

Ongoing Staff Training and Development

Including Head Start's Family Service Worker Training and Credentialing Initiative

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Staff development is an ongoing activity designed to increase the level of competence and expertise of staff in the work environment and in personal interactions with others in the workplace and the community. It is also an effective way to empower staff, parents, and volunteers to gain a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for themselves, both professionally and personally.

The Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion stated, "The quality of services must be a first priority." (*The Report of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, Executive Summary, Page vi.*) Step one toward achieving this goal is to focus on creating a learning community within Head Start that supports continual training and development. The committee highlighted the following principles:

- All staff should have the knowledge and expertise required to fulfill effectively their job responsibilities
- Continued efforts should be made to recruit staff from the community and to develop the skills needed in the community
- Training should be on going and structured to include observation and feedback
- Whenever possible, training should be linked to college credit and should lead to degrees or other recognized credentials
- Training and resources should be made available to support a differentiating staff model with various levels of qualifications, roles, responsibilities, and compensation
- All staff should take initiative and personal responsibility for their own professional growth and should be offered ample opportunities and support for career advancement.
- There should be sufficient levels of supervisory staff available to provide ongoing and regular support to staff
- Caseloads and child-staff ratios should be at sufficient levels to encourage ample opportunities for staff-parent and staff-child interactions

To implement these principles, the Advisory Committee stated that, "Every Head Start program should have a staffing plan that addresses staff qualifications, job descriptions, staffing levels and linkages to education and training that will allow staff to advance through various roles with increasing levels of responsibility and compensation." (*The Report of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, Part II, A Renewed Vision: Advisory Committee Recommendations, Page 21.*)

Head Start's Family Service Worker Training and Credentialing Initiative: An Example of an Organized Professional Development Plan

The goal of the Family Service Worker Training and Credentialing Initiative is to improve the effectiveness, quality, and outcomes of family service workers employed by local Head Start programs. Family service workers play a critical role in developing and supporting the implementation of Head Start's family partnership process. Through this process, the family of each enrolled child has opportunities to develop and implement an individualized plan of services based on their interests and needs. In many instances, the quality of support received by families correlates with the training and qualifications of the program's family service workers.

Information Memorandum ACYF-IM-HS-01-08 informs Head Start and Early Head Programs about efforts to enhance the preparation, ongoing training and effectiveness of Head Start family service workers. This effort complements a variety of other initiatives to strengthen Head Start programs. These include major efforts to improve the training and education of classroom teachers and other staff and managers, ongoing investment to enhance staff compensation, and new work to improve child outcomes.

The preparation, training and effectiveness of Head Start family service workers are enhanced through the Competency Goals and Indicators for Head Start staff working with families.

Competency Goals and Indicators for Family Service Workers

1. *Establish mutually respectful partnerships with families to enhance the quality of their lives and their communities.* Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Conduct outreach, recruitment, and enrollment
- Provide orientation on philosophy of program and services provided;
- Establish and maintain ongoing partnerships based on trust with families
- Communicate effectively using appropriate verbal and nonverbal messages and reflective listening skills
- Implement strategies including home visits to learn about families and the changing community

2. *Support families' efforts to reach their goals.* Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Develop strength-based assessments with families that describe their goals, strengths, resources, and support networks, as well as necessary services and supports
- Develop, in partnership with the family, an individualized family plan
- Facilitate families' problem-solving and teach problem-solving skills
- Coach, consult, educate, and utilize counseling skills, where appropriate
- Advocate for the family and support them in advocating for themselves
- Follow-up with the family on the progress toward meeting their goals and any needed revisions to the plan
- Assist with transitions to other programs, communities, and schools.

3. Offer parents opportunities to be involved in group activities, including policy groups and educational activities based on interest and need. Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Identify common interests and needs of parents in order to plan appropriate activities
- Work with parent groups on group formation, group processing, and leadership
- Provide and/or coordinate training and educational opportunities for parents
- Engage parents in volunteering, community service, and other ways of contributing to program activities and services.

