

**Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
Office of Head Start**

**Virtual Tribal Consultation – Summary Report
Geographic Regions 1-5**

September 23, 2020

OHS Representatives

Ann Linehan, Deputy Director of the Office of Head Start

Todd Lertjuntharangool, Regional Program Manager, Region 11 American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN)

Greeting and Introductions

Ann Linehan, Deputy Director of the Office of Head Start (OHS), welcomed attendees, and brought greetings on behalf of Dr. Deborah Bergeron, Director of Head Start, who was unable to attend. She expressed this is her first time conducting a Tribal Consultation virtually and that it is challenging not being able to meet in person but acknowledged the importance of being able to meet and communicate in these unprecedented times. She acknowledged that 2020 has been an incredibly trying year on numerous fronts, and how tribal communities have been impacted by the pandemic. Ms. Linehan also acknowledged that Tribal Head Start Early Head Start programs are a lifeline to many families, and expressed gratitude for the work that the tribal communities are doing on a daily basis, particularly the incredible work the Tribal Head Start staff has done, both remotely and face-to-face.

Transcript from OHS Overview/Presentation

Todd Lertjuntharangool
Regional Program Manager
Region 11/American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN)
Office of Head Start

Mr. Todd Lertjuntharangool thanked Deputy Director Linehan and greeted the attendees. He gave a brief introduction, sharing his background and allowed the other members of the AIAN leadership team, Delroy Grant and Trevondia Boykin, to introduce themselves before transitioning to the OHS PowerPoint presentation.

National Overview

The OHS funds preschool programs which serve nearly a million children and their families each year. The majority of programs provide services to three and four-year-old children. We do also have a growing number of programs who are serving infants, toddlers, and pregnant women in Early Head Start programs.

Head Start Legislation and Regulations

To administer and oversee these grants, OHS is governed by several pieces of legislation and policy which include the 2007 Head Start Act, Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), and the various fiscal regulations which govern the administration and oversight of federal funding.

Purpose and Service Models

Head Start and Early Head Start programs offer a variety of service models, days, and hours depending on the needs of the local community. Many of those Head Start programs and Early Head Start programs are center based and those services are provided in a classroom setting. Other programs are located in childcare settings and family childcare homes and we do have some programs who also offer home based services with dedicated staff who go to the home and work with that child and that family.

Head Start programs provide services targeted at supporting children's growth and development in a positive learning environment through a variety of services, which include Early Learning, Health, and Family Well-being.

OHS Structure

In addition to our central office located here in Washington DC, we also have 12 Regional Offices. Through that structure, we are responsible for funding, for ensuring that our programs have access to training and technical assistance, for monitoring those programs, and of course, for implementing leadership priorities. 10 of the Regional Offices are geographic and are located at various cities across the United States. 2 of our Regional Offices support specific populations and those are Region 11 which support all of our American Indian and Alaska Native programs and Region 12 which supports all of our Migrant and Seasonal Programs.

Region 11 - American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) Overview

Region 11 supports all of our tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs across 26 states. Currently our region funds approximately 180 grants across 154 grantees. These numbers fluctuate as programs may relinquish their grants or programs may apply for and obtain more grants through the OHS. Currently in Region 11, we serve over 17,000 Head Start children, over 4,700 Early Head Start children.

2019 Tribal Consultations

Prior to discussing work that has taken place in 2020, we feel it is appropriate to start with where we left off in 2019 and some of the things that we heard in our discussions with tribal leadership. OHS participated in five tribal consultations around the country in 2019 and some of the most common areas for discussion were around funding, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and implementation of monitoring overall, and concerns around staffing, that included the credentialing of staff, staff turnover, and staff salaries.

Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Funding Update

Region 11 will have funded approximately \$299 million to tribal grantees around the country in FY20. This figure is inclusive of \$5.6 million for Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) increases and \$9.2 million for increases for Quality Improvement.

What have we been up to in 2020?

