



Birth to 5 Father Engagement Programming Guide

Strategies to Use Father-Focused Data for Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement



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Strategies to Use Father-Focused Data for Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

Explore this practical guide to learn more about using data to enhance father engagement activities in Head Start and Early Head programs. Review strategies about how to use data to support continuous learning and quality improvement. Reflect on examples and guiding questions.

Fathers and program staff participated in developing this guide. It is part of a series of brief guides on how to implement the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework to support father engagement in early childhood programs.

This guide provides information about the following topics:

- What is the Head Start PFCE Framework?
- What is continuous learning and quality improvement in the PFCE Framework?

Three strategies to use father-focused data for continuous learning and quality improvement are:

- Implement the “Four R Approach”
- Use the four data activities to support fathers’ progress
- Connect data to the PFCE Framework

In this resource, the term father refers to fathers and other males who play a significant role in raising a child. This person may be a biological father, adoptive father, or stepfather.

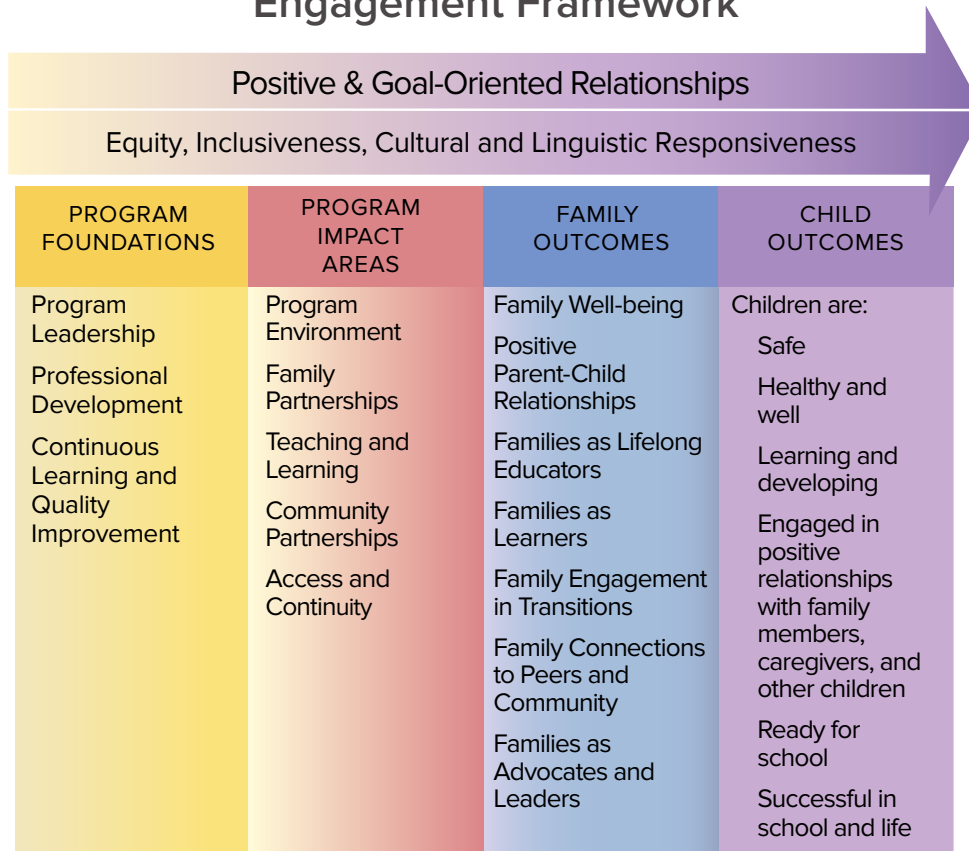
He may be a grandfather, another adult male family member, foster father, guardian, or the mother’s significant other. He may be the expectant partner of a pregnant woman.

What is the Head Start PFCE Framework?

The Head Start PFCE Framework is an organizational guide for collaboration among families, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and community service providers to promote positive, enduring outcomes for children and families. The Framework describes the program elements — program foundations and impact areas — in early learning programs that can work together to positively influence child and family outcomes. The Framework identifies equity; inclusiveness; cultural and linguistic responsiveness; and positive, goal-oriented relationships as important drivers for these outcomes.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs need strong program elements that are coordinated to create lasting change for families and children. Together with program leadership and professional development, continuous learning and quality improvement is one of the program foundations that supports effective father engagement.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



Look for these icons throughout the guide to find strategies and key points from fathers, programs, and researchers:



Key Points from the Field



Strategies

What is Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement in the PFCE Framework?

