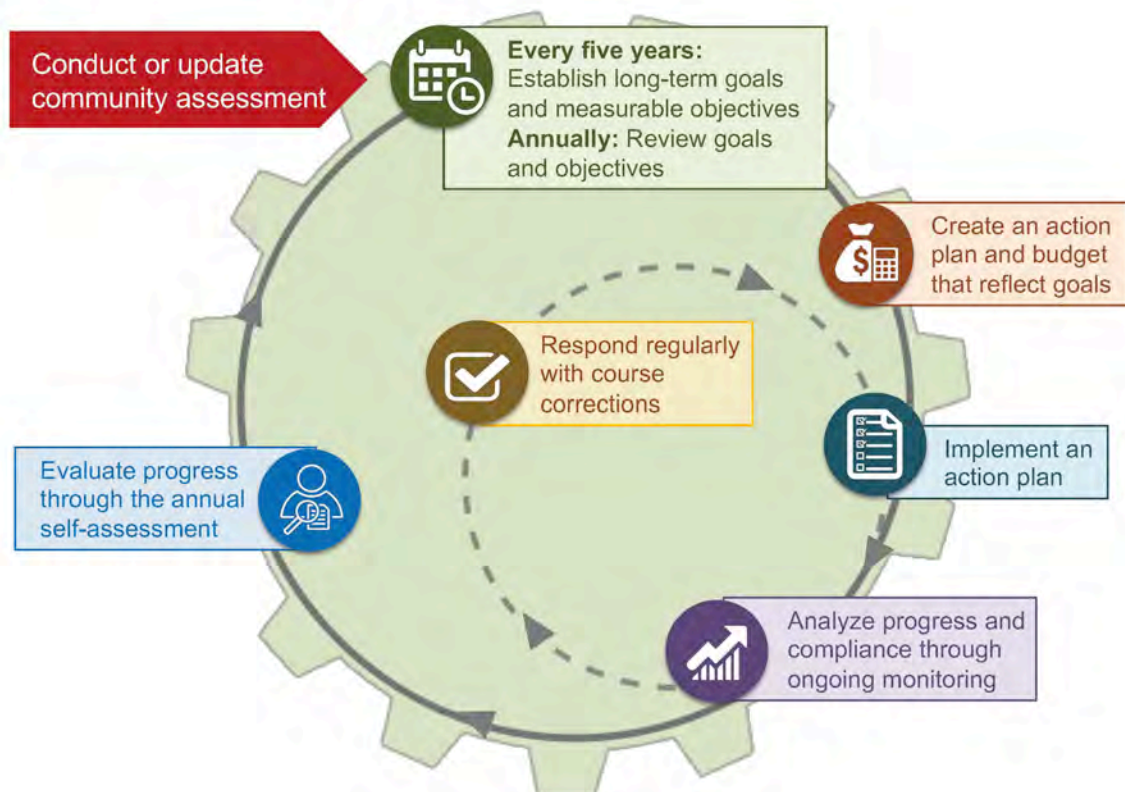


Program Planning in Head Start: The Program Planning Cycle

Thoughtful planning is key to successful programming and to the achievement of desired outcomes. The Head Start Program Planning Cycle outlines how the required Head Start management systems are interrelated parts of a predictable planning process. Through this process, programs develop goals, objectives, and expected outcomes. They monitor and evaluate progress toward their program goals, which include school readiness goals. In this document, references to long-term goals are inclusive of all program goals. Programs also ensure compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS).

The Program Planning Cycle depicts an ongoing sequence of planning, implementation, and evaluation. It promotes continuous quality improvement and allows programs to work toward the achievement of positive outcomes for children and families. Many of the steps happen repeatedly throughout the cycle, and the cycle itself is repeated throughout the five-year project period.

The Program Planning Cycle



To learn more about the process, follow the arrows clockwise around the planning cycle. Review a list of the steps and a brief description of each below.

1. Begin with either **community assessment** or **self-assessment** (see red arrow above).
 - **New programs** begin with a community assessment. They collect and analyze data about the needs and resources of eligible families, the program, and the community within the service area to inform the goal-setting process.
 - **Existing programs** may begin the process with self-assessment. They take a fresh look at updated community assessment, ongoing monitoring, and other relevant data to make recommendations for program planning and goal-setting.
2. For their baseline grant applications, programs identify the long-term goals they will accomplish during the **five-year project period**. They also identify initial specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely (SMART) **objectives** linked to **expected outcomes**. During their **annual** planning process, programs review their long-term goals and objectives, along with community assessment and self-assessment data, and make any necessary programming adjustments. They continue to break down their goals into measurable objectives linked to expected outcomes.
3. Programs develop an annual **action plan**, which is a defined set of steps outlining what a program will do to accomplish its goals and objectives. The action plan is supported by a budget that is aligned with the goals and objectives. Through the **data and evaluation system**, the program decides which data will be collected to measure progress and determine impact.
4. While **implementing its plan**, the program collects data through its **technology and information systems** and manages it through its **recordkeeping and reporting system**.
5. The program continually evaluates progress toward its goals and objectives and compliance with the HSPPS by reviewing data gathered through the system of **ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement**. Effective ongoing monitoring enables programs to track progress toward their goals and objectives, ensure compliance, and collect data to inform continuous improvement.