Many of the areas we have focused on over the past year were driven by what we heard in consultations in 2019. One thing we did was we brought together several members from AIAN communities: long standing directors and individuals who have provided testimony in past consultations, to help the OHS identify ways that we could tweak the way we implement the CLASS tool to make it of more benefit to our tribal grantees. Something we were extremely thankful for. That group of individuals did provide several recommendations that we were really excited about and that we believe could be implemented. Due to COVID-19, CLASS reviews have been paused. We are optimistic that once these commence again, we can continue our dialogs and explore where we can implement suggestions.

Another concern identified during 2019 tribal consultations was the lack of CLASS observers and reviewers from AIAN communities. We did a couple things to try to be more responsive to this throughout 2019 and into 2020. One thing that we did was, we did a bit more heavy recruiting. We started sending out e-blasts to ensure that our tribal grantees were aware of how they could apply to become observers and reviewers. We were also supported by our TA network who also shared information at the various events they were facilitating. Our Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) also reached out to tribal colleges and tried to make sure that they were aware of how potential observers and reviewers could apply. We also relaxed some of our previous credentialing requirements for CLASS observers to support recruitment. These efforts have not produced the type of results that we had hoped they would. So one additional thing we did, we came back to the table made the decision to team up with Teachstone, the founders of the CLASS tool for what we called the AIAN CLASS Pilot. Through this Pilot, OHS was able to provide virtual CLASS training for staff members from AIAN communities at no cost to them. We reached out to staff members from programs originally scheduled to receive CLASS reviews in FY21. Through this Pilot, training was provided to over 30 individuals in the months of June and July of 2020. As a result, 12 AIAN program staff were able to obtain their CLASS reliability. What we do hope is that these individuals who became reliable can potentially serve as observers to support CLASS reviews in Region 11 in the future.

A huge priority for us was to ensure that we got out all of the CARES Act funding that was meant for our tribal Head Start and Early Head Start grantees.

In 2020 OHS also facilitated several national competitive processes for various contracts. These included our Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) contract, our National Centers, and our Monitoring contracts.

COVID-19

On March 13th a national emergency was declared. Virtually all tribal programs were shut down or had to temporarily suspend service. One thing that I do want to make note of here and thank Tribal Leadership for is the fact that so many communities and tribes reacted so swiftly in making big decisions that I think helped mitigate the spread of the virus in their communities.

Region 11 funded \$19.2 million to tribal programs to prepare, prevent, and respond to COVID-19 through the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security or CARES Act.

Also during this time, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Children and Families, and OHS have issued unprecedented flexibilities to alleviate the administrative burden on grantees while they focus on COVID-19 and the safety of their communities.

During this summer, OHS also implemented the Collaborating Actively in Meaningful Planning (C.A.M.P) webinar series to support grantees. Those webinars were recorded and are still available on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website. If you have not already seen those, I definitely encourage folks to make time to view these informative webinars.

Funding Opportunities in 2020

In 2020, OHS published several Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs). These included \$4 million for Tribal Colleges and Universities and Head Start Partnerships. In September OHS awarded 6 grants to tribal colleges to support higher education opportunities for AIAN Staff to obtain credentialing and further their education. OHS posted another round of Early Head Start and Childcare Partnership funding opportunities. OHS also posted a Region 11 specific FOA to redistribute funds recaptured from under enrollment or relinquishment in the previous year. Before the close of the fiscal year, we were also able to issue several one-time funding awards for health and safety needs that were requested by grantees.

Final Rule Update

During the summer of 2019, the Federal Register was opened up for comments on a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) on the Designation Renewal System (DRS). Within that Notice of Proposed Rule Making, there were changes proposed for three of the current seven conditions that are identified in section 1304.11 of the HSPPS. These were the Deficiency Condition, CLASS Condition, and Going Concern.

We were happy to see that COVID-19 did not significantly delay what we had earlier estimated our timeline for the issuance of that new rule. It was published on August 28, 2020. The new rule will go into effect approximately 60 days after the date of publication.

FY2021 Forecast

Priorities for Region 11 have to start with engaging with tribal leadership and understanding the goals and priorities of tribal leaders for their specific communities. One thing I want to encourage folks to do, in addition to the larger tribal consultation, is that our tribal programs always communicate the specific priorities and the goals you have for your children, families, and communities in the years to come. This will help ensure the work we are doing is supporting that direction and those goals.

