

# Attachment A: Discussion Guide for Key Informants

## Background

The following Discussion Guide is for use with Key Informants in the *Head Start Connects: Individualizing and Connecting Families to Family Support Services* (HS Connects) study. Key informants include regional, state, or local administrators; researchers; policy experts; representatives of national organizations; and/or technical assistance providers. They have been selected as key informants for their knowledge of Head Start and its coordination of family support services, as well as their familiarity with Head Start programs.

The purpose of these discussions is (1) to gather information about the range of HS programs' approaches to the coordination of family support services and (2) to solicit the names of programs that could potentially be candidates for inclusion in HS Connects as case study sites. Case study sites will collectively reflect variability in their approaches to family support services.

Discussions will be facilitated by a senior member of the research team.

Discussions will last no more than 90 minutes.

Senior members of the research team serving as facilitators will:

1. Introduce members of the study team and ask informants 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.
3. Facilitate the discussion according to the guide below, ensuring that all relevant topics are covered but tailoring the discussion based on informants' areas of expertise and backgrounds.

## Discussion Guide

### Section 1: Introduction and Overview

- Introductions by all members of the research team.
- Invite key informant(s) to introduce themselves and give a short summary of their work.
- Describe HS Connects as follows:
  - *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.*
- Explain the purpose of the call as follows:
  - *We have invited you onto this call today because we think, with your expertise, you can help us build our understanding of how Head Start programs coordinate family support services and identify Head Start programs that might be good candidates for inclusion in HS Connects as case study sites. We are looking to understand where and to what extent there is variation in how programs coordinate family support services.*
  - *This discussion won't take more than 90 minutes, and your participation is voluntary. If you need to leave at any time or don't want to answer certain questions, that's fine.*
  - *We will keep your responses private. Notes from our discussion will be for internal use only.*
  - *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.*
- Ask if the informants have any clarifying questions about HS Connects or the call

### Section 2: Approaches to Family Support Services

*Throughout our conversation, I'll ask you about how Head Start programs coordinate family support services. What I mean by that is how programs assess family needs, set goals with parents/guardians, individualize service recommendations and referrals according to families' needs, and follow-up with parents/guardians. We are particularly interested in service coordination for parents/guardians, not children. Thus, we are focused on family support services such as 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. In some cases, we know*

some Head Start programs deliver services on-site, like parenting classes; I'll be specific when I'm talking about on-site services.

- Across Head Start programs, how would you describe the “standard” or most common approach to coordinating family support services for parents/guardians? What are the various components of this approach? (Probe: for example, assessing families’ needs, setting goals, making referrals to services, following up, and reassessing needs)
  - Can you think of any specific programs that exemplify that approach?
- Where is there the most consistency in how Head Start programs coordinate family support services? What do programs tend to do the same way?
- Where is there the most variability in how Head Start programs coordinate family support services? What do programs tend to do differently? Are there certain components that some programs do and not others?
- Please think about specific programs that serve families with high or complex needs.
  - Can you name programs in this category that have a lot of services available on site or that are particularly well-equipped to address these needs? (Probe: please describe the program briefly; are these services provided by the HS program or a community partner)
  - Can you name programs in this category that have very few services available on site or few staff dedicated to coordinating family support services? (Probe: please describe the program briefly)
- Can you name specific programs that serve families with high or complex needs that have overall strong programs for working with parents and families to coordinate services? (Probe: please describe the program briefly)
- I’m going to go through some aspects of how programs might coordinate family support services and ask you to describe how programs vary in their approaches:
  - Assessing families’ needs:
    - What are the most common practices? (Probes: timing and frequency of meetings with families; use of structured tools; reassessing needs over time)
      - Can you name specific programs that use the(se) typical approach(es) to assessing families’ needs?
    - How do programs vary in assessing families’ needs? (Probes: timing and frequency of meetings with families; use of structured tools; reassessing needs over time)
      - Can you name specific programs that assess family needs in a unique way? (Probe: describe the unique practice)
  - Creating family partnership plans, specifically the aspects of plans that relate to parent/family well-being needs, preferences, services, and supports and that are targeted to the parent/guardian
    - What are the most common practices? (Probe: use of structured tools)