4. Provide opportunities for children and families to participate in family literacy activities and services. Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Work with other program staff to support interactive literacy activities between parents and their children
- Provide training for parents in how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children
- Assist parents as adult learners to recognize and address their own literacy goals
- Link and support parents in literacy training that contributes to self-sufficiency.

5. Coordinate and integrate Head Start services in order to enhance effectiveness. Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Serve as a productive team member on an interdisciplinary team of professionals
- Participate in and facilitate case conferences to promote service integration
- Apply knowledge of health, mental health, disabilities, and child development in order to ensure holistic service delivery
- Promote and support parent involvement and leadership throughout the program.

6. Support families in accessing other community resources. Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Research and keep up-to-date on program and community resources
- Analyze match of community resources to family needs and identify unmet family needs
- Refer families to community resources and follow-up on the effectiveness of referrals
- Promote community partnerships that will improve supports to families.

7. Assist families in crisis. Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Listen to families and assess the crisis situation
- Take active steps to ensure the safety of all involved
- Decide when to intervene and when to refer a family
- Identify (with the family) options, resources, and consequences to address the crisis
- Support families in making decisions and taking active steps to resolve current crises and be prepared to address future crises

8. *Respect and respond competently to the culture, traditions, lifestyle, language, and values of each family and community.* Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Be knowledgeable about and sensitive to each family's values, beliefs, traditions, cultural influences, makeup, and circumstances
- Work with families representing different cultures using a culturally competent and flexible approach
- Identify and reflect on personal values, experiences, and biases that facilitate and present barriers in working with certain groups of people.

9. *Contribute to effective program practices and maintain a commitment to professionalism.* Head Start staff working with families must demonstrate their ability to do the following:

- Perform record-keeping and internal and external reporting tasks in a timely and objective fashion
- Effectively utilize supervisory professional development and technical assistance resources to improve competence
- Contribute to and participate in strategic planning, program self-assessment and other efforts to improve program services and agency responsiveness to families
- Make decisions and act based on family support principles, theories, practices, and code of ethics
- Articulate an awareness of self, values, and ethics as they impact on work with families
- Maintain professional boundaries and confidentiality.

These Competency Goals and Indicators may be utilized by local Head Start programs as they review and update job descriptions, qualification standards, and guide the selection, training, and supervision of family service workers.

Local programs should assess their current policies, practices, management systems, and use of resources to support high quality family and community partnership services. Programs should:

1. Utilize the Competency Goals and Indicators for Head Start staff working with families, to review the program's job descriptions, qualification standards, and criteria for recruitment, selection, supervision, and evaluation of family service workers.
2. Review the present opportunities and supports for initial preparation and ongoing professional development of family service workers, including the availability, quality, and financial support for competency-based, credit-bearing training, and longer-term opportunities for career development and pursuit of academic degree programs.
3. Examine and identify opportunities for improvement in the compensation, staff/family worker ratios, staffing patterns, working conditions, and career development opportunities provided for family service workers in local programs.

Professional Development Plans

To support the ongoing professional development of staff, the Head Start management team is responsible for developing and carrying out a professional development plan for **all** staff (including family service workers), policy groups, parents, volunteers, and others involved in the operation of the Head Start program.

There are two types of professional development plans – plans for individual staff and program-wide plans designed to address the training needs of all program employees.

- Although the *Head Start Act* only requires individual professional development plans for classroom staff, best practice dictates that individual training plans should be created in consultation with each staff member and should be regularly evaluated for their impact on staff effectiveness.
- In their development, program-wide plans should be created collaboratively among members of the program's management team, and make use of information from individual staff development plans, information obtained from ongoing staff monitoring, staff performance appraisals, program self assessments, monitoring results, program goals, and national initiatives.

