



## Planning in Head Start

# Topic #5: Program Planning and Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

**The Head Start planning system and its related activities are an essential part of program operations.**

While thoughtful planning has always been critical to successful programming, it becomes even more so as Head Start programs shift from an indefinite grant period to one based on a five-year project period. The Head Start National Centers created this series of papers to support programs in developing and implementing their planning system and in making optimal use of the five-year period. [This paper focuses on special considerations for parent, family, and community engagement in program planning.](#)

# Program Goals and Objectives Related to Family Outcomes

Program goals related to family outcomes are broad statements that describe what a program intends to accomplish in its work with (and in support of) families. An objective is an element of a goal. It describes, in a **SMART** way (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imely), what the program is intending to do to reach the goal. See “Topic #1: Understanding Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans” for guidance on setting **BROAD** goals (**B**old—**B**eyond expectations, **R**esponsive, **O**rganization-wide, **A**spirational, and **D**ynamic) and **SMART** objectives.

It is important to be able to distinguish between program-wide goals related to family outcomes and individual family goals that are created with the family through the family assessment and family partnership process. Family goals are based on the personal strengths, needs, and aspirations of each family and on each family’s individual circumstances.



The chart that follows describes the differences between program-level and individual-level family goals.

| Type   | Definition  | Purpose   | Informed By  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Program goals related to family outcomes</b></p>                           | <p>Goals that are designed for all or for specific groups of families in the program (e.g., immigrant groups, dual language learners, fathers) and that support progress toward child and family outcomes</p> <p>Goals that affect all program services and systems</p> <p>Goals that are set at the program level and that may affect all families in the program</p>  | <p>To answer the question: What should our program do to make a difference for children and families?</p>   | <p>Understanding and analysis of trends and patterns that affect children and families through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community assessment</li> <li>• Annual Self-Assessment</li> <li>• Summary of Family Strengths and Needs Assessments (aggregated data)</li> <li>• Summary of individual family goals from family partnership agreements (aggregated data)</li> <li>• Aggregated child assessment data</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Individual family goals based on strengths, needs, and aspirations</b></p> | <p>Goals set with an individual family to support progress toward child and family outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff and parents develop these goals together, based on the family’s strengths, interests, and needs.</li> <li>• These family goals may target adult learning or financial stability and/or child outcomes related to early learning, school readiness, and healthy development.</li> </ul> | <p>To answer the question: How can we partner with this individual family to make progress toward the goals family members set for themselves and their family?</p> | <p>Family discussions about goals, interests, strengths, and hopes</p> <p>Recruitment and application process</p> <p>Family assessment data</p> <p>Child assessment data</p>   |



In the Head Start and Early Head Start program-planning context, the term “expected outcome” refers to what programs expect the results to be. The term “outcome” refers to the actual results achieved. Here’s an example of how that works:

**Sample Program Goal:** Moving Forward Head Start Program will ensure that all Head Start and Early Head Start families have the knowledge and skills to effectively parent their children beginning in the pre-natal period through age five.

| Objective  | Expected Outcome   | Outcome   |
|--|--|---|
| Develop parent cafes in each delegate agency which will run through each program year, with 40 percent participating in the first year, and 10 percent more parents participating in each subsequent year. | Participating parents will have reduced stress, increased parenting knowledge and skills, and increased meaningful connections with other parents. | Thirty percent of enrolled parents participated in the cafes in year one. Of participating parents, 90 percent reported changes in parenting stress levels, increased knowledge about parenting, and more connections with other parents. |

The program can tie this to the Outcomes for Family Engagement in the blue column of the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. The PFCE Framework includes seven Family Engagement Outcomes that are broad areas of practice. Our example relates to two Family Engagement Outcomes: Family Well-being and Parent-Child Relationships.

## Tips for Setting Program Goals and Objectives Related to Family Outcomes

**Ensure families are a part of the process.** Engaging families in Head Start and Early Head Start planning strengthens the design and implementation of program plans and engages parents as leaders and decision-makers. To engage families as program planners, be intentional in building a welcoming environment where families feel valued, supported, and ready to contribute. You can do this by using strength-based attitudes and relationship-based practices that help individual staff have positive goal-oriented relationships with families.

For guidance in relationship-based practice with families, please see *Head Start and Early Head Start Relationship-Based Competencies* and other resources from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE) at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/relationship/practice.html>.

Families can be engaged in all phases of planning, whether it is to develop five-year plans, annual program plans, written plans/service plans, or T/TA plans, among others. (See “Topic #2: Plans in Head Start” for more information about different kinds of plans). Parent input on program plans can be sought through Policy Council and Parent Committee meetings, parent focus groups, staff and parent conversations, parent representation on planning committees, and similar kinds of occasions. Be sure to thoughtfully include the families of dual language learners and different subgroups of families in the process as well (e.g., fathers, immigrant groups, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender] families, etc.).