Funding of our programs is always going to be a huge priority for us. OHS has received our first quarter appropriation for FY21 through a continuing resolution. This continuing resolution is through December 11, 2020. Grantees who are funded in the first quarter of the fiscal year, specifically November, December, January, and February will be funded 50% of their annual grant rather than the full amount upfront. The remaining balance will be funded once our remaining appropriation is issued by congress for FY21.

Over the summer, our team facilitated our regional needs assessment and began to pull different data sources that we will look at as ongoing and reliable. Those included past year tribal consultation testimony, Program Information Reports (PIR), reports from our Head Start Enterprise System (HSES), monitoring reports, reports from our training and technical assistance network (T/TA), our regional needs assessments from the Region 11 HSSCO, data from our AIAN FACES data collection and the Tribal Research Center, as well as input from the National Indian Head Start Director's Association (NIHSDA). Through several weeks of data analysis, our team identified to most significant concerns and most urgent needs of tribal Head Start programs and developed our Regional priorities for FY21.

The first priority area is Health, Disabilities and Mental Health.

The second priority area is staffing. With staffing, we're referring to the challenges that programs are experiencing with high turnover and the challenges experienced with recruiting and retaining qualified staff.

The third priority area is fiscal. One concerning observation made by pulling data was we went back to the last year that was not impacted by COVID-19 because we know FY 20 and FY19 have both been impacted by COVID-19. We looked at FY18 and one thing that we noticed was out of an annual budget of approximately \$290 million we finished that year with about \$30 million unobligated or left on the table. Region 11 was able to work with a lot of those programs to retain and continue to utilize those funds through carry over, but undoubtedly a lot of programs lost, or 'left' money on the table. That's definitely a concern to us because we never want to see our programs sending any funding back.

Another thing that we observed was, we saw some of our grantees who were falling behind on audits. Falling behind on audits impacted certain grantees' eligibility for other grants, which then impacted eligibility for the Head Start Grant.

One example I will give was we saw programs who fell behind on audits and therefore they were not eligible for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) grant for meal reimbursement, which is a requirement of the Head Start grant. One thing we want to do is target how we can support any programs who are experiencing challenges or falling behind with their audits and their internal financial controls.

The fourth priority area was promoting School Readiness and Supporting Teachers. That was the systemic approach to getting kids ready for kindergarten and progressing them throughout their time with Head Start and the systemic approach that programs were taking to support teachers with ongoing growth and development so that we have the best teacher child interactions happening in every classroom and promote high quality learning experiences program wide and region wide for tribal children.

The fifth priority area is governance. This particular area was one where we saw many programs that struggled with not having effective internal communication structures between the Head Start program, the fiscal office, human resources, or other internal division to ensure the smooth delivery of services to children, families and their communities. Through monitoring we saw a high number of programs who weren't doing their regular reporting to the policy councils and governing bodies. Without these regular reports, governing bodies and tribal leadership are limited in their ability to provide effective and ongoing oversight of the Head Start grant and Head Start program.

Lastly, full enrollment is always going to remain a priority for OHS. One alarming thing that I observed in the fall of 2019 when pulling enrollment data, was that we had about 48% of our grantees nationally that were under enrolled by four or more months. We really want to take a targeted look at what is contributing to this. We want to identify pathways for our grantees to reduce or eliminate under enrollment and to meet what their full enrollment is. I do think a lot of that is going to start with revisiting what the current unmet need in the community is to make sure that your Head Start program or Early Head Start Program is aligned to meet those needs.

Resources

Lastly, I do want to encourage our grantee to keep in close contact with your Program Specialists and Grant Specialists assigned to your programs. By ensuring they are kept in the loop and are informed allows them to ability to more effectively support your programs success. Also, I'll refer folks to Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website. We do have a specific page for COVID-19. This page is updated regularly, and I do want to encourage folks to check this from time to time just to ensure that you have the most updated information, guidance, and support. Thank you.

**Ann Linehan,
Deputy Director
Office of Head Start**

Well, I'm going to turn it right back to you, Todd. Thank you for that update. But we did have an update while you were giving updates that overtook one of your updates.

