

Instrument 2

Program Staff Interview Protocol: Program director and ERSEA staff

SPRING 2022 HEAD START REACH CASE STUDY SITE VISITS

Program Staff Interview Protocol: Program Director and ERSEA Staff

In spring 2022, the Head Start REACH team will use this protocol to conduct interviews with program directors and eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance (ERSEA) staff (at the program or center level) at six Head Start programs. We may conduct interviews one-on-one or conduct group interviews with staff with similar roles and levels based on information obtained from the program director. All respondents may not be asked all questions; each interview will be tailored in advance based on what the program director indicated about specific staffs' roles. We will seek staff permission to record all interviews.

NOTE: This protocol is a guide, not a script. The protocol has been developed to apply to the program director and ERSEA staff at the program and center levels. Interviewers will need to tailor questions to the specific programs and add probes to further explore the responses provided.

A. Introduction

Hello, my name is [NAME]. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. Mathematica is conducting a study for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to improve understanding of how Head Start programs recruit, select, enroll, and retain families experiencing adversities. By retain, I mean efforts to maintain the attendance and enrollment of families in the program. As part of this study, we are taking an in-depth look at programs that have demonstrated success in reaching and supporting families facing one or more adversities. Adversities is a broad term that refers to a wide range of circumstances or events that pose a threat to a child or caregiver's physical or psychological well-being. The adversities that families experience are often intertwined with poverty, may co-occur, and are affected by systematic factors, such as structural racism. Common examples include (but are not limited to) families experiencing homelessness; involvement in child welfare, including foster care; and affected by substance use, mental health issues, and domestic violence. Your program was selected after talking to experts in the field who recommended your program as being one that was doing an exceptional job in serving families facing adversities. You/your program director indicated that your program focuses on [ADVERSITY 1] and [ADVERSITY 2] for its ERSEA activities. You/your program director also indicated that you partner with the following organizations [PROVIDE LIST PROVIDED BY PD]. We want to stress that we are here to *learn from you* about what your program is doing to succeed in recruiting, selecting, enrolling, and retaining families experiencing adversities. We are not here to judge, evaluate, or monitor your program.

We expect this interview will take about [60/90] minutes. Before we start, I want to let you know that your participation in this discussion is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any of the questions. All information you provide will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. We will use the information you share to write a summary of what we learned, but we will not attribute any of your comments to you in our reports. We want to record the information you share to inform our notes. Only the study team will listen to the recordings and we will destroy the recording at the end of the project. Data from the interviews and focus groups will be transmitted to the [Child & Family Data Archive](#) or a similar data archive at the end of the study so it can be used by other researchers. No personal information that could identify you or your program will remain in the interview notes that are shared with the data archive. If

you want to say anything that you do not want recorded, please let me know, and I will be glad to pause the recorder.

Do we have your permission to record this interview?

Do you have any questions before we start?

B. Respondent characteristics

Let's start by discussion your background and responsibilities and staffing around recruitment, selection, enrollment, and retention.

1. [ERSEA staff only] What is your official job title?
2. [PD ONLY]: What is your program's staffing structure related to the recruitment, selection, enrollment, and retention of families into the program?
 - a. Which staff conduct this work?
 - b. How are responsibilities for conducting this work split at the program and center level?
3. [ALL] What are your responsibilities related to the [ASK ABOUT EACH SEPARATELY: recruitment/selection/enrollment/retention] of families in the program? You may think about these as responsibilities related to ERSEA [DO NOT READ UNLESS NECESSARY: eligibility, retention, selection, enrollment, attendance].
4. [ALL] For how many years have you been handling these ERSEA-related responsibilities?
5. [ERSEA STAFF ONLY] Is this your full-time job or do you have other responsibilities?

In this interview, I will first ask you about the approaches you use to recruit, select, enroll, and retain families into your program, focusing specifically on families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1] and [ADVERSITY 2]. Then I'll ask you about partnerships your program has that support your ERSEA efforts and training and support you receive related to ERSEA. [IF APPLICABLE: Finally, I will ask you to show me documents related to your programs ERSEA efforts.]

C. Adversities of focus

First, I'd like to understand how your program decides which adversities to focus on.

6. How did your program decide to focus on families facing particular types of adversities? What informed that decision?
7. How do you conduct your community needs assessment?
8. How does your program use community needs assessments to identify groups of families that may be experiencing specific adversities?

- 9.** What are the other early childhood education options accessible for families facing those adversities in this community?

