Attachment B: Discussion Guide for Representatives of Head Start Programs

Background

The following Discussion Guide is for use with representatives of Head Start (HS) programs in the *Head Start Connects: Individualizing and Connecting Families to Family Support Services* (HS Connects) project. Representatives of Head Start programs may include directors, the Manager for Family and Community Partnerships, family support staff, or other staff familiar with how the program coordinates family support services.

The purpose of the following discussion guide is to gather information that will be used in the identification of programs as potential case study sites. The programs eventually selected as case study sites will reflect variability in how they coordinate family support services and along dimensions that may include (but not necessarily be limited to) program size, structure, agency type, and population served. As such, the aim of the following discussion is to learn about how a given HS program coordinates family support services. Questions focus on the programs' processes as well as features of programs that may influence the coordination of family support services (e.g., staffing structure). At times, this will involve confirming information found in the Program Information Report (PIR) and asking staff to expand upon it.

Calls will be tailored according to the participants' roles and expertise. Multiple calls involving different staff may be needed if the program is complex or if there are several staff responsible for coordinating family support services. No more than two calls per program will take place; calls will end when we have gathered enough information to inform site selection but will not exceed one hour.

Discussions will be facilitated by a senior member of the research team and will include 2-3 representatives from a single Head Start program.

During each discussion, the topics below will be covered in varying depth, depending on participants' roles and expertise, as well as information gathered on previous calls.

Senior members of the research team serving as facilitators will:

1. Introduce members of the study team and ask participants to introduce themselves, describing their roles and responsibilities.

2. Provide a brief overview of HS Connects and summarize the purpose of the discussion, answering any clarifying questions.

Facilitate the discussion according to the guide below, ensuring that all relevant topics are covered but tailoring the discussion based on participants' roles and expertise, as well as information gathered on previous calls.

Discussion Guide
Section 1: Introduction and Overview

- Introductions by members of the research team.

- Invite participant(s) to introduce themselves and give a brief description of their program.

- Describe HS Connects as follows, tailoring the language depending on the type of staff participating in the call:

  o *Head Start Connects is a research study funded by the Administration for Children and Families and conducted by MDRC, MEF Associates, and NORC at the University of Chicago. The aim of the study is to build knowledge about how Head Start programs across the country coordinate family well-being support services for parents/guardians and tailor services to individual family needs. In the course of the study, we will review existing literature, develop a theory of change or conceptual model that will show how service coordination links to outcomes for children and families. We will also conduct in-depth case studies that will inform the creation of several design options for a large-scale study of Head Start programs' approaches to the coordination of family support services.*

  o *This discussion won't take more than one hour, and your participation is voluntary. If you need to leave at any time or don't want to answer certain questions, that's fine.*

  o *We will keep your responses private. Notes from our discussions will be for internal use only.*

  o *Finally, 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 information collection is 0970-0356 and the expiration date is June 30, 2021.*

- Explain the purpose of the call as follows:

  o *We have invited you onto this call today because your program was recommended by members of the study's advisory panel or our key informants. We're hoping to learn more about your program's approach to coordinating family support services for parents/guardians. As we get to know more about it, over this call and possibly one more, we may also invite your program to participate in HS Connects as a site for a case study of how you go about coordinating family support services.*

  o Follow-up call: *We have spoken with [staff] previously about your program. We are hoping to go into greater depth about some specific aspects of how your program coordinates family support services. The information we gather on this call and from similar calls with other programs will help us determine which programs to engage as sites for HS Connects' case studies.*

- Ask if the participants have any clarifying questions about HS Connects or the call

Section 2: Approach to Family Support Services

- I'm going to start by asking you some basic questions about your program. We've reviewed [PROGRAM NAME]'s PIR, and we want to confirm what we found. Or, if this information isn't accurate, please let me know. We understand that things may have changed, or the PIR data may not give the full picture.

    - Program structure: The PIR indicated that [PROGRAM NAME] is [information from PIR; e.g., "a Head Start grantee with 3 centers, with both Head Start and Early Head Start Services"]. Is that correct? Do you want to expand on that at all?
        - *If the program is part of a larger organization:* Can you tell me about the organization that your Head Start program is a part of? (*Probe:* organizational mission, structure)

    - Program size: The PIR showed that [PROGRAM NAME] serves [# from PIR] children/families. Is that correct? Do you want to expand on that at all? *(Probes: number of funded slots, types of funded slots)*

    - Staffing: The PIR showed that [PROGRAM NAME} has [# from PIR] staff members. Is that correct? Do you want to expand on that at all? *(Probes: types of staff, number in different positions)*

    - Support services: We see from the PIR that you deliver some services for parents/guardians on-site, including [information from PIR; e.g., "parenting education and asset building services"]. Is that correct? Are there any other services that [PROGRAM NAME] offers on-site? Are these services provided by HS program staff or community partners? What services are delivered off-site?

- How do you define family support services? What services fall into that category? *(Probe: do you think of parenting classes as being part of family support services?)*
    - *Follow-up:* For this study, we are defining family support services as family well-being support services for parents and guardians. This includes services like education, employment services, financial capability services, housing and food assistance, emergency or crisis intervention services, substance abuse treatment, physical health services, and mental health services.

- How would you describe [PROGRAM NAME]'s approach to coordinating family support services for parents/guardians? What are the components of your approach? (*probes: assessing parent/caregiver needs, meeting with HS staff, linking to services*) Which staff members are involved? (*probes: name; job title; responsibilities*)
    - What it looks like when it goes well? What are some of the challenges?

- The PIR listed the following data system, [data system name from PIR]. Is that correct? Do you use this data system to support the coordination of family support systems? *(Probe if yes: what parts of the process it is used for; Probe if no: name of the system, what parts of the process it is used for)*

- How does [PROGRAM NAME] go about assessing parent/guardians needs? *(Probes: timing and frequency of meetings with families; use of structured tools; reassessing needs over time; variation with different types of families)*

- How does [PROGRAM NAME] go about creating family partnership plans? Here I'm most interested in the aspects of the plans that relate to services for parents and guardians, not services for kids or leadership/advocacy activities. *(Probes: use of structured tools; reassessing family partnership plans; variation with different types of families)*

- How does [PROGRAM NAME] go about connecting parents/guardians to appropriate services? *(Probes: services delivered on-site by HS staff versus on-site by community partners versus services delivered off-site in the community; service availability, accessibility, and quality; variation with different types of families)*

- How and to what extent does [PROGRAM NAME] staff monitor whether parents/guardians are using services? *(Probes: data-sharing; communication with community agencies; using information to reassess and adjust family partnership plans)*

- How does [PROGRAM NAME] engage with the community? *(Probes: relationships (formal or informal) with community service providers or with community leaders; formal or informal networks or collaboratives; whether referrals are bidirectional)*
- Is there any other information about [PROGRAM NAME] that might be relevant for understanding how you coordinate family support services?

- Who, if anyone else, at [PROGRAM NAME] should we speak to in order to learn more about how you coordinate family support services? *(Follow-up: job title/role; Can you give us his/her contact information?)*

- Is there any relevant information we should be aware of for this program to be part of a research study? For example, who needs to approve the program's participation in a study?

Section 3: Conclusion
- Thank participant(s).

- Ask if participant(s) has anything to add or any additional questions.

- Explain that we may be reaching out for follow-up conversations as we narrow down to case study sites.