ACF will be issuing a press release tomorrow with the names of the tribal colleges who were successful in the competition and I didn't want folks to leave saying, well, Todd said "maybe next week." The formal announcement will be made tomorrow. And we wanted to be assured that those tribes were all aware, and the notice of award had been cut and they had received it. So that's really a piece of good news and it's great to have tribal colleges back in the mix supporting our tribal communities. So that's all Todd, I'm going to pass it right back to you.

Todd Lertjuntharangool: Awesome. Thank you. And that is great news coming sooner than I thought. We know that that's going to be important part of the work we do going forward and we're really anxious to see how those tribal colleges are going to support areas like staffing and some of the challenge that we've had there. So this is very exciting news. Thank you, Ann.

Tribal Leader Testimony

**Gil Vigil,
Executive Director
Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council, Inc.**

- We're doing good, also. We're hanging in there with this pandemic, it's been challenging in many ways, but we're holding our own. Good morning to everybody, thank you for allowing me to make my statement. My name is Gil Vigil. Currently I'm the Executive Director for the Eight Northern Indian Public Council and we still administers two Head Start Centers for San Ildefonso and Nambe Pueblo. Also, I'm a former governor of Tesuque Pueblo and by virtue of that, I'm a lifetime councilman. And so again, thank you for allowing me to make a few comments.
- Before I begin, I just want to thank Head Start for all the work that you do and I know sometimes we don't see eye to eye, but I think I understand the situation of where you're coming from and the presentation that Todd just made, I think, has a lot to do with it. I'm always talking about rules and regulations and standards. And I think we've been working to address those. However, Here at Eight Northern, it's not just about Head Start anymore, it's about child development. It's not just about our children, but our communities and our families. And so, we've been working on an effort to address those all those issues in a collaborative way and certainly we want to include Head Start as part of our efforts to address all the concerns and tribal needs.
- We've been working, starting with a home visitation grant, where we did a committee asset mapping. In committee asset mapping, we identified some key areas of concern. The committee asset mapping was done by tribal members of each of the eight pueblos inclusive of educators, tribal leaders, social workers, behavioral health workers, and families. The issues that came up were loss of language and culture, domestic violence, and alcohol and drug abuse. All those things that are happening in our communities became an issue for us. So, we're developing our program to address those issues. Developing a program for what we're calling our community, for our community and basically addressing it from a community perspective.
- My comments are geared along those lines. We want to include language, culture, and our traditional values in our programs that we have. Of course, with Head Start it's regulated by certain standards that we have to abide by. So, the issues of income eligibility have always been an issue for us. As tribal leaders, it's our responsibility to serve all our kids, no matter where they come from or who they are. We need to serve all our children. With Head Start, income eligibility kind of ties our hands from doing that. Even for though those that are in the income requirement that we are allowed to do that (for).
- We are also looking at the educational component of Head Start, which requires our staff to get certain education but at the same time, we don't compensate them at that level. Once they receive their degrees, or at least certificate or whatever it is, we don't compensate them, so we need to look at that. How do we work around that? If we're going to ask them to upgrade themselves, we also need to make sure we compensate them properly.

