of Head Start collaboration office role is communicate with the regional offices. The regional offices meet with HSCOs on a regular basis as well.

The regional offices review their grant application, their budget, their needs assessment, and their strategic planning. They guide them in their work and also provide them information about the regional priorities and work with them. And of course, federal or central office of Head Start, Beth and I work very closely with the collaboration office directors.

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So, what do HSCO do? And I, I, I gave a little detail about who do they work with. And then, what are their main role or what are they doing on a day-to-day basis? So, they work with early care and education system. They help to crosswalk the Head Start regulation or childcare regulation.

When I was the HSCO in Head Start—when I was the HSCO in Idaho, one of the things that I led was, I gathered all the early childhood expert and wrote the early learning guidelines for the state, and revised them every five years. As I mentioned before, they participate on advis—State Advisory Council. They work on alignment effort in their state system. They work school district and Pre-K. They work very closely with the state education agencies to provide support in transition activities, and they provide support with children with disabilities and challenging behavior.

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Data system, although HSCOs don't have much funding to bring to the table, but they can bring the Head Start data to the table, as Khari mentioned before, ensure the data system includes Head Start data. They also have—they try to deliberately integrate Head Start data into the state data system. They serve a conduit between Head Start agency and state data system.

Although—the professional development is also an important role that HSCO plays—although they do not provide direct technical assistance to the grantee, but they can provide professional development activities to support Head Start grantees or even early childhood community in the state.

Going back to my days in Idaho, Collab Director, one of the things that my office did was to implement a statewide early childhood conference. It was called Early Years Conference. About 350 to 400 attendees attend that conference, and it was very well received, and people wait for that conference, every other year.

Although the state Head Start Collaboration Office are expected to address all the priorities areas over the course of their grant, they're not required to address all of them each year.

The role and focus of HSCO's work evolves with changes in state and national early childhood landscape. Such as, if expansion of preschool is happening in their state, or a state priority of inclusion of children with disabilities, or there's a political change that happened in the state, or there's some financing change that happened in the state, the priority, or the work of schools can change. Shifting our priorities from legislations or regulation, if there are new initiatives coming from Office of Head Start, that can also change the day-to-day work, or the priorities, or the role of HSCOs, or their emphasis, per se, per year, for that year.

I can talk about what they don't do. Head Start collaboration office directors, they don't supervise, manage, or monitor Head Start program or grant recipient for compliance, or

they do not provide any oversight. They do not interpret federal performance standards or policies. And lastly, they do not engage in the lobbying activities.

This is my, my part of the talk. I think it's a quick rundown of some of the activities HSCOs do, but this is not at all, this is just the tip of the iceberg. I think they do a lot more, on a day-to-day basis. Thank you so much, Beth, you can take it from here.

Beth Caron: Thank you so much, Omair, for that great overview of the Head Start Collaboration Office Grants, and thank you, Khari, for, as always, your great energy and informative and inspiring context that you've put to this work. I am very lucky to be able to be working with both of these gentlemen and their wealth of knowledge and expertise.

My name is Beth Caron, and I am the State Systems Specialist in the Office of Head Start in the central office in D.C. I come to this role with a variety of experiences supporting both states and governors in their efforts to build and enhance state systems of early care and education. I want to give you a little bit more detail about how we support the collaboration offices, and the—and the—the directors of those offices and also how OHS approaches the alignment between Head Start and state systems more broadly.

As Omair mentioned, the collaboration grants are overseen by the regional offices. There are 12 regional offices, and there are liaisons in each of those offices who award the Head Start collaboration grants. They meet regularly with collaboration directors, they review their progress, and they work with them to offer ongoing support.

Omair and I meet with those regional offices on a regular basis to consider how Head Start policies and state initiatives intersect to impact Head Start programs, and in turn, how Head Start programs can impact state systems. In addition to the support that they receive from the regional offices, Omair and I meet with them regularly and provide direct support to the HSCOs through a number of different mechanisms.

We answer questions as they come in, we provide supports and resources, we have virtual meetings once a month, we have monthly office hours where we just have an open discussion—if anyone needs anything from us, we're there and available to them—and we have regular in person convenings. Those meetings we use, we bring all the HSCOs together, we share updates from the office, as well as discussing what's working well, brainstorming strategies, and addressing challenges as they arise.

Omair and I are both located in the policy and the planning division within the central office. While Omair has the primary responsibility of supporting HSCOs on a day-to-day basis, I work alongside him, but I also work on state level policy issues that affect Head Start more broadly. I also try to keep up on, as best I can, the state and national trends and initiatives that may be affecting young children and their families across the nation.

As you can imagine, that's a continual effort because it's a very moving target. There's a lot of changes happening across the nation, that we need to keep up with so that we know how

state systems and Head Start might align and support one another. As you heard from both Khari and Omair, the HSCOs collaborate with a multitude of policymakers, program implementers, and stakeholders throughout their states on a wide variety of issues.

You can imagine how challenging this is, given that there's only one person in most cases in an office who is responsible for all of the things that are laid out in the Head Start Act, and all of the ways in which Head Start might intersect with state early care and education.

