

Head Start Collaboration Office Grant Scope and Application Instructions

Released XX 2026

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The purpose of this information collection is for eligible entities to apply for Head Start funding. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 10.4 hours per respondent, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This collection of information is required to receive funding under the Head Start Act (42 USC 9801 et seq.). An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-NEW and the expiration date is [date]. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact. HSCollaboration@acf.hhs.gov.



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Overview of Head Start Collaboration Office Grant Awards

Funding for Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) grant awards is critical to advancing the Office of Head Start's (OHS) mission to integrate Head Start within state early care and education (ECE) systems, strengthening coordination across early childhood, child welfare, and family support systems. HSCO grants support authentic integration of Head Start into state ECE systems. In carrying out this role, HSCOs often serve as a bridge among OHS, Head Start and Early Head Start grant recipients, state systems, and other early childhood partners. HSCO activities should advance the purposes and requirements of the Head Start Act while supporting alignment with state early childhood priorities, as appropriate.

The recipient of this award must implement any funds awarded to effectuate program goals or agency priorities in accordance with ACF's vision, mission, values, priorities, and guiding principles when authorized. Funded activities must advance ACF's vision of resilient, safe, healthy, and economically secure children, youth, families, and communities, and support ACF's mission to foster health and well-being through effective, accountable, and compassionate human services when awarded in any programs that authorize these priorities.

To learn more about ACF's vision and mission, visit <https://acf.gov/about/acf-vision-mission-values>.

What are the Head Start Collaboration Office (HSCO) grant objectives?

The objectives below are intended to strengthen Head Start's participation and meaningful engagement in statewide systems while recognizing differences in state governance structures and preserving the HSCO's role as a federally authorized partner.

1. **Unified state governance:** Support and participate in effective, functioning, cross-sector early childhood governance through the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education or other council(s), entity(ies), or governance structures that collectively perform comparable statewide coordination and advisory functions.
2. **Strong Head Start leadership:** Empower the State Director of Head Start Collaboration to be an impactful partner in the statewide ECE decision-making structure
3. **Statewide vision for ECE:** Integrate Head Start into priorities, policies, and initiatives that advance the state's priorities and vision for ECE

Taken together, these objectives – when implemented in support of state priorities – foster coordinated, cross-system leadership to strengthen states' ECE systems.

Overview of Application Instructions

Section 642B of the Head Start Act requires recipients of the non-competing HSCO grants to submit written requests for funding. In this document, OHS provides guidance on grant objectives and written submission requirements for recipients applying for a new five-year HSCO grant award.

Recipients applying for a new five-year HSCO grant must follow the instructions for submitting a **Baseline Application**. Recipients that are not applying for a new five-year HSCO grant award must follow the instructions for submitting a **Continuation Application**. Continuation Applications must be submitted annually for the duration of the grant cycle. All HSCO awards are subject to the availability of federal funds. The Department of Health and Human Services and the Administration for Children and Families reserves the right to reduce, delay, or discontinue funding in accordance with appropriations and program priorities.

Who should complete the grant application?

Per [Sec. 643 of the Head Start Act](#), the chief executive officer of the state must be engaged in any awards made for the purpose of carrying out a Head Start program in the state. The HSCO grant application package should be developed in coordination with relevant state leaders and offices and should reflect the approvals required under the state's governance structure. Engagement of the Governor's office, or the Governor's designated state leadership, is encouraged where appropriate and feasible.

What are the application formatting requirements?

The following application formatting requirements apply to all **Baseline Applications** and **Continuation Applications**. Additional instructions for each type of application are listed in the relevant section.

The grant application package must be developed and submitted in an electronic format using the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES) at <https://hses.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/state>. A hard copy of the application will not be accepted. Incomplete applications will not be processed.

Your application narrative and budget narrative documents should be:

- Double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides
- Written in a font size of 12
- Numbered in the lower right-hand corner
- Structured using the format and numbering of the application instructions
- Clearly organized in a Table of Contents

To avoid undue burden, your application should adhere to the following submission guidelines:

- The application narrative and budget narrative combined cannot exceed 20 pages.
- Responses should be succinct, clear, and directly address the relevant question. Use bullet points to share responses whenever possible.
- For information that is relevant for multiple questions, respond with references to previous questions; do not repeat the same information multiple times.
- Do not submit any documents, materials, or information outside of what is explicitly requested in the application instructions.