- You talked about one of your priorities being health, disabilities, and mental health. Certainly, that's been a concern. Not just Head Start, but everybody. One of the areas is Circles of Life, which is our Behavioral Health Network, has been asked to provide a grant that trains parents in psychotherapy.
- We are looking into the early lives of our children, looking at their needs as they progress. We're looking at the Neural Sequestration Model. We're working with a group that is providing training to do that. Adverse childhood experiences are an issue. So, it's good to hear that you're talking about including mental health in this area as far as Head Start's priorities.
- The other area of concern is enrollment. Our pueblos are really small, especially the two pueblos that we serve currently. And likewise, a lot of the tribes, we don't have the numbers, especially when we have to use income requirements to get our kids enrolled. It's hard sometimes to get full enrollment. Plus, basically competing with preschool programs that state has, other programs maybe even Head Start, that the state has. So, we're competing with other entities to try to do our full enrollment. It's been a challenge, but we've been working on it. Income eligibility is still a concern for us.
- I guess those are our concerns. I would like to inform that I have been asked to serve on the Administration for Children and Families Tribal Early Childhood Work Group. I've been serving on that group and we have had two meetings. I'm also serving on the New Mexico Early Child Education and Care Department that was recently created. They just opened their shop in July of this year, but I'm also on their Advisory Council. The Administration for Children and Families Work Group, I guess, was created under a legislative committee.
- And one of the things that the committee as of our group was, "how do we make early childhood better?" That's the same purpose for the State Department, the new department, how we make early childhood better? And of course, my comments at that point was, we got to change regulations, standards, and rules. I know Anne was telling me before that "Gil, you know, I agree with you, but I can't make any changes because that's the legislation. To make changes we have to change the legislation." I guess my point is that hopefully being involved with the group at the national level and our local level, that it will have some kind of results that maybe we need to look at the way we develop or do Head Start. How we do childcare. I guess what we're asking for is maybe more flexibility
- In our committee asset mapping, what we came up with was that we are going to create early learning centers in each of our communities including language and culture and all the other things that need to go as far as early childhood learning is comprised of. Also, the request for flexibility is to allow, and I saw that you're developing partnership with Early Head Start and childcare to develop partnership, I think that's a good idea. I think Head Start should develop those partnerships also with Child Care and all the other entities that provide those kind of services and allow flexibility so once we establish our early learning centers that we can use those funds to support an Early Learning Center.
- Like I've always stated, Head Start works, but Head Start is not for everybody because not everybody is eligible. As far as the discussion with the state Childhood Advisory Council, the key things we came up with was, it's got to be community driven and it's got to be inclusive and it's got to be equitable in order for our children to benefit from these services. That's the direction we're taking. We've had three meetings and I think we have one more meeting. Then we report back to the state legislature on our results and our findings. I hope that we can share this with the national organization, the national Head Start, to see what New Mexico is doing in addressing early childhood services.
- Those are my comments for today and I will submit a written statement on to this effect also. So, Ann thank you. Thank the Director also. Todd, and all of you that are working with Head Start. Thank you.

**Angela James,
Vice Chairwoman
Pinoleville Pomo Nation**

- My name is Angela James and I'm the Vice Chairperson from the Pinoleville Pomo Nation and Pinoleville Native American Head Start Program. We service 70 families for Early Head Start and Head Start
- I just wanted to make a few comments regarding, you know, during the pandemic and just overall regarding more funding for mental health and trauma informed care. Especially during this time, you know, a lot of our families are experiencing a lot of trauma, as you know, as is everyone else. The other thing is health and safety.
- During this time, we've been providing food for the families and PPE supplies for them and I don't feel like we had sufficient funding to cover what we needed to cover, and the tribal side assisted in that.
- Another topic that I just wanted to touch on briefly is the job criteria. The criteria that is needed for teachers and assistant teachers in their education.
- Over the years there's requirements for our teachers to further their education, but when they do, there's not an opportunity to increase their funding and their pay by that much, so funding in that area is a problem because they will go elsewhere. We have Head Start offices in our town here that are not Native and sometimes we lose our employees to those programs.
- Another issue during this time that we came across was Internet access for our families. Not only with our Head Start, our whole school district is experiencing that because we are a rural program and internet access has been a huge problem for our children that live on the reservations which are out in the mountain areas, away from town.
- Being able to expand our broadband, that's something that on the Pinoleville Reservation, we are trying to do. We are located closer to town than some of our neighboring reservations and even with that, we still have a lot of problems with that.
- And some families can't afford to have an unlimited data plan on their internet, or some kids are trying to use their cell phones to access their classroom. It's just a huge problem because if they are accessing through their parents' cell phone service, they're going over their data and then the bill becomes higher and they can't pay it, so they have another burden on their shoulders. Our program has actually purchased tablets that the children are using to access the classroom curriculum through their teachers. We have had some success with that. It's called HATCH and it's just something that our program through Head Start purchased to continue that education for them.
- We do also do packets and like I said food boxes during this time for the children. We do not only academic packets for them, but also cultural packets and they still have access online to our northern formal language the teachers work really hard to keep them engaged in that along with their families.
- Those are my few topics I wanted to touch on today for our program and I wanted to thank you guys for being available and especially Aziz and Betsy. Thank you for being available during this time and helping through this crisis that we're all facing. Thank you.

