Formative Data Collections for ACF Research

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Supporting Statement

Part B

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Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
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The purpose of this generic information collection (GenIC) is to support the development of the case study design and identification and exploration of Head Start programs to potentially participate in Head Start (HS) Connects as case study sites. HS Connects is a research project sponsored by Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) through a task order to MDRC and its subcontractors, MEF Associates and NORC at the University of Chicago.

This GenIC for HS Connects seeks to gather information about the coordination of family support services in Head Start programs for the purposes of (1) developing a better understanding of the range of ways in which family support services are coordinated and the factors that influence these processes; (2) soliciting recommendations for programs reflecting variability in how Head Start programs coordinate family support services; (3) identifying a subset of six of these programs for potential participation in-depth case studies (full OMB clearance will be sought for case studies and other data collection efforts under HS Connects); and (4) confirming program information from the PIR and exploring the feasibility of conducting case studies in six sites, including American Indian/Alaska Native or Migrant Seasonal Head Start programs.

B1. Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods

Two groups of participants will take part in tailored, semi-structured discussions, facilitated by members of the research team. Descriptions of each group, along with inclusion criteria and sampling methods, are described below.

- **Key informants:** Sampling for key informants will be purposeful. Selected for their knowledge of Head Start, its programs, and its coordination of family support services, we will seek 15 key informants, including regional, state, or local administrators; researchers; policy experts; representatives of national organizations; and/or technical assistance providers. In speaking with key informants who interact with Head Start programs in different ways, the project team will develop a thorough understanding of the range of processes that programs use to coordinate family support services. An initial list of potential key informants will be developed based on recommendations from the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), other staff in OPRE, and staff in the Office of Head Start, along with knowledge of the research team. The list will include 15 targeted key informants and up to 10 backups. As we gather information about people who know Head Start and have specific knowledge of its coordination of family support services, we may add individuals to the list; however, we will not interview more than 15 key informants in total.

- **Representatives of Head Start Programs:** From the list of programs generated through discussions with key informants, along with recommendations from the project's advisory board, stakeholder panel, and consultation with the COR, 12 programs will be purposefully selected for inclusion in information-gathering discussions. The research team seeks to identify programs that vary in how they coordinate family support services as well as aspects such as program size and structure. From each program, representatives targeted for participation in discussions will include administrators and other staff with knowledge of the coordination of family support services. We anticipate speaking with two to three representatives from each program. Ultimately, a subset of these programs will be recruited into the next phase of HS Connects under procedures described in a separate OMB package.

In the selection of key informants, Head Start programs, and their representatives, an alternative to the purposeful sampling strategies proposed would be to seek representative samples. However, this would be cost-prohibitive and not essential—or appropriate, in the case of identifying programs for such a small number of case studies—for achieving study goals.

B2. Procedures for Collection of Information

Members of the research team will contact potential participants and facilitate the semi-structured one-on-one or group discussions that comprise this GenIC. Detailed procedures follow.

Phase 1: Discussions with Key Informants:

- **Recruitment:** Members of the project team, including at least one senior member of the team, will contact each person on the list of potential key informants individually by e-mail, explaining the purpose of the project, describing the nature of the discussion, and inviting their participation (see Attachment C for e-mail template). The e-mail will include a project description (Attachment E). If the key informant agrees to take part in the call, a member of the project team will schedule a call at a time that is convenient to the participant.

  If an invited individual is unable to participate, the research team will ask whether another member of the individual's organization might be appropriate and available for a discussion, contacting and inviting suggested key informants as needed. If no alternative is given, the research team will contact a backup key informant.

- **Discussions:** A senior member of the research team will facilitate each call according to the Discussion Guide for Key Informants (Attachment A), tailoring the conversation according to participants' backgrounds and expertise. Topic areas specified in the discussion guide will be explored, and participants will be asked to identify any Head Start programs that they think would be appropriate for inclusion in HS Connects as case study sites. Each call will last no more than 90 minutes. A member of the research team will take detailed written notes on each call.