For further assistance, please contact the Head Start Collaboration Grant team at HSCollaboration@acf.hhs.gov or the HSES Help Desk at help@hsesinfo.org or 1-866-771-4737.

Instructions for Completing the Baseline Application

If you are applying for a new HSCO grant award (i.e., if you are in the last year of your current grant), you must submit a **Baseline Application** and follow the instructions in this section. All other grant applications should follow the instructions for submitting a **Continuation Application**, described in the next section.

What information do I submit in HSES for the Baseline Application?

For **Baseline Applications**, you must submit information in the following application tabs in HSES:

- SF-424A
- SF-424
- Documents

In the **SF-424A and SF-424 tabs**, you will submit information through on-screen forms on HSES. There are no documents to upload in these tabs.

In the **Documents tab**, you will upload the application materials in the following folders:

- Application Narrative and Budget Narrative
- Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable)

What information should I include in the Baseline Application narrative?

In the **Baseline Application** narrative, describe your state's approach to meeting the three HSCO grant objectives by addressing the questions in this section. Responses should reflect your state's strategies or specific bodies of work that will occur **over the full five years of the HSCO grant cycle**. The total project period is 5 years; however, awards are made on an annual basis and are subject to the availability of appropriations.

Objective 1. Unified State Governance

To address this objective, describe your state's approach to supporting an effective, functioning, cross-sector State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education (State Advisory Council) that helps drive the state's priorities and Governor's vision for early care and education.

States vary in how statewide early childhood governance and advisory functions are organized. A state may have a formally designated State Advisory Council, another entity that performs comparable functions, or multiple entities that collectively perform these functions. For purposes of this application, identify the council, entity, or combination of structures most relevant to statewide ECE coordination and describe the HSCO's role within that structure. For example, your state's State Advisory Council might be the coordinating body that is consulted in development of the state's Child Care and Development Fund Plan as required in 45 CFR 98.14(a)(e1)(vii).

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1. Identify the State Advisory Council or other council(s), entity(ies), or governance structures that perform statewide ECE advisory, coordination, or decision-making functions and how the HSCO is incorporated within this structure. If the HSCO is not yet incorporated within this structure, describe steps that could be taken to meet this goal during the duration of the grant cycle.
2. Describe the steps your state will take to support appropriate engagement and communication between the State Advisory Council, the Governor's office, or other relevant state decisionmakers to advance state ECE priorities. .

Objective 2. Strong Head Start Leadership

To address this objective, describe how the following aspects of the State Collaboration Director's role will be created anew, adapted, and/or strengthened to support meaningful participation in statewide ECE planning and decision-making and to contribute Head Start expertise to relevant state leaders and offices, consistent with the state's governance structure:

- a. Required experience and expertise
 - b. Role on the State Advisory Council or appropriate agency with ECE advisory functions.
 - c. Placement within the state governance structure and how that placement supports meaningful access, participation, influence, and coordination, recognizing that appropriate placement may vary by state.
 - d. Ongoing communication with relevant executive and state decisionmakers through pathways appropriate to the state's governance structure, which may include the Governor's office, Governor-designated leadership, cabinet or agency officials, ECE advisory bodies, or interagency partnerships.
 - e. Organizational supports that will enable the State Collaboration Director to fulfill the role effectively, such as access to relevant decision-making bodies, cross-agency coordination mechanisms, and other resources available through the recipient or state.
1. Describe how the HSCO will engage Head Start and Early Head Start grant recipients and, where applicable, the State Head Start Association or other representative bodies to inform statewide priorities and ensure the perspectives of local Head Start programs are represented.

Reminder: As part of the **Baseline Application**, upload an organizational chart of the state ECE governance structure in the Application Narrative and Budget Narrative folder in the Documents tab of HSES.

Objective 3. Statewide ECE Decisions

To address this objective, describe your state's approach to advance integration of Head Start into relevant statewide priorities, policies, initiatives, and systems in ways that support the Head Start mission and strengthen early childhood outcomes.

For purposes of this objective, meaningful integration means sustained inclusion of Head Start expertise,

perspectives, programs, needs, and infrastructure in relevant statewide planning and implementation. Integration may include coordinated policy development, shared planning, data or systems alignment, cross-sector initiatives, or other durable mechanisms that move beyond one-time consultation. Meaningful integration should preserve Head Start's distinct federal requirements, program governance, and locally operated grant structure while strengthening coordination with state systems.