Lenora Steele

- This is Lenora, I'm the interim director right now for the Head Start. I just want to thank the Office of Head Start. I know we sent pictures to Todd of our staff on this side, doing the shopping and everybody pulling together for the families and pictures of the kids and their teachers. It was their faces that just lit up and right now we just all have to pull together. And I know we're getting ready to do a distribution in probably in a half an hour. And so, we just want to thank the Office a

Head Start again. Shout out to Aziz and Betsy, they were really there to help us through this time. Thank you.

OHS Remarks and Response to Testimony:

Service Implementation and Pandemic Response

The OHS is encouraged to hear about the amazing innovations grantees have implemented in 2020 to continue to support families most in need. From ensuring children still received meals, to identifying family needs around housing and basic necessities, Head Start programs have worked tirelessly to ensure the basic needs of families are met and children are mentally, physically, socially and emotionally in environments that support their ability to learn. 2020 has required programs to pivot, assess the impacts of COVID-19 on their communities, and implement modified service delivery that supported the safety of children, families, and staff. We've also seen programs implement modified center based services this year. Programs have designed services for smaller classrooms for families who still want and need center based services, virtual services for families who prefer a virtual setting. Some programs are rotating children's in person days and virtual days to limit in person, group settings and observe social distancing best practices based on the needs of families in their communities. Head Start programs continue to demonstrate why they are such a vital part of the communities they serve.

OHS understands that all communities, especially tribes, have been impacted economically by the pandemic. COVID-19 forced everyone to pivot and with little to no planning time, assess the impacts in their communities, plan for the safest way to implement services, and implement modified service delivery. In consideration of these enormous challenges faced by programs, OHS worked to communicate programmatic and fiscal flexibilities as soon as possible through e-blast, the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website, and the Collaborating Actively in Meaningful Planning (C.A.M.P) webinar series hosted over the summer. Additionally, we have worked with grantees to assess the impacts on current year budget and wherever possible and beneficial, to work with grantees to reallocate funding to areas most in need. Additional flexibilities were also implemented to alleviate the administrative burdens on programs when reallocation of funding was an identified need. Many of these flexibilities can be found on the COVID-19 page on the ECLKC website.

OHS always appreciates hearing about the ways the Head Start program is positively impacting children and families in their communities and where programs are experiencing success working with OHS. OHS appreciates hearing about areas where improvements can be made in how we support our tribal programs and hearing recommendations from tribal leadership.

Income Eligibility

Eligibility requirements for Head Start programs are established in the Head Start Act. The statutory eligibility requirements for Head Start are intentionally focused on Head Start serving the most vulnerable children and families in our nation's communities. Since eligibility requirements are statutory, the Office of Head Start (OHS) does not have authority to change these income thresholds or other eligibility requirements through regulation, but only has authority to make minimal changes to implementation.

Access to Internet, Broadband, and Technology necessary to implement remote service delivery

Throughout this year, internet connectivity and access to broadband and technology necessary to support families in a virtual setting have been the most significant challenge experienced by tribal programs. Some programs have utilized E-rate funding through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to support improved availability of internet to their communities. Other programs have utilized CARES Act funding or re-budgeted annual award funds impacted by COVID-19 to acquire technological supplies necessary to support virtual service delivery. OHS encourages programs to work with Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA to develop remedies to challenges experienced with connectivity or technology supplies which may or may not include modifying current year budgets. OHS also encourages programs to generate supplemental funding requests, often referred to as, 'one time' funding request to support costs that are not normal annual operation costs. One time funding requests are not guaranteed and are contingent upon the availability of funds and prioritized by health and safety needs.