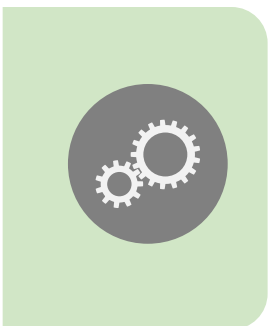
What is data? [Foundations of Excellence](#), a Head Start resource, defines data as a body of facts, statistics, or information. There are many types of data collected in a Head Start program, and the data have many different purposes.

Leaders and managers build support and capacity for data-informed work among staff, families, and community partners. Data-informed work includes selecting indicators of PFCE progress, collecting and analyzing data, sharing information, and using data to make decisions to improve program systems and service delivery. Fathers, mothers, and other family members can be involved throughout the process.

All Head Start and Early Head Start programs implement a family partnership process. This process includes development of an individualized family partnership agreement that identifies strengths, needs, and goals related to the family outcomes in the PFCE Framework. Staff and family members share data, review individual progress, evaluate whether goals are met, revise goals, and adjust strategies as needed. Programs also collect ongoing child assessment data to document a child's progress and support individualized learning. When staff share data about the child with their family, partnerships strengthen to improve child and family outcomes.

The [Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement](#) resource series describe the knowledge, skills, and practices related to family engagement for staff who partner with families. Relationship-Based Competency (RBC) No. 9 refers to data-driven services and continuous improvement. Here is the professional practice for RBC No. 9: Collects information with families and reflects with them to inform goal setting, planning and implementation to effect progress and outcomes for families, children, programs, and communities.

Program leadership is responsible for establishing goals and measurable objectives of family engagement and overseeing progress toward family outcomes. Data from multiple sources, including the community assessment, Program Information Report, and staff and family surveys, are used to identify family and community needs. Data also inform strategies for continuous improvement of PFCE efforts. Leaders use program data to inform local and state planning and policy decisions.



Leadership strategies for creating a program wide culture of continuous improvement for father engagement programming include:

- Involve fathers and father figures. Do they help plan and make decisions about effective fatherhood programming and successful community partnerships?
- Encourage curiosity. Are leaders, staff, and fathers asking questions and thinking critically?
- Value reflection. Are time and space provided to review policies and practices?
- Develop trust. Are staff and fathers comfortable discussing challenges and proposing solutions?
- Invite feedback. Are fathers engaged in using data to assess strategies and make improvements?
- Emphasize a systematic, integrated, and comprehensive approach. Are improvement efforts designed to connect program systems and services for fathers more effectively and break down silos?

“We’re trying to look at the data and see how what happens with the families in their homes correlates to what’s going on in the classroom.”
– Head Start director



[Foundations of Excellence](#) discusses these leadership strategies in more detail.

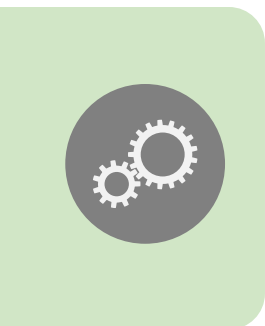
Implement the “Four R Approach”

The “Four R Approach” offers guiding principles for decision-making, program evaluations, and changes to improve program effectiveness. Use these principles when partnering with families, setting program and family goals, and assessing progress toward these goals.

“My child has been through Early Head Start and Head Start – that’s five years in the same program. At the end of each year, the parents are asked to do a survey. I like to do this because I like to think about the highs and the lows. I know that everything I say is going to help the program get better.”
– Head Start father



Read more about the “Four R Approach” in [Measuring What Matters](#).