Phase 2: Discussions with Representatives from Head Start Programs

- **Recruitment:** Through discussions with the key informants, the project's advisory board and stakeholder panels, and consultation with the COR, a list of Head Start programs from which to sample programs for the second phase of discussions will be generated. Twelve programs that vary in how they coordinate family support services will be identified and targeted for inclusion. Members of the research team, including at least one senior member of the research team, will e-mail the director of each of the 12 programs, describing HS Connects, explaining the nature of the discussion, and inviting their participation or the participation of appropriate staff in a one-to-two video or phone calls (See Attachment D for e-mail template). The e-mail will include a project description (Attachment E), and will ask directors to identify a member or members of their staff that are most appropriate for the discussion; participants may include directors or other staff familiar with the program's coordination of family support services.

  If a program director declines participation, the research team will invite a comparable program from the list that maintains variability in how programs coordinate family support services, as well as general characteristics of the programs if possible, among the programs selected.

- **Discussions:** A senior member of the research team will facilitate each call according to the Discussion Guide for Representatives of Head Start Programs (Attachment B). One to two calls may be held with staff from each program. The purpose of the first call will be to gather information about how the program coordinates family support services. If, after one call, more detail is needed to inform whether a program would be a suitable case study site, we will request and host a follow-up call. During these follow-up calls, we will use the same Discussion Guide (Attachment B), focusing the conversation in areas where there are gaps in the research team's

understanding of the program's approach. Care will be taken to avoid redundancy and ensure that new, necessary information is being gathered on follow-up calls. Each call will last no more than 60 minutes. A member of the project team will take detailed written notes on each call.

B3. Methods to Maximize Response Rates and Deal with Nonresponse

Expected Response Rates

Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and we expect few issues with response rates. When members of the project team have conducted tasks like this for other similar projects, response rates for key informants in similar positions have been high. Key informants, many of whom have long careers researching, advocating for, or working in Head Start, have been eager to contribute their expertise to inform projects; we expect this to be the case in the current GenIC.

Similarly, we expect that most Head Start program directors whom we contact will agree to their program's participation in HS Connects information gathering calls. A small number may decline, most likely due to scheduling conflicts. When members of the project team have gathered information about Head Start programs previously for other research projects, which typically have had more extensive data collections, we have found that at least 50% (typically more) of the programs agree to participate. An example of such a project is Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions [0970-0356]).

Dealing with Nonresponse

We expect few issues with nonresponse for the current project. If a potential key informant does not respond to our e-mail request for a call, we will send a second request by e-mail. If we do not receive a response to our second e-mail, the team will follow up with a phone call, during which a member of the research team will use the e-mail template as a script. After these three attempts, we will not continue to pursue a response. Should any of the targeted key informants decline our invitation, we will ask if there are any other suitable staff at their organization who might be able to participate in a call instead. If none are offered, or if we receive no response from a targeted key informant, we will invite a backup from the initial list. We will speak with 15 key informants in total.

Likewise, if a Head Start program director does not respond to our e-mail request for a call, we will send a second request by e-mail, followed by a phone call (again, the e-mail template will be used as a script for the outreach call); no further attempts will be made if no response is received. If a program director does not respond or declines a program's participation, we will identify and invite a comparable backup from the list of candidate programs generated by key informants, the project's advisory and stakeholder panels, the COR, and the project team. In total, we will engage 12 Head Start programs, from which we anticipate speaking with 36 representatives.

Maximizing Response Rates

We will take several steps to help ensure a high rate of participation among key informants and Head Start program representatives, including the following:

- Targeted key informants and Head Start program representatives will be contacted by senior members of the research team who have substantial experience working closely with programs, as well as research and advocacy organizations, on previous projects. These researchers have had a high level of success in engaging individuals in discussions such as these.

- Our initial e-mails will emphasize the importance of participation and explain how the project will benefit Head Start programs and the early care and education field more broadly.

- Candidate Head Start programs will be identified by key informants, members of the project's stakeholder and advisory panels, and the COR. We expect that these recommendations will be based in part on their knowledge of a program's likelihood of participating.
- Calls will be scheduled at participants' convenience.

B4. Tests of Procedures or Methods to be Undertaken

The data collection instruments will not be pre-tested. Previous large-scale evaluations have successfully used similar semi-structured discussion guides during information gathering processes.

B5. Individual(s) Consulted on Statistical Aspects and Individuals Collecting and/or Analyzing Data

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