D. Approaches

Now I'd like to understand a family's experience as they make their way through the program, as well as staff's role in helping them navigate the program.

Recruitment

- 10.** So first, let's think about recruiting families into the program. Tell me about the strategies your program uses to recruit families.
- 11.** Now can you tell me about how families apply to your program?
- a.** How do you verify eligibility once a family applies?
- 12.** How did your program develop your recruitment approach for families experiencing adversities?
- 13.** Tell me how your recruitment approaches might differ for families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1]. How might they differ for families experiencing [ADVERSITY 2]?
- 14.** Which of these approaches do you think are the most effective for families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1]? And [ADVERSITY 2]?
- a.** Why do you think these approaches are effective?
- 15.** Do you work with any partner organizations to support recruitment? [INDICATE ORGANIZATIONS NAMED BY PD, IF NECESSARY]
- a.** What is the role of [PARTNER ORGANIZATION] in the process?
- b.** How do you partner with staff at this organization to identify and recruit families?
- 16.** Do you have specific recruitment goals or targets for certain types of families?
- 17.** To what extent do you track recruitment activities? Probe: For example, do you routinely assess the program service area you are able to access with your recruitment activities? Do you regularly evaluate your recruitment strategies based on recruitment numbers?
- a.** IF THEY TRACK RECRUITMENT: How do you use this information?

Selection

ASK PROGRAM DIRECTOR; ASK CENTER-LEVEL STAFF ONLY IF THEY ARE SELECTING FAMILIES INTO PROGRAM:

18. Turning now to selection. What is the process you use for prioritizing enrollment of eligible families?

a. How does your program prioritize families when you have multiple families facing adversities vying for a limited number of spots?

19. Do you have a waitlist?

a. How do families get on the waitlist?

b. When an enrollment slot become open, what is the process you use for selecting families from a waitlist for enrollment?

c. What is your procedure for contacting families on the waitlist when a spot becomes available?

d. Do you share your waitlist with any other organization to help families enroll in other ECE options?

Enrollment

20. Now I'd like to ask you about your program's enrollment procedures. Once a family is selected, what are the next steps they must complete before they start receiving services?

a. Do you make any adjustments to these requirements for families experiencing [ADVERSITY1]? And [ADVERSITY2]?

21. Does your program have any challenges in maintaining full enrollment?

a. What are the challenges that your program faces in maintaining full enrollment?

22. What are the strategies that your program uses to maintain full enrollment?

a. Does your program use strategies such as reserving slots or over enrolling families experiencing adversities?

b. IF YES: Can you explain how your program uses these strategies?

23. Does your program use any data or other types of information to identify factors that influence a family's decision to enroll in the program? This could include data from community needs assessments, self assessments, or information from partner organizations or parents.

a. What types of data or other information does your program use to identify such concerns?

b. Do you ask parents to provide reasons for choosing not to enroll when offered a spot?

c. IF YES: What are the most common reasons that parents choose not to enroll when offered a spot?

24. Do you work with any partners to support enrollment? [INDICATE ORGANIZATIONS NAMED BY PD, IF NECESSARY]

- a. What is the role of [PARTNER ORGANIZATION] in the enrollment process?
- b. How do you partner with staff at this organization to enroll families once they have been recruited? PROBE: How do you collaborate with partner staff to ensure the family completes enrollment?

25. Do you think there is a tension between maintaining full enrollment and serving the families who need program services the most? Probe: That is, because the program is trying so hard to maintain full enrollment, it becomes hard to engage in efforts to reach the families that need the program the most.

- a. IF YES: Can you explain how your program handles this tension?

Attendance and Retention

26. Now, I'd like to ask you about what your program does to encourage attendance and to ensure that families stay in the program. Thinking first about attendance. What are the most common reasons why families have low attendance?

27. What are the strategies your program uses to ensure that families attend the program once they are enrolled?

28. Does your program do anything differently to encourage attendance in families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1]? And [ADVERSITY 2]?

29. Thinking next about retention. First, in your opinion, do many families facing [ADVERSITY 1] leave the program during a program year? And what about families facing [ADVERSITY 2]?

- a. What are your observations about the different reasons that families facing [ADVERSITY 1] leave? And [ADVERSITY 2]?

30. Does your program use any data or other types of information to identify concerns that may influence families' decision to stay in the program? This could include data from community needs assessments or information from partner organizations or parents.

- a. What types of data or other information does your program use to identify such concerns?