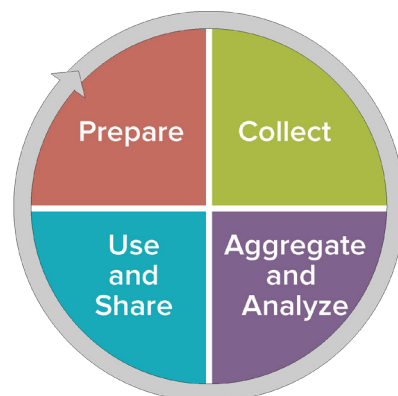
Apply these principles to father engagement using data to support family engagement

- **Responsible** – Are you using data responsibly?
Use high-quality data to guide decisions that support family and father progress as well as staff development. Ensure high-quality data are accurate, timely, and informative. Focus on data that are not a challenge for staff and families to gather. Data should be kept confidential and shared only with individuals and groups who need it to partner effectively with families.
- **Respectful** – Are you using data respectfully?
Appreciate each family’s and father’s unique circumstances, cultures, and backgrounds. Prioritize family input and use their preferred language during data collection. Partner with families to decide how to interpret data. Invite and learn different perspectives and plan for next steps.
- **Relevant** – Are you using data that is relevant?
Collect data using tools or measures that are reliable, valid, and culturally relevant. Be flexible in collecting family and father data to ensure information is meaningful to families in the program.
- **Relationship-based** – Are you using data in a relationship-based way?
Use the data process to reaffirm partnerships with families and fathers. Engage in data-informed conversations about child and family progress to enhance relationships with families. Create a shared understanding of program and family goals.

When program leaders and staff ask themselves whether the program collects, analyzes, and shares data in ways that are responsible, respectful, relevant, and relationship-based, they promote a data-informed program culture. In this context, staff, families, and community partners view the strengths and challenges revealed through data activities as opportunities for learning and improvement.

Use the Four Data Activities to Support Fathers’ Progress

Together with the “Four R Approach,” use the four data activities in a cycle of continuous learning and improvement to make progress toward family – and father – outcomes.



1 Prepare

- Begin by identifying goals, objectives, and expected outcomes for father engagement activities. Consider your program's five-year project plan.
- Develop processes and procedures to assess the challenges, successes, and outcomes of the father engagement activities, such as a parenting curriculum or peer networking opportunities for fathers.
- Consider how to analyze data to answer questions about father engagement and outcomes for fathers, families, and children.
- Discuss how data will be used and stored to ensure confidentiality and safeguard access.

A Head Start and Early Head Start program is preparing their five-year plan. One goal is to strengthen positive parent-child relationships. A specific objective is to engage incarcerated, nonresident fathers in their children's lives. Previous data indicate that a majority of the incarcerated fathers are not in touch with their Head Start children. The program has a partnership with the local prison to support parents. The current memorandum of understanding (MOU) states that the program staff and prison officials will partner to support parents. The MOU includes a statement that surveys and focus groups will be conducted to involve incarcerated fathers in planning. Data collection is designed to gather demographic information about the fathers and their children and their interests in parenting resources or programming. A team consisting of family services staff, parents, and program administrators forms to draft a survey for the incarcerated fathers.

2 Collect

- During data collection, review questions for fathers to ensure they focus on the strengths and capabilities of fathers.
- Invite fathers to participate in a discussion or a focus group to add details and fill in gaps in data collection. Ask what data they think should be collected.
- Collect fathers' and mothers' evaluations of family engagement activities, such as a parenting curriculum. Collect ongoing data so that course corrections can be made.
- Review data from family partnership agreements as well as information on child progress.
- Add data from referral services and community partnerships to evaluate program services to fathers.

A group of incarcerated fathers reviews the survey and makes a few suggestions before the survey is distributed. The family services manager and the fatherhood coordinator lead the focus group. Their guiding questions are "What does it mean to be a father while incarcerated?" and "What kinds of activities would support your relationship with your child?". They also ask the same questions of the co-parents, typically the mothers. There is also another discussion group set up with the prison officials to get their input on opportunities for programming.

Co-parent refers to two or more adults who take on the responsibility for raising a child. They may or may not live together or be biologically related to the child.

3 Aggregate and analyze

- Aggregate (combine) data to look for patterns across the program. Does it make sense to disaggregate (separate) the data to compare father participation in different activities or to learn more about sub-groups of fathers, such as teen fathers? Both options can be used.
- Decide what data say (or don't say) about fathers' priorities. What topics do fathers want to know more about? What feedback do they have about the strengths and challenges of the program?