Staffing

Head Start programs have vocalized challenges experienced around the recruitment and retention of qualified staff. Many of these challenges attributed to not having qualified applicants located within communities or losing qualified staff to higher paying positions with other early childhood education programs and school districts. Staffing, and the factors mentioned above, are included in AIAN's FY21 Priorities for support for our grantees. Region 11 / AIAN is currently working with T/TA and the National Centers to develop support targeted at these factors and provide that support to AIAN grantees. Increases in funding levels are possible through competitive Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) that are published when additional funds are available to support additional children and families. OHS cannot, without a competitive process, arbitrarily increase funding levels to a Head Start grantee. Many programs have also communicated the challenges with the recruitment of qualified staff from within their communities. OHS encourages these programs to work with Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA to explore additional recruitment methods and platforms to expand the reach of vacancy announcements. Programs are also encouraged to post their vacancies on the ECLKC website's job center. OHS also awarded 6 Tribal College and Universities and Head Start Partnership grants in September of 2020. The purpose of these grants is to increase the number of credentialed staff in AIAN programs. While these 6 Tribal Colleges and Universities have specific AIAN Head Start programs they will be partnering with, our hope is that in the future these grants may evolve into more grants with more broad impact. If and when qualified staff cannot be identified, OHS has also provided teacher waivers to programs to allow for an individual to work toward minimum credentialing requirements. To be considered for a waiver, the individual in question must have a current and valid CDA credential and currently be enrolled in coursework leading to the required credential. Teacher waivers may be granted up to but not to exceed 3 years. Waiver consideration is for Head Start only. Early Head Start teacher waivers are not available.

OHS encourages programs experiencing these challenges to work with Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA to review current funding levels, programs designs, and explore if and where funding can be reallocated to provide more commensurate compensation to staff and prioritize high quality services to the age eligible and income eligible population that are currently unserved in their respective communities.

Culturally Relevant Curriculum

The Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) updated in 2016 now make it a requirement that Head Start programs provide educational environments that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to the communities they serve. OHS continues to work with programs, T/TA, and our National Centers to support programs with immersing Native languages and cultures in tribal classrooms

to enrich learning experiences. Tribal programs continue to evolve in how language and culture is included in their curriculums from short lesson planning activities up to and including full language immersion in classrooms. School Readiness remains a core priority of the work Head Start programs do. OHS is encouraged to hear of the impacts and intentional direction programs are taking to ensure children are provided the highest quality education service possible. In addition to Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, T/TA, and out National Centers, OHS also makes available the MyPeers network where programs may connect with one another to share best practices and support one another. Additional information can be found on the ECLKC website - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>

Additional Service Providers in Communities

Over the last several years Head Start programs have experienced an increase in additional service providers in their communities. OHS is encouraged to see additional serviced providers being made available to families who need them and encourages Head Start programs to collaborate and coordinate with other early childhood education providers to ensure services to all children and families in the community receive high quality services to support their needs. OHS also encourages programs to conduct updated and thorough community assessments. Community assessments should evaluate factors including but not limited to current unserved age eligible and income eligible populations, their specific needs, additional service providers in the community, and design programs targeted at meeting current unmet needs of the community. Program Specialists, Grant Specialists, and T/TA teams are available to support programs with this. This may or may not include reassessing the number of families proposed to be served.

Resources

OHS highly encourages all programs to remain in close contact with Program Specialist and Grant Specialists for ongoing support. Additionally, the OHS's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website includes a COVID-19 specific page. This page is regularly updated with most recent guidance and programmatic and fiscal flexibilities available to Head Start grantees. A link is included here - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/ohs-covid-19-updates>

Additionally, one resource for Head Start programs that cannot be overlooked, are other Head Start programs. To provide a platform for programs to share best practices and support one another, OHS has created MyPeers. This virtual platform allows programs and program staff to connect with one another to share best practices and support one another. Additional information on the MyPeers virtual network can be found here - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-collaborative-platform-early-care-education-community>. Program Specialists may also support connecting programs for the purpose of supporting one another.

Closing

The Tribal Consultation closed with Ms. Linehan sharing a life lesson learned from previous workshops with less than the expected number of attendees, “that only if one person shows up, that one person is very important.” She ended by thanking the two Tribal Leaders who gave their testimonies and reminded the other attendees that their “doors and ears and hearts are always open to listening to the concerns and the occasional applauds of our tribal communities.”