31. What does your program do to ensure that families stay in the program once they have been enrolled?

32. Does your program do anything differently to retain families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1]? And what does your program do to retain families experiencing [ADVERSITY 2]?

- a. Of these, which approaches do you think work best to retain families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1]? And [ADVERSITY 2]?

- b. Why do you think these approaches work well for families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1]? And [ADVERSITY 2]?

33. Do you work with any partners to support retention? [INDICATE ORGANIZATIONS NAMED BY PD, IF NECESSARY]

- a. What is the role of [PARTNER ORGANIZATION] in retaining families in [PROGRAM NAME]?
- b. How do you partner with staff at this organization to retaining families in [PROGRAM NAME] once they have enrolled? PROBE: How do you collaborate with partner staff to ensure the family stays in the program?

E. Partnerships

34. [ASK PROGRAM DIRECTOR ONLY]: How does your program identify partner organizations and form partnerships to support its ERSEA efforts for families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1] and [ADVERSITY 2]?

ASK PD WHO THE BEST SOURCE FOR THIS INFORMATION IS.

I'd like to ask you a few questions about each of the partnerships named by you/the PD. [INDICATE ORGANIZATIONS NAMED BY PD, IF NECESSARY]

35. What is the nature of the agreement you have with [PARTNER ORGANIZATION]?

36. How does your program conduct outreach to [PARTNER ORGANIZATION]?

37. How would you describe your relationship with staff at the organization?

38. What kind of information about families is shared between your program and [PARTNER ORGANIZATION]?

USE THE FOLLOWING AS PROBES:

- a. What type of family information is shared?
- b. How is the information shared?
- c. How does this information-sharing help families?

39. What are the challenges to sharing this information?

F. Training and support related to ERSEA and adversities

Now I'd like to talk about training and support staff may have received related to conducting ERSEA work or in interacting with families experiencing [ADVERSITY 1] and [ADVERSITY 2].

ASK PROGRAM DIRECTOR ONLY:

40. Have staff at this program received training specific to ERSEA policies and practices?

IF YES, ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

- a. Which groups of staff received this training? If staff other than those doing ERSEA work received this training, I'd like to know that too.
- b. Which topics do these trainings cover? [PROBE: topics related to outreach, recruitment, selection, attendance, enrollment]
- c. Who provided this training? That is, was it someone from your program or an external person who provided this training?
- d. How often are such trainings conducted?

ASK ERSEA STAFF:

41. Did you receive training specific to ERSEA policies and practices? This training may have been provided by your center, program, or external entity.

- a. IF YES: What topics did it cover?

42. Other than training on ERSEA, what other kinds of support have you received in conducting ERSEA work?

- a. Who provides this support?

ASK PROGRAM DIRECTOR ONLY:

43. Have staff at this program received any special training in interacting with families facing adversities? For example, training in using trauma-informed approaches or in communicating with families when they bring up difficult topics. IF YES, ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- a. Which groups of staff received this training? If staff other than those doing ERSEA work received this training, I'd like to know that too.
- b. Which topics do these trainings cover?
- c. Who provides this training? That is, was it someone from your program or an external person who provided this training?

ASK ERSEA STAFF:

44. Have you received any special training in interacting with families facing adversities? For example, training in using trauma informed approaches or in communicating with families when they bring up difficult topics. IF YES, ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- a. What topics did it cover?
- b. How often are such trainings conducted?

45. What other kinds of support have you received in interacting with families experiencing adversities?

a. Who provides this support?

46. Are there other kinds of training or support you would find useful in interacting with and/or conducting ERSEA work with families experiencing adversities?

a. IF YES: Please elaborate.

G. Document review

ASK ERSEA STAFF (ONLY IF THIS INFORMATION WAS NOT OBTAINED AHEAD OF TIME)

47. We sent you an email indicating that we would like to review the following documents. Could you please provide the following documents. They can be paper copies or electronic.

- a. Your program's ERSEA procedures and/or policies
- b. Your program's recruitment plan
- c. Your program's attendance plan
- d. Selection criteria and scoring
- e. Outreach and recruitment plans and materials
- f. Application and/or enrollment forms
- g. Program forms that track enrollment and vacancy for monitoring
- h. A copy of documents summarizing information from your community needs assessment (for example, change in scope or 5-year applications).

48. Are there other documents related to your program's ERSEA efforts that you think would be useful for us to review?

H. Closing

Thank you so much for meeting with us today and taking time out of your busy schedule. We really appreciate the work that you do here and your willingness to allow us to learn from you and your team!