The program analyzes survey data across all the incarcerated fathers. It also considers whether there might be different responses depending on the age of the child. Staff analyze subgroups to compare the responses of fathers of infants and toddlers with the responses of fathers of preschoolers. There are no significant differences. Overall, the data are compelling. Fathers are very interested in being “good” fathers, but many say they don't know how to do that in their current situation. They indicate that they are interested in providing “emotional support” and “teaching” their young children. Mothers also report that they want a positive father-child relationship.

4 Use and share

- Consider who your key stakeholders are. Find ways to make the data understandable and meaningful to them, including through visual displays.
- Determine how data can be used to improve services for fathers.
- Share aggregate information with community partners about the interests of fathers and the quality of service delivery. Uphold confidentiality requirements.
- Use the data to tell your program's story about progress toward improved outcomes for fathers, families, and children.
- Ask fathers to share the results and tell their personal stories to other fathers in the justice system and to community stakeholders. Fathers are persuasive advocates for father engagement programming.

The family services manager and program director share the results with the prison officials and the incarcerated fathers. They brainstorm options to strengthen the father-child relationships. To support the fathers' role as "teachers" of their children, the prison helps establish a program that video records fathers reading stories. The videos are sent to the family service manager who shares them with the co-parent. If the co-parent needs support sharing them with the young child, that is provided. The Head Start program commits to sending a child's progress report to the incarcerated father, including videos of the child in class.

With support from the prison officials, incarcerated fathers are allowed to use digital technology to participate in teacher-parent conferences and home visits. Fathers are interested in learning how to be better parents. The program reaches out to a community partner who agrees to provide a parenting class that focuses on positive parenting techniques. The program will continue to monitor the expected outcomes. Examples include increased father-child interaction through media sources and child visits to the prison (when possible) and a greater sense of father efficacy in their child's development.

Programs can use this cycle of data activities to support progress on family outcomes. Fathers and staff share information with one another and monitor progress toward their individual goals. Together, they also plan future steps. For example, a family advocate may help a father connect with a new community partner that offers resources that his family needs. This is an ongoing process. At the program level, this cycle of data activities is used to monitor continuous progress toward program goals and improve PFCE practices.

"Take the things that you know about the data, about families and their children, and expand that discussion to touch things within the community. If fathers are facing unemployment because of plant closures, reach out to the local unemployment office and workforce development agency. If families are homeless because of a natural disaster, work with relief agencies to provide their services in a convenient location, maybe at the Head Start center."

– Training and Technical Assistance specialist




Connect Data to the PFCE Framework

Programs can use data from and about fathers to make decisions about how to better implement the PFCE Framework in partnership with fathers. For example, use father-related data to:

- Help leadership and staff better understand fathers' perspectives, interests, goals, and needs. (continuous learning, family partnerships)
- Provide information about program strategies that work best for making progress toward positive father and family outcomes. (program leadership, continuous improvement)
- Support staff by identifying areas where they can build their father engagement knowledge, skills, and practices. (professional development)
- Offer fathers and families information about how to build on their strengths and develop strategies to improve their well-being and help prepare their children for school. (teaching and learning, access and continuity)
- Offer staff aggregated information about children, fathers, and families to help them develop engagement strategies that are culturally and linguistically responsive. (program environment, family partnerships, teaching and learning)
- Strengthen community partnerships that promote positive father and family outcomes (community partnerships, continuous learning and quality improvement).

Information on father engagement can be combined with other program data about families as well as individualized family data. The data can help programs assess their practices, plan for improvement and measure progress. The end result is a systemic, integrated, and comprehensive PFCE approach that is data informed and responsive to fathers across the program.

For more examples of how to connect father engagement data to the elements in the PFCE Framework, refer to [Integrating Strategies for Program Progress](#).



“We use a strengths-based assessment tool that measures where a family is in different domains — from employment and income to parent-child relationships to the child’s school readiness. The data guides our partnership with the family.

We also connect the data to the PFCE Framework to identify areas that need the attention of program leaders. In the past, a big gap was integrating teaching and learning into parenting roles. We developed a science/math workshop that was a huge hit with dads and their children. They’ve asked for more, and now we’re working on a literacy and storytelling workshop.” – Family services manager

Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement in Action

Read the scenario about how a Head Start program used the data cycle to respond to fathers' concerns and enhance services.