It'll illustrate it on this slide, you'll see some of the many issues and partners that—that intersect between Head Start and state systems, but these are only some of the examples, because as Omair and Khari both pointed out, the priorities may shift.

They shift based on a number of different factors, including Head Start's priorities, state priorities, regional priorities, political landscapes, shifting offices—all kinds of different factors influence, the direction that Head Start collaboration offices might need to go, which also means they need to be experts at pivoting, which is really an important skill.

We often describe the ISCO directors as knowledge brokers and collaborators, who bring people together, they build bridges, and they help fit all the puzzle pieces together to provide a comprehensive picture of what supports and services can look like for Head Start children and families. But to do this, as Omair and Khari both mentioned, they must be at the table, right?

HSCO directors have to be at the table when important early care and education policies are being discussed, when decisions are being made, and when programs and services are being implemented. Elevating the role of Head Start collaboration offices and ensuring that they're at the table to inform these important state policy decisions and discussions is really an important priority for the Office of Head Start.

This is part of why this webinar today is kicking off a campaign where we can really make sure we're emphasizing the importance of their roles and the intersection between Head Start and state systems.

One example of an important policy trend that occurred in states that you heard from both Khari and Omair in their comments is the expansion of state preschool or Pre-K programming. States are creating and expanding mixed delivery systems in which children can receive preschool program services in a variety of settings, including Head Start and childcare, for example. Mixed delivery systems are really important because they provide families with options, and those options can best meet their needs and the needs of their children.

By engaging with state expand—preschool expansion efforts, collaboration directors can help states in, to tap into the rich history of equity, equality, and family centered comprehensive services that Head Start programs have historically offered. And at the same

time, they can ensure that Head Start remains a viable option to support children and families with the greatest need in our nation.

Similarly, Head Start collaboration offices can expand the reach of Head Start by partnering with others, like the McKinney Vento liaisons that you heard Omair reference. These folks are responsible for supporting families who are, who have children experiencing homelessness. Collaboration directors can, can partner with them to bring additional supports and resources to the families while also providing much needed stability, which in turn assists the McKinney Vento program staff in meeting their goals as well, so a really good example of a relationship that's mutually beneficial to both partners.

States are also exploring ways to integrate Head Start data into comprehensive early learning data systems, so that policymakers can use the best available data to inform their policies and practices. By bringing Head Start data into the larger data system efforts, stakeholders and policymakers can more accurately identify community needs and gaps in services so that they can develop the most efficient and effective policies for the families in their states.

There are many other natural opportunities for intersection between Head Start and SAIT systems as well, such as providing inclusive opportunities in high quality programs for young children with disabilities, intersecting with health systems to ensure that children have adequate health care, including dental care, you heard the example that Khari mentioned at the—at the top of the—the conversation around bringing, dental care to, to rural populations. A really tricky, complicated problem that takes a lot of partnership and negotiation and, and advocating on behalf of children, across the state to make sure those kinds of things happen.

Omair also mentioned partnering with refugee and resettlement entities, which can be a really important support for children of refugee families who are in, in Head Start programs. Head Start also intersects with state workforce and provincial development initiatives, including state workforce registries, and working to get Head Start part of those—Head Start staff being part of those workforce registries, and aligning workforce efforts across multiple sectors, including childcare and state Pre-K. And credentialing efforts to make sure we all have the workforce that we need that's trained and supported in working with our children and families.

Head Start can also help intersect with systems like state background check systems to ensure that all of the staff who work with Head Start children are properly vetted. Those systems are unique in each state, and so it needs someone at the state level who represents Head Start but can also navigate and negotiate a system that wasn't designed by or for Head Start in particular. Those ... Head Start collaboration partners can also partner with childcare licensing and subsidy policies and overall childcare quality initiatives, in general.

So, while we're here supporting the Head Start collaboration offices, we're also continually thinking about how Head Start intersects with and integrates into a larger fabric of early

care and education systems and services across the country, so that we all can work together to better serve our nation's children and families.

On our next slide, you'll see the contact information, where you can see the links as well, to where you can find more information on the collaboration offices. This is also where we'll post the recording from this webinar, and we also have information on there about the individual collaboration directors, but also highlights from information that we've gathered from their annual reports, as well as many of the partners and relationships that you'll see that they're connecting with.

We're going to be overhauling that website a little bit. So, keep an eye on it. Be watching as we make some important changes to make it a little bit more navigable. We want it to be a good resource for folks where you can come and learn more about collaboration offices and the work that we're doing to support them.

I hope you gained some insight into the value of the collaboration offices and the importance of the work that Head Start is trying to do to integrate Head Start more into early care and education systems. I join Director Garvin and Omair in thanking you for spending this time with us today.

Now I'll turn it back to Director Garvin who can close us out.

Khari: Well, thank you so much, Beth. Beth, thank you. To Omair, thank you for allowing me to share this space with you. To everyone, there's almost 300 people, I think, logged in across the country, which includes, of course, the great island of Puerto Rico. We are so thrilled to have everyone participating today. Thank you for carving out time.

This is just the beginning. We've got a lot more to share over the course of the year and hope that you'll join us. Special thanks to our collaboration offices and those special, special directors out there who are doing tremendous work every day.

We are adjourned now, but we hope to do it again soon. So long, everyone.