In addition, the Head Start Program Performance Standards require programs to include parents and family members when setting school readiness goals. Many programs include parents on school readiness committees and always gather parent input from all parents during periods of child assessment. Regardless of the type of program planning you use, outcomes for children and families are likely to be strengthened when families are involved.

**Review and/or collect data from a variety of sources about the strengths, needs, and personal goals of families.** Use data collected from the community assessment and the annual program Self-Assessment. You will find that family surveys, input from community partners, summaries of individual family goals, and aggregated child assessments are also good data sources. By using these sources of data, you can identify trends and patterns to develop and set program goals and objectives related to family outcomes.

Staff can also use aggregated information about individual families—including their goals, strengths, and challenges—to set program goals and objectives. For example, what are you learning about the strengths and needs of all families from the Family Strengths and Needs Assessments, the family partnership process, and from child assessments? Programs can also use conversations/discussions with key staff and stakeholders—the Policy Council and Parent Committee and/or observations of staff (e.g., teachers, family service staff, home visitors, health services, bus drivers) who interact regularly with families—as helpful sources of information. Summaries of input from experiences of individual families are valuable data sources, as well, for setting program goals related to family outcomes.



## Based on your data, develop program goals and/or objectives that address your priorities.

Program goal setting helps everyone (leadership, staff, Policy Council, etc.) focus on priorities in support of the program’s shared vision. Based on your data, consider the following:

- Which PFCE Framework outcomes are most critical to focus on first
- What the timeframe is for this focus (e.g., during one specific year, or in all five years)
- Whether you need a program goal related to one or more of the outcomes in the PFCE Framework

Keep in mind that you may find it more appropriate to develop objectives related to the family outcomes that support *other* program goals and/or your goals for school readiness. To meet expectations for five-year planning, programs need to use their data to prioritize goals and objectives related to their expected family outcomes. It’s important to note that programs may have several objectives related to a program goal or school readiness goal. Here are some different examples of how programs may choose to structure their goals and objectives related to family outcomes in Head Start and Early Head Start:

### 1. Programs could create broad program goals related to one of the PFCE outcomes

- Program goal related to family mental health (PFCE Outcome: Family Well-being)

### 2. Programs could outline objectives related to family outcomes that support program goals

- Program goal around transitions with a family-related objective
- Program goal around facilities (not family related) with a family-related objective in support of creating a “family room”

### 3. Programs could prioritize family objectives that support school readiness goals

- Family-related objective that supports children’s mental health through targeted parenting workshops

**Ensure alignment between the goals families set for themselves and the goals set at the program level.** Consider whether you have planned for services that are responsive to families’ strengths and needs. At times you may need to change a program goal (or objective) in response to a gap in services identified during your planning process from reviewing aggregated family data.

## Tips for Making Progress Toward Expected Family Outcomes

**Use the PFCE Framework as a guide to program planning for parent, family, and community engagement.** The PFCE Framework challenges programs to explore effective ways to design and implement systems and services to achieve expected outcomes for families and children. The PFCE Framework encourages programs to begin with the end in mind. It is helpful to consider from the outset what you want to achieve for families and children and which outcomes are most important to consider for your families and communities at this time and over the projected five-year period.

Keep in mind that the PFCE Outcomes are broad outcome categories that may need to be tailored to a program’s data-informed priorities. Just as the domains in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework are made more specific through the development of school readiness goals, PFCE Outcomes can also be made more specific through the development of specific goals and objectives.

If, based on your families’ and community’s priorities, you decide to set a program-level goal for PFCE, consider the objectives that will help you meet your goal and expected family and child outcomes. For effective parent, family, and community engagement, also think about objectives that align with the Program Foundations (Program Leadership, Continuous Program Improvement, Professional Development) and the Program Impact Areas (Program Environment, Family Partnerships, Teaching and Learning, and Community Partnerships). Ideally, your objectives will link across systems and services to support overall program goals related to family outcomes.

**Define how you will track progress toward your goals, objectives, and expected outcomes.**

Include objectives that address both the effort and the effect of your strategies. Your program’s level of *effort* addresses the type and amount of family programming you offer. Your program’s *effect* addresses whether your program’s activities have made a difference for children and families. To learn more, see the glossary of terms and definitions in the “Introduction to Program Planning Topics in Head Start” and *Measuring What Matters* on the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement webpages of the ECLKC (<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/center/assessing>).

