

Appendix A: Conceptual Model and Description of the Head Start Designation Renewal System

The Community Actors

Head Start Incumbents (see as purple column to the left): This group of actors represents the organizations that have Head Start grants at the start of the DRS cycle. The DRS process will sort these incumbents into those that do not have to compete to maintain their grant (top of purple column), and those whose grants have been designated for competition (bottom of purple column). Among those who do not have to compete in the current DRS cycle are two sub-groups: those who were not evaluated in the current DRS cycle and those who were evaluated but did not have to compete.

Potential Non-Incumbents (seen as a green cycle at the top of the page): The potential non-incumbents are represented as a cycle because they are not a stagnant pool. Non-incumbent organizations that will choose to compete will emerge from the existing environment, which is itself a cycle of change within the local community – the interested parties, partners, funders, the economy, state/local rules and regulations – and information, rules, resources, and implementation of the DRS and Head Start at the federal level. Not all potential incumbents would be interested in or suitable for every market, in every time period.

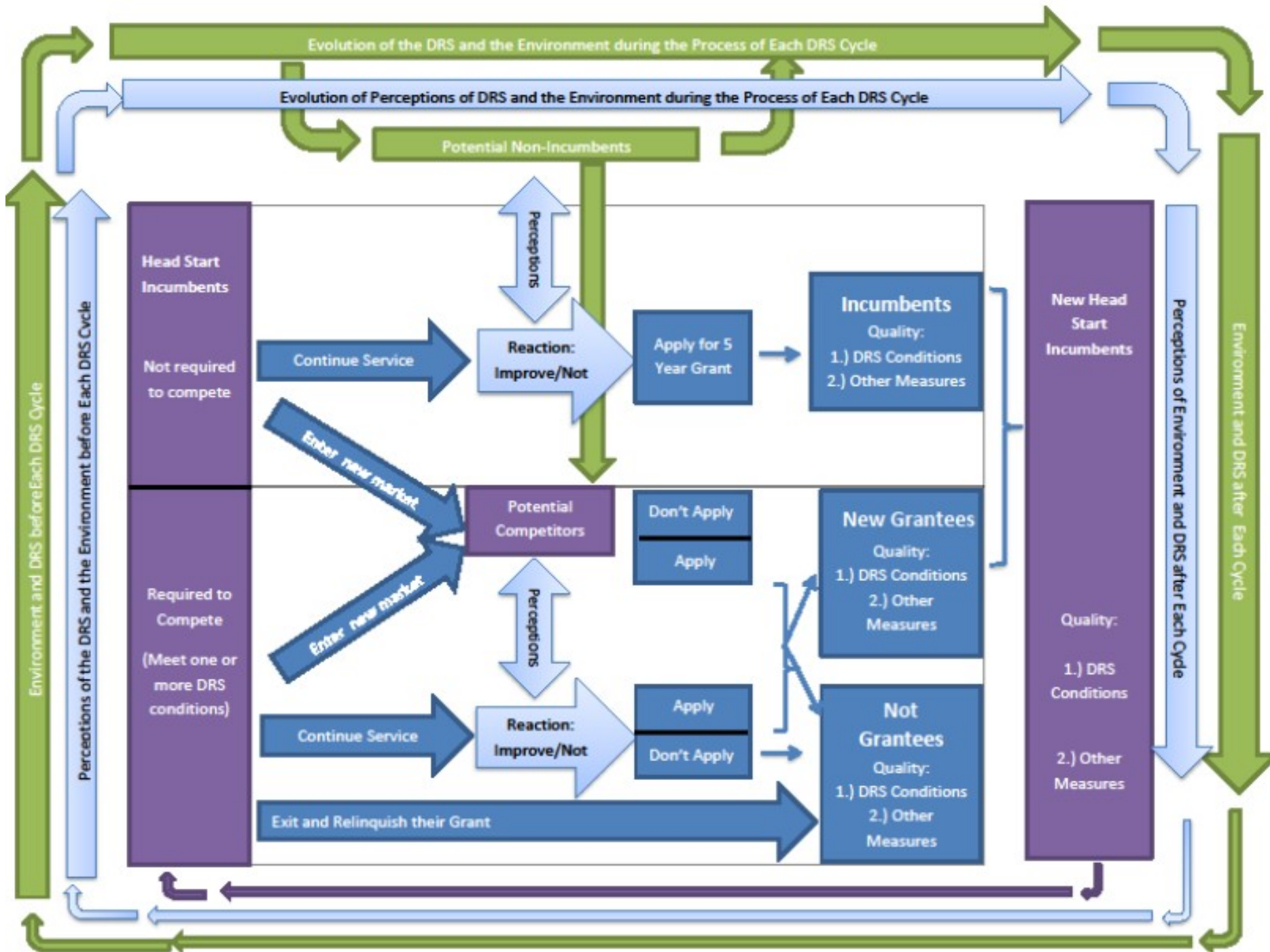
Potential Competitors (seen as the purple box toward the middle of the page): These are organizations that could be participating in the competition. As the blue “Enter New Market” arrows (coming from the left) and the green “Potential Non-Incumbents” (coming from the top) illustrate, there are essentially three sources for competitors: (1) incumbents that have been designated may choose to compete to retain their grants; (2) incumbents that have not been designated may choose to compete for additional service areas; and (3) non-incumbents may enter the market.