A Head Start program is preparing to conduct its annual self-assessment. The program has an active fathers' group that has raised many concerns about children's transition into kindergarten. The fathers report that their older children have had a hard time adjusting to the faster-pace and more academic environment. Fathers also share that they don't feel welcome in the school. The management team and a group of fathers and mothers form a transition workgroup to learn more. They develop some general questions about the transition process.

- What kind of experiences do you want for your child in kindergarten?
- What kind of experiences do you want as a parent in the school system?
- What can Head Start do to improve the transition process?
- What can the school do to improve transitions?

The program's data coordinator refines these questions and puts them into an online survey. In addition, the program holds focus groups with parents to generate more qualitative information. Fathers lead some of the discussion groups. They reach out to other fathers, encouraging them to participate in the transition study. They remain very involved in the data collection activities.

When the survey data are analyzed, the results confirm the initial concerns. The transition process isn't positive for many families. The program decides to look closer at the data. They disaggregate — or separate — the responses from parents at different centers because their children go to different receiving schools. A pattern emerges that confirms the fathers' concerns. The majority of parents report negative experiences with the schools when they leave Head Start. However, one school has developed a smooth transition process. There, parents are satisfied with the transition experience. Data from conversations also confirm this finding.

The transition workgroup writes up the results and presents them to the policy council, staff, and parents. The workgroup begins to generate action steps. First, the director meets with the principal of the school where the transition has been smooth. She invites him to join the workgroup to learn about the transition success. He emphasizes the importance of communication between parents and teachers. The kindergartens hold an open house in the spring for the incoming families and children, who can meet the teachers, see the classrooms, and learn about lunchtime and other routines. The director also invites the school superintendent



to join the workgroup, who agrees that a better transition process is needed across the district.

The school district and Head Start leaders schedule monthly meetings to review transition activities. A first step is inviting parents and their children to visit the kindergartens. Head Start distributes information about these visits to all the families whose children are turning 5. Transitioning children receive Get Ready for Kindergarten packets, which include fun activities for them to do over the summer. Exchange visits with teachers are planned to share curriculum ideas. The grantee and the district refer to the Transition to Kindergarten materials on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website to guide their planning.

One year later, the discussions about the kindergarten transition have a different tone in the fathers' group. The fathers are more positive about how the schools receive their children and engage with families. The Head Start program and the school district have agreed to implement these areas of PFCE continuity:

- Create a positive and welcoming school environment. The program and school district schedule visits to the school at convenient times for fathers to meet the staff and see the classroom and the building.
- Strengthen the home-school connection. The kindergarten teachers and Head Start family services professionals make a home visit to meet the father, mother, and incoming child and talk about the child's interests and strengths.
- Promote leadership and advocacy. Fathers are encouraged to take on leadership roles in the school site councils and participate in school board meetings. They feel empowered as advocates for their children.
- Build continuity around comprehensive services. Fathers and families of children who are dual language learners (DLLs) are provided with translation and interpretation services in the school setting.

Reflection

Consider these questions:

How are parents, including fathers and non-residential parents, included in planning for program improvement?

Are fathers asked questions that focus on their concerns and views?

Does data analysis take a look at sub-groups of fathers?

Do fathers participate in the dissemination of the findings to staff and other parents? And to community partners?

Reflection, cont.

Are the findings used to revise or develop strategies that are likely to improve family, father, and child outcomes?

Does professional development at the program and individual staff level reflect the results of the review process?

Resources

Explore these resources on the ECLKC.

- [Foundations for Excellence: A Guide for Five-Year Planning and Continuous Improvement](#)
- [Integrating Strategies for Program Progress](#)
- [Learning for New Leaders: Head Start A-Z](#)
- [Measuring What Matters](#)
- [Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement](#)
- [Strategies for Implementing the Head Start PFCE Framework](#)
- [Strengthening Families and Fatherhood: Children of Fathers in the Criminal Justice System](#)
- [Tracking Progress Database: Standardized Measures to Assess Family Engagement Efforts and Effects](#)
- [Transition to Kindergarten: Partnering with Families for Head Start Programs and Schools](#)



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