Many additional data-related tools can help both with developing goals and objectives and with tracking progress toward goals and objectives. Some tools may already be part of your program’s ongoing monitoring process, some may be already-developed, published tools, and some may need



to be designed by your program. Here are a few examples of tools that may be useful for tracking progress—depending upon your program’s goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, of course:

- Self-Assessment
- Community assessment
- Parent surveys
- Family partnership process
- Family assessments
- Child assessment data
- PFCE Markers of Progress
- Depression screeners
- Parenting intervention tools

**Create your plan of action for achieving goals, objectives, and expected outcomes.** Action plans vary, but generally they include the “what,” “who,” and “when.” Outline the steps you will take to accomplish your goals and objective and to measure progress toward achieving them. Be sure to include the persons responsible, and identify the projected completion dates.

For additional support on action planning, see “Topic #1: Understanding Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans” and “Topic #4: Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans—Program Examples,” as well as the action plan in the *Using the Head Start PFCE Framework in Your Program: Markers of Progress* (on the ECLKC webpages for the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>).

**Refine goals and plans by examining data for patterns of progress on family and child outcomes.** Programs can use data to identify the changes needed to achieve goals for families. For example, while working with individual families to set goals in the family partnership process, program staff may learn about family-specific trends and patterns that may be of value to program-wide goal setting and planning with community partners. Goal setting with families may offer data that programs can use to make timely shifts and monitor the effect of services provided.





# PFCE Program Planning: Example

ALL OF US TOGETHER, Inc., has been providing Head Start and Early Head Start services to its community in Michigan for more than 20 years. For the past 6 months, there has been a rumor about the potential closing of two of the largest employers in the community. At community meetings, the Head Start Director has learned that the rumors are true and that the closings may impact more than half of the families in the program.

Program leadership and family services staff were concerned about what these anticipated job losses might mean for families and children. The most recent results from the community assessment, program Self-Assessment, and family assessments, clearly indicated an immediate need to address the well-being of families. There was already an increase in family violence, use of drugs, and stresses related to unemployment. Staff wanted to know: How can we make a difference for our families to help them during this time of change?

To help address this question, staff invited all stakeholders (members of the governing body, staff, family members, and community partners) to join a program planning committee. The group decided that it first needed to gather more

information from families in the program. To do this, staff developed a survey about family well-being. At the program's quarterly scheduled "Family Night Out" event, parents completed the survey with their Family Service Workers (FSW). As a follow-up, FSW contacted families who were not in attendance to complete the survey.

Next, program staff reviewed and aggregated the data from this survey and compared it with other previously reviewed sources. This process allowed the group to identify the following common goal:

## **BROAD Program Goal Related to Family Outcomes for a Five-Year Period**

ALL of US TOGETHER will partner with families and work with community partners to support families' progress toward improved well-being and stronger financial stability. We will pay special attention to the families impacted by the job loss and the changes that these families will experience over the next 2–5 years as a result of the job loss. This goal is tied to the Family Well-Being Outcome of the PFCE Framework.

## SMART Objectives for Year One

- 1) Develop MOUs with key community partners that have the capacity to offer job cross-training and apprenticeships.
- 2) Within one month of the start of the program year and continuing throughout the program year, ensure that 100 percent of parents have information about support services available in the community—including mental health counseling and job training—to better cope with job loss. Also ensure that all staff know of the resources available in the community to help support families experiencing these stressors.
- 3) Deliver training in mental health consultation, reflective practice, and supervision to all staff to ensure a better understanding of how job loss and job transition influence such mental health issues as depression and anxiety.

Using this goal and these objectives, the committee created a plan of action in which all stakeholders (governing bodies, staff, parents,

See the [PFCE Framework: Family Partnerships and Community Partnerships](#) and the two related family outcomes, Family Well-being and Families as Learners.

and community partners) could play a role. This plan of action focused on a collaborative process to monitor the program’s progress and evaluate the objectives and strategies planned. Engaging families and key stakeholders in the goal-setting process supported the implementation of the plan of action. As part of ongoing communication with the Regional Office, the program also engaged in regular discussions about the program’s progress toward this and other program goals. The program stayed in close contact with its training and technical assistance specialist to discuss its ongoing planning and to identify or access training and resources to implement its plan to support family well-being.

Refer to the information on **BROAD** goals and **SMART** objectives in “Topic #1: Understanding Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Progress, and Action Plans.” You can also refer to *Using the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework in Your Program: Markers of Progress* to inform your ideas about goals and objectives. This resource can be found on the ECLKC website at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>.

## Conclusion

Programs and families can set goals at the program or individual family level. Program goals related to family outcomes are intended to address the needs of all families in a program. These program-wide goals emerge from several data sources. Program leadership, governing bodies, community partners, staff, and families work together to set and achieve these goals.

In addition, staff work with families to set specific individual goals for each family in response to its strengths, needs, interests, hopes, and progress. During the goal-setting process with individual families, program staff may discover trends and patterns that are emerging for a majority of families. These trends and patterns inform program-wide goal setting and planning. Goal setting with families offers data that programs can use to make timely changes and to monitor the effect of services provided on families' progress at both program and individual levels.