New Head Start Incumbents (seen as the purple column to the right): At the end of the DRS cycle, there are a new set of Head Start incumbents. These are both the old incumbents who did not have to compete in the current cycle, old incumbents who had to compete and maintained their grant awards, and new incumbents who have won grants for the first time. As the purple arrow at the bottom shows, these New Head Start Incumbents at the end of one DRS cycle become the Head Start Incumbents at the beginning of the next DRS cycle.

The DRS and Its Implementation Environment

The DRS and its implementation environment are represented together by the green arrows going around the edge of the page. In this way the DRS and its implementation environment are represented as an evolving cycle. This cycle attempts to capture the element of time at three points: before the DRS cycle begins (on the left side of the page), evolution of the DRS and the environment during the execution of the DRS, and the post-cycle environment. Because the cycle is constantly in motion, each of these three time periods exists in the same space as the others, but sets of incumbent grantees are experiencing different parts of the cycle at different times. For example, when the selection of New Head Start Incumbents from cohort 1 is made, these incumbents are experiencing the post-DRS cycle. At the same time, cohort 2 incumbents are experiencing the implementation of the DRS, while cohort 3 incumbents are experiencing the DRS as a pre-cycle – they know they will be in the assessment pool soon, but they are not there yet.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Head Start Designation Renewal System



The evolution of the DRS and its implementation environment as indicated at the top of the page is not meant to suggest that the reliability and consistency of implementation is variable. Instead, it is meant to represent changes at the federal level in how competition information may be distributed, what kinds of information about previous competitions becomes available, and the types of resources, training, and technical assistance provided by the Office of Head Start both for understanding and responding to the DRS and to address quality more broadly. It also represents other information, training, and technical assistance that will be provided by professional associations, state/local governments, and other community partners. Finally, it represents the evolution of the environment at the community level which occurs as just part of the natural cycle of communities and may or may not be occurring in response to the DRS itself.

Perceptions and Reactions

While the reality of the DRS and the changing environment are important, the perceptions of the actors and potential actors in the environment are just as important. The perceptions are represented as a cycle in the same way that the DRS is represented as a cycle (the light blue set of arrows around the page closer to the center than the green arrows). This is because the actors in the process will form evolving perceptions based on how and when they experience the DRS. As the environment changes, their perceptions about the DRS are likely to change as well. Perceptions are important in that they set the stage for actions. In essence, they become another layer of the environment.

In the middle of the figure, there are also light blue arrows representing perceptions and reactions to those perceptions. The perceptions arrows are two-way arrows between Potential Non-incumbents and Reaction (at the top) and Potential Competitors and Reaction (at the bottom). These two-way arrows represent the continuous feedback loop that occurs between potential non-incumbents/competitors observing the reactions occurring among competitors, and the incumbents observing the extent to which organizations enter competition for the first time or enter to compete in new ways. The incumbents are influenced by the perceptions of competition represented by the potential competitors, while the potential competitors are influenced by their perceptions of how likely they are to win if they choose to compete.

The “Reaction: Improve/Not” arrows represents the immediate result of incumbent perceptions. In theory, the DRS process will incentivize all incumbents to want to improve their programs whether they have been selected for competition or not. This arrow represents that choice, and encompasses all the decisions that could take place within that reaction such as seek technical assistance and training or not, read more about how to improve quality or not, make changes within their program or not, seek out additional resources and partnerships or not, etc.

Actions and Results

The dark blue arrows and boxes represent actions and results. The first set of arrows on the left side of the page, represent the set of actions that may be taken by the Head Start incumbents: continuing serving, entering a new market, or exit and relinquishing their grant.

As discussed under actors, the Head Start incumbents are sorted into two groups as a result of the DRS process – those that may renew for a 5-year grant without competition, and those that have been designated for competition. Also among the incumbents not designated for competition, are those who are not in the current DRS cycle. Those incumbents not designated for competition have two likely courses of action: (1) continue service (as indicated by the perpendicular arrow) and (2) enter a new market through the DRS competition. Incumbents not required for competition may both continue their present service and enter competition for a new market.

Incumbents that are required to compete have three likely courses of action: (1) continue service (as indicated by the perpendicular arrow) – eventually they have to decide whether or not to compete, (2) enter competition in a new market, or (3) exist and relinquish their grant – a formal process with the Office of Head Start where they give up their incumbent status before the competition takes place.

After reflecting on their perceptions and what they have learned in the “react” process, incumbents and potential competitors take the action of either applying or not applying for the available Head Start grants. Among those organizations that apply and secure the grant, they become “New Grantees.” Among those organizations that apply and do not secure a grant, those organizations become “Not Grantees.” The “New Grantees” plus the noncompeting incumbents become the new incumbents who will participate in the next round of the DRS cycle.