- Can you name specific programs that use the(se) typical approach(es) to creating family partnership plans?
  - How do programs vary in creating family partnership plans? (*Probe: use of structured tools*)
    - Can you name specific programs that create family partnership plans in a unique way? (*Probe: describe the unique practice*)
- Connecting families to appropriate services; for example, identifying services for parents/guardians and making referrals
  - What are the most common practices? (*Probes: what kinds of services provided on-site vs. in the community; which staff provide services on-site; how are referrals made: formal/informal referrals, use of “warm hand-offs” or other referral supports*)
    - Can you name specific programs that use typical approach(es) to connecting families to appropriate services?
  - How do programs vary in connecting families to appropriate services? (*Probes: what kinds of services provided on-site vs. in the community; which staff provide services on-site; how are referrals made: formal/informal referrals, use of “warm hand-offs” or other referral supports*)
    - Can you name specific programs that have unique practices related to connecting families to appropriate services? (*Probe: describe the unique practice*)
- Monitoring service referral and use
  - What are the most common practices? (*Probes: data-sharing, relationships with community agencies, communication directly with families*)
    - Can you name specific programs that use these typical approaches to monitoring service referral and use?
  - How do programs vary in monitoring service referral and use? (*Probes: data-sharing, relationships with community agencies, communication directly with families*)
    - Can you name specific programs that monitor service referral and use in unique ways? (*Probe: describe the unique practice*)
- Use of data systems
  - What are the most common practices or data systems?
    - Can you name specific programs that use these typical practices or use the most common data system(s)?
  - How do programs vary in their use of data systems?
    - Can you name specific programs that have unique practices or use particularly innovative systems? (*Probe: describe the unique practice or system*)
- Family support services structure
  - What are the most common ways programs are structured to coordinate family support services that are tailored to families’ needs? (*Probes: Staffing: number of staff, roles, part-time/full-time, caseload, other support staff; Physical layout*)

*and space: where are family support services offered; where do family support services staff meet with families; different types of programs)*

- Can you name specific programs that represent typical structuring to coordinate family support services?
- How do programs vary in the way they are structured to coordinate family support services? (*Probes: Staffing: number of staff, roles, part-time/full-time, caseload, other support staff; Physical layout and space: where are family support services offered; where do family support services staff meet with families*)
  - Can you name specific programs that are structured in a unique way to coordinate family support services? (*Probe: describe the unique practice*)
- To what extent does the coordination of family support services look the same or different in AI/AN Head Start programs? In migrant/seasonal Head Start programs?
  - Can you think of AI/AN programs whose approaches to family support services are especially interesting or unique? What are they?
  - Can you think of migrant/seasonal programs whose approaches to family support services are especially interesting or unique? What are they?
- Are there other important aspects of how programs coordinate family support services that we didn't talk about today? (*Probe if yes: can you name programs that approach [aspect] in the typical way? Programs that approach [aspect] in a unique way?*)

### Section 3: Recommendations for Case Study Sites

- Throughout our conversation, I've asked for the names of Head Start programs with different approaches to family support services. We may want to reach out to those programs to explore whether they would be a good fit for HS Connects' case studies. I want to run through the programs you mentioned quickly and get a bit more information about them, if possible.
  - Information to gather for each program identified in Section 2:
    - Name and location of program
    - Contact person's (director) name and contact information
    - Willingness to help with an introduction?
    - Anything else we should know about the program, especially as it relates to how they coordinate family support services or their ability/willingness to participate in a case study?

### Section 4: Conclusion

- Thank key informant(s)
- Ask if key informant(s) has anything to add or any additional questions
- Suggestions of other key informants who may be able to provide similar or more detailed information
- Review next steps, if any