Earlier in Head Start's history, programs were encouraged to create Career Development Committees, comprised of staff representing all positions and disciplines in the program. The purpose of the Committee was to provide direct input from staff, at all levels, into the program's professional and career development planning, and to offer input into the use of scarce human and financial resources. Programs may wish to consider the value of re-creating this committee as a strategy to get input from and buy-in into the notion of professional development planning.

A good training plan contributes to the development, skills, and knowledge needed to operate a successful and effective Head Start program, one that fully meets Head Start Program Performance Standards and the program's goals and objectives. Development of individual and program-wide training plans should be an integral part of the program's management process.

The Training Plan

A well-developed training plan can be extremely beneficial to programs, especially when referred to and used on a regular basis. It facilitates the development of a learning community within the program. It is important, therefore, to decide how a training plan will be implemented and integrated into the overall program management and operations.

A training plan outlines what training will take place, who will benefit, and how, when, and where the training will be conducted. Learning in Head Start, however, should be an ongoing process, and one that is available in a variety of ways to everyone in the program. Staff

development opportunities should come in many different forms and be used for different purposes.

Depending on its purpose, training can be formal or informal, costly or inexpensive, intensive or casual. Learning can take place on the job, in the classroom, in a group setting such as staff meetings or supervisor-staff discussions, or at special training conferences. Training can be provided by a supervisor, a program specialist, an outside expert, a training consultant, or a mentor. In addition, training plans need to include a variety of learning experiences so that they can meet different needs. The learning strategy may vary according to several factors, such as:

- Learning style of the participant(s)
- Number of participants
- Prior experience and/or education level of the participant(s)
- Type of skill or information to be presented.

Sometimes providing information through a lecture or workshop will meet a learning need. In other circumstances, intensive practice and feedback sessions to build participant skills and confidence may be required.

Steps for Building a Training Plan

The following steps can help programs develop an effective training plan:

Step 1: Determine the Needs of the Program

Review the Head Start program, particularly the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the organization. Look for areas where learning opportunities can increase staff competence, enrich the program, and improve administration of the program.

Step 2: Describe the Expected Outcomes of Training

Describe how the training will benefit Head Start staff, volunteers, parents, children, or the organization.

Step 3: Set Training Priorities

Make a list of what staff development is needed. Review the list and rank learning needs according to their importance, keeping in mind the availability of time and resources.

Step 4: Identify Training Options, Resources Available, and Cost Estimates

Examine the list of staff development needs and determine what resources are necessary to conduct the training. Seek out and identify different options and resources available to produce specific learning outcomes. Then estimate the cost of each option.

Step 5: Prepare a Training Budget and Allocate Funds

Decide which training options will be used. Estimate the costs of each training option. Prepare a detailed training budget.

Step 6: Prepare the Final Training Plan

Write a comprehensive training plan accompanied by a narrative description to provide additional background information. In this final plan, include details such as learning objectives, delivery strategies, and costs.

Step 7: Implement the Training Plan

Prepare a schedule, assign staff responsibilities, and adopt strategies that will ensure the training is conducted according to the plan.

Step 8: Evaluate the Staff Development Event

Assess each learning event in terms of planning, presentation, and effectiveness. Evaluation should take place both immediately following the event and several weeks or months later, to see whether it accomplished its objectives.

Step 9: Provide Follow up

After evaluating the learning event, it may be useful to provide follow-up. The need for follow-up training is revealed when (1) the learning objectives have not been met, (2) staff requires additional information, and (3) other staff will benefit from successful training.

Step 10: Evaluate the Training Plan

Evaluation of the training plan will reveal whether the overall learning objectives were met. This will help determine whether the training strategy was successful and what adjustments, if any, need to be made to the plan or the implementation process.

References:

Adapted from ACYF-IM-HS-01-08

Adaptations from *Developing A Head Start Training Plan*, Research Assessment Management, Inc., Under Contracts 105-90-1513 and 105-93-1571 of the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1994