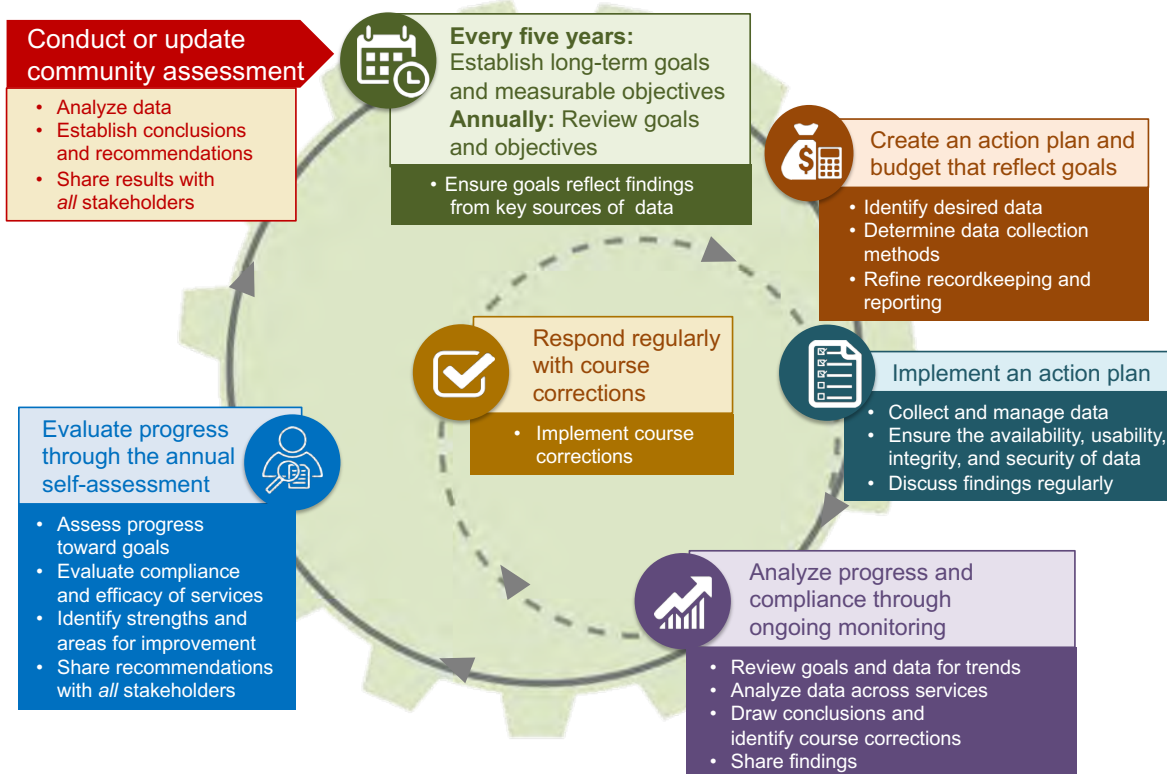
6. Based on ongoing monitoring results, programs may continue to implement their **action plan** as written, change the plan to **replicate best practices**, or make **course corrections** that may require changes in program activities or levels of effort. Following up to determine the efficacy of the course corrections is critical.

7. Finally, the program comes full circle to the annual **self-assessment**. In this step, the self-assessment team uses its ongoing monitoring, community assessment, and other relevant data (e.g., child assessment, professional development, and family engagement data, as appropriate) to assess the program’s progress in achieving its goals, objectives, and expected outcomes. The team also evaluates the program’s compliance with federal requirements.

Two more elements are essential throughout the planning process:

- Effective use of data that support a coordinated approach to service delivery
- Communication with appropriate stakeholders at each step

Integrating Data into Program Planning Systems



The Integrating Data into Planning Systems graphic above shows how the use of data is integrated into each step of the planning cycle. Below is a list of the steps in the planning cycle, along with the data activities that occur at each step.

- **Evaluate progress through the annual self-assessment (new programs begin with community assessment)**
 - Assess annual progress toward goals and objectives
 - Evaluate compliance and the efficacy of services
 - Identify strengths and areas for improvement
 - Share recommendations with all stakeholders
- **Conduct or update community assessment**
 - Analyze data
 - Establish conclusions and programming recommendations
 - Share results with all stakeholders
- **Every five years: Establish long-term goals and measurable objectives**
- **Annually: Review goals and objectives**
 - Ensure goals reflect conclusions from key data sources (e.g., community assessment, self-assessment, child outcomes, professional development, and family engagement data)
- **Create an action plan and budget that reflect goals**
 - Identify desired data
 - Determine data-collection methodologies
 - Refine recordkeeping and reporting systems
- **Implement an action plan**
 - Collect and manage data
 - Ensure the availability, usability, integrity, and security of data
 - Discuss findings regularly
- **Analyze progress and compliance through ongoing monitoring**
 - Review goals and data for trends
 - Analyze data across services
 - Draw conclusions and identify course corrections
 - Share findings with internal stakeholders

- **Respond regularly with course corrections, as required**
 - Implement course corrections
 - Review corrections to monitor the efficacy of the change
 - Communicate data findings and next steps to internal stakeholders