1. List between three and five major strategies that will meaningfully integrate Head Start into relevant statewide systems, priorities, policies, or initiatives. Strategies may reflect state or gubernatorial priorities, Head Start priorities, stakeholder-identified needs, federally required coordination, or other significant early childhood systems-building efforts. Examples might include:
 - State ECE financing strategy
 - Head Start program participation in state data systems
 - Workforce supports that include Head Start staff
 - School transition and preschool/kindergarten alignment
 - Coordinated enrollment initiatives
 - Strategies to ensure access to foster care survivor benefits
 - Health and health care coordination
 - Infant and early childhood mental health
 - Housing and homelessness
 - Child welfare
 - Early Intervention and disability services
 - Family economic supports
 - Nutrition
 - Maternal and infant health
 - Other family-serving systems
2. Describe how the HSCO will partner with appropriate ECE decisionmakers, agencies, Head Start recipients, and other stakeholders to advance the work. Where relevant, describe how the HSCO will work in reciprocal partnership with the CCDF Lead Agency and other state early childhood agencies or systems to support coordination and shared planning.
3. Five-year planning / changing priorities: Because state leadership, priorities, and system conditions may change during the five-year project period, recipients may refine or adapt strategies over time while continuing to advance the approved HSCO objectives and comply with applicable grant requirements. Material changes requiring prior approval remain subject to applicable grants-management requirements.

What information should I include in the Baseline Application budget narrative?

In the **Baseline Application**, in addition to completing the SF-424A and SF-424, you must submit a budget narrative. Your standard forms and budget narrative should reflect a funding request for the full five-year grant cycle and describe a five-year budget plan. The budget plan should reflect a fixed amount each year for your state over the five-year project period. Awards are made on an annual basis and are subject to the availability of appropriations.

Applicants may describe state, recipient, or partner resources that complement the federal HSCO award and

support implementation of the proposed strategies. This may include staff, administrative support, in-kind contributions, or other resources consistent with applicable cost and matching requirements.

Complete your budget narrative by addressing the questions below.

1. Include a narrative to complement the budget information you provided in SF-424A. Write N/A if the budget category does not apply.
 - Personnel
 - Fringe Benefits
 - Travel
 - Equipment
 - Supplies
 - Contractual
 - Other

Note that your budget should include travel and per diem costs for attendance at one national Head Start Collaboration meeting every year, which will align with the annual State and Territory CCDF Administrators Meeting (STAM).

2. Identify each source of non-federal match, including the estimated amount per source and the valuation methodology as outlined in 2 CFR § 200.306. The amounts across all sources should equal 20 percent of the total (federal plus non-federal) budget.

You are encouraged to leverage grant funds as one source in a broader financing strategy (e.g., portion of compensation, governance and systems building) to advance your state's priorities and Governor's vision for early care and education.

3. If budgeting indirect costs to the grant, upload a copy of the current or proposed indirect cost rate agreement to the Indirect Cost Rate Agreement folder under the Documents tab. If using the 15% de minimis indirect cost rate, upload a copy of the policy or other written record indicating date upon which the rate was adopted.

Instructions for Completing Continuation Application

What information do I submit in HSES for the Continuation Application?

For **Continuation Applications**, a complete application package requires you to submit information in the following tabs in HSES:

- SF-424A
- SF-424
- Documents

In the **SF-424A** and **SF-424 tabs**, you will submit information through on-screen forms on HSES as applicable. There are no documents to upload in these tabs. In the **Documents tab**, you will upload the application materials in the Application Narrative and Budget Narrative folder, as applicable.

What budget information do I submit in HSES for the Continuation Application?

If you are submitting a **Continuation Application**, submission requirements are determined by your proposed budget. If your proposed budget **does not include any significant re-budgeting** from your Baseline Application budget (i.e., no changes across categories greater than 10 percent), you must submit a Funding Continuation Request. No accompanying budget narrative is required.

If you are proposing a budget that **does include significant re-budgeting**, you must submit a budget narrative that describes the proposed budget changes and the reasons for the proposed changes. Indicate if you have received prior approval for these changes. Upload the budget narrative document in the Application Narrative and Budget Narrative folder under the Documents tab in HSES.