

Appendix A-1: Program Recruitment Letter with Project Overview & FAQs

THE URBAN INSTITUTE 2100 M STREET, NW. WASHINGTON D.C. 20037

[Date]

Dear [Name of Program Director/Executive Staff],

We are writing to invite you to participate in a telephone survey about Head Start and Early Head Start programs' experiences with the new school readiness goal requirement. The purpose of the survey is to learn how programs establish and implement their school readiness goals, how they measure progress toward these goals, and how the requirement is affecting program planning and operations. The survey is part of a study being conducted by the Urban Institute, a private non-profit research organization. The study is sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families.

Because Head Start and Early Head Start programs are so diverse, it is important to interview individuals from a wide range of programs. Your [Head Start/Early Head Start] program was specifically selected to represent others across the country with similar characteristics so we hope you will agree to participate. Specifically, we would like to conduct a telephone survey with the person in your management team who played the lead role in establishing your school readiness goals and is knowledgeable about school readiness goals and related data in your [Head Start/Early Head Start] program. These interviews will last approximately 45 minutes and will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for the person participating. We are able to offer each person participating in the telephone survey a \$25 token of appreciation for their time.

We want to emphasize that the study is not designed as an evaluation of your program's compliance with the requirements. Rather, it is designed to provide information to the Office of Head Start, Congress, and other key stakeholders to help inform future policy, technical assistance, and training efforts. (See enclosed fact sheet for additional information about the study).

Someone from our research team will contact you by phone in the next two weeks to answer any questions you have about the study or the Urban Institute, and to discuss the possibility of your program's participation in the telephone interviews. In the meantime, if you want to contact us, please do not hesitate to reach out to Monica via e-mail (mrohacek@urban.org) or phone (202.261.5425). We look forward to speaking with you soon.

Best Regards,

Monica Rohacek & Heather Sandstrom
Co-Principal Investigators

This information collection is voluntary and will be used to learn how Head Start and Early Head Start programs establish and implement their school readiness goals. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this collection is 0970-XXXX and expires XX/XX/XXX.

Project Overview

In Fall 2012, the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) awarded the Urban Institute a two-year contract to conduct a study on how Head Start programs are interpreting and implementing new school readiness goal requirements. The purpose of this descriptive study is to explore how the requirement to set school readiness goals may affect Head Start program functioning, program quality, and ultimately, outcomes for the children served by the Head Start program. Specifically, we seek to better understand the process through which local programs define, measure, and communicate school readiness goals, as well as how they use these goals in program planning or evaluation.

The study involves a telephone survey with Head Start and Early Head Start grantees (in Fall 2013) followed by site visits (in Winter 2014) to a subset of the grantees involved in the phone interviews. The telephone interviews will be conducted with lead staff from approximately 90 grantees; the two-day site visits will include interviews and/or focus groups with program staff, oversight boards, key stakeholders, and parents in 12 sites. Grantees will be selected for the study to encompass a wide variety of program characteristics and diverse policy and community contexts.

The telephone survey and site visits will address the following research questions:

- What school readiness goals do Head Start and Early Head Start programs set?
- What does the process of setting school readiness goals look like?
- How do programs use and analyze data to monitor progress on goals?
- How do programs report progress on goals?
- How do grantees use school readiness goals and data to inform program planning and improvement efforts?

The study will result in the following major products:

- A conceptual model that depicts the process of setting school readiness goals and the use of those goals to drive program planning and improvement.
- A final report that presents key research findings about school readiness goals and Head Start program functioning, drawing upon and synthesizing the data collected from each of the two research components.
- Two, short research briefs drawing on key themes in the final report.
- Survey items for possible inclusion in a future national survey or data collection instrument to gather follow-up information from Head Start and Early Head Start programs on how they define, prioritize, implement, measure, and report on school readiness goals.

Study results are expected in 2014. The Federal Project Officer and point of contact is Mary Mueggenborg (mary.mueggenborg@acf.hhs.gov)

Answers to Some Commonly Asked Questions:

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to learn from Head Start and Early Head Start Programs about their experiences implementing the new school readiness goal requirements.

Who is sponsoring this study?

The study is sponsored by the Office for Research, Planning and Evaluation, in the Administration for Children and Families, which is a division within the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

What is the Urban Institute?

The Urban Institute is a non-profit and nonpartisan social and economic policy research organization based in Washington, DC. We contract with government agencies, private agencies and philanthropic organizations to produce evidence-based research on a wide variety of topics relating to social and economic issues.

Is this an evaluation?

This is not an evaluation, and your participation is completely voluntary. Neither your decision to participate nor your responses will affect funding for your program.

What if we haven't started the goal-setting process yet?

We are hoping to speak with grantees at all stages of the goal-setting process, so we still very much welcome your participation. If this is the case, we will be asking many questions that require you to project or describe your plans for the future.

Will you be asking questions about the goal setting process in both Head Start and Early Head Start programs?

Yes, the telephone survey will collect information from both Head Start and Early Head Start programs. If your grantee operates both Head Start and Early Head Start, the invitation letter should specify which program is the focus of our questions.

Who in the grantee agency should respond to the telephone survey? What kinds of questions will be asked?

We would like to speak to the person who played a lead role in setting school readiness goals and has knowledge about both the process of setting goals and using data to track goals. This person could be the program director, an assistant director, the education services manager, or whoever played the lead role. We will ask you questions about the process of setting school readiness goals in your program (e.g., who was involved and how they were involved, any challenges in the process, what resources were helpful) and your opinions regarding the new requirements. We will also ask some questions relating to how you track progress toward your goals, how you analyze data and report on progress, and how school readiness goals and data inform program planning and improvement efforts.

Is the information shared private?

The information provided will be kept private and will not be shared with anyone outside the research staff working on the study, except as required by law. Your name and the program's name and specific location will never be identified in any reports or in any discussions with the government or public.

What do survey participants get for participating?

We will offer each participant for the telephone interview \$25.