ERSEA Institute 2022

Community Assessment: The Foundation for Responsive Services

Session 3a

Karen Surprenant: Hello, everyone, and welcome. Thank you for joining us today for our session, Community Assessment: The Foundation for Responsive Services. We hope we can provide you with some helpful, valuable information that you can use in your work, your important ERSEA work. We will get started.

We have one little housekeeping note for you. This session has interpretation service available to you. You have some instructions here on the slide regarding that option. If you'd like to listen to the session in Spanish, check on the Interprefy widget on the right-hand side of your window. If you use Interprefy, be sure to mute the media play microphone found on the screen. The volume has a dial that you could put in a down position. Go ahead and avail yourself to that, if need be, and we'll get started.

I want to start by introducing myself. My name's Karen Surprenant, and I'm program management governance specialist with PMFO. I'm from Massachusetts. I'm from Region One, and I was a director there for many years, so if there's any of my Region One colleagues out there, hello, and hello to the rest of the regions also, because I've worked with lots of you in my PMFO role. Vernex?

Vernex Harding: Thank you. My name is Vernex Harding, and I hail from the city that never sleeps – I love saying that – AKA The Big Apple. That's New York City. I am the program management and early childhood education specialist for the National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations. I look forward to our time together today, and I hope you find this presentation helpful in the work that you do, so I'm going to turn it back over to Karen.

Karen: Thank you. Thank you, Vernex. Let's take a quick look at our learning outcomes. As a result of this webinar, we hope that participants will be able to identify at least one ERSEA decision informed by the community assessment. This is about making those connections between community assessment and those important ERSEA decisions. We're going to share lots of resources, and we want you to be able to identify one, hopefully more resources, to support your ERSEA decision making. We'll jump right in.

When it comes to talking about planning to reach and maintain full enrollment, this is the core question that we have for our consideration, and I'm going to read it to you. It says, "What is our strategy to address current and future community, family, and child needs in order to achieve and maintain full enrollment?"

I'd like to say that this is the work that we do in Head Start. This is what we have to do to continually evolve that strategy based on the changes that we're seeing within our families, within our communities, within the needs of the children that we're serving. It's the work that we do, and especially the work that we do in Head Start.

This strategy is changing, and what we need is we need strong leadership, we need data, but we also need that agility to be able to continue to evolve and adapt to meet those changing needs. How do we get that information that we need to develop this strategy? The answer is the community assessment. The community assessment is providing that data you need to be able to reach more children and families, make sure that you're in the communities where you're most needed, make sure that the services are adapted so that they are the kind of services the population needs.

Let's talk a little bit more about community assessment. I know we've been doing community assessments for a long time. Haven't we? They're a "must." They're in the Performance Standards. You can check out those standards, and you can see exactly what's required. These key elements might be a little bit of a review for you, but just to go over them.

The community assessment is aligned with a five-year project period saying you must do a comprehensive one once within that five-year project period. It's strengths based. You want to understand what the strengths and the resources are in the community. It requires very specific collection on data on vulnerable populations – families experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, children with special needs. It's focused on the diverse needs of children and families within their community, and it must be updated annually.

Lots of different kinds of data. You see some data up here on the screen that you could be collecting. Again, as I mentioned, the standard itself will tell you exactly what you have to collect, but there might be other things that you feel like you need to collect to truly understand what's happening in your community and to help you to develop those important goals and make those decisions about locations and hours. That information, in addition to the required information, might change.

For example, there might be some different health and nutrition information that you want as a result of the pandemic. There may be some new community resources out there as a result of the pandemic that you want to identify and partner with community perspectives. You want to know how families are feeling, how organizations, how your community partners are feeling. There might be a particular issue going on in addition to the pandemic that you might get one perspective on.

I remember when I was a director, there was a period of time where community violence was at an all-time high. We wanted to get some real feelings and real perspective from our families as to what they were experiencing, so lots of different kind of data. We're going to share some resources with you that are available in ECLKC that can help you formulate your thoughts about what kind of data you want to gather.

How does the community assessment help us? It helps us to make informed decisions about service area plans and delivery. Vernex is going to go over some of those ERSEA decisions that are informed by the community assessment. It helps us understand the needs of families. Many of you are doing parent surveys, interviews, focus groups that really get the parent voice in. Again, thinking back on my experience as a director, I always had a focus group with the Policy Council, and I was always amazed at how in tune they were to the issues in the community and what was happening. That's valuable information at your fingertips.

It helps you recognize demographic changes and community needs. I don't want to say, "The impact of competition." I want to say "recognizes a changing landscape" – what's happening in the landscape and what's the early childhood landscape look like and who's out there that you might be able to partner with.

It helps you to find what your niche is. Maybe you're going to do more Zero to Three programming because you see what's out there in the community in terms of programming for children ages 3 to 5. It helps you to identify the skills and competencies needed in the workforce. Where are the gaps?

Once you understand better what's happening in the community, you want to make sure that your staff is able to work with those kinds of things that are happening and those experiences that the families are facing. It helps you to leverage your resources and support your staff so that you can advance culturally responsive practice, make sure that your services, that there's equity and that people can access them, that all people can.

It helps you to mobilize community resources and partnerships. Again, we've had a lot of talk about partnerships. I'll spend a little bit more time on it later on, but we know how important that is to providing rich services, comprehensive services, and to getting the word out about the services that we provide. I'm going to turn it over to Vernex now, and she's going to start with this little "Assess Your Knowledge" opportunity.

Vernex: On that note, we'll take a moment to test your knowledge with this true and false activity. Feel free to type your answers in the chat. The first question is, "The community assessment focuses on the needs of Head Start eligible children and families, and the challenges that they face." Is this true or false? Again, please type your answers in the chat. I'll give you a few moments to respond.

OK. I'm seeing something come in. OK, a few answers are starting to come in. All right.

Karen: You have a split audience there, Vernex.

Vernex: I do have a split audience. Thank you. If you said "false," then you are correct. The community assessment must use data that describes community strengths, needs, and resources. This is according to 45 CFR 1302.11B. This data helps to provide a deeper understanding of the community importance for identifying eligible children and families and designing services to best meet their needs.

Karen: Vernex, that can be a tricky one. People are inclined to see "true" when they see that word "needs," but what we wanted to point out here is the importance of learning about the strengths of the community. It's resources, so the programs can leverage those resources. It's strengths and needs.

Vernex: That's right. Karen. Knowing our strengths is just as important as identifying the areas for improvement, which brings me to our next true false question. For this question, "The community assessment must include data on children with disabilities, homeless children, and children in foster care." Please again, post your comments in the chat, and I'll give you a few moments to respond.

We got a few coming in right now. I see a few responses. So far, so good. Looks like we're doing pretty good with this one. All right. On that note, I am going to share the answer. If you answered "true," according to 45CFR 1302.1B, "community-wide strategic planning and needs assessment outlines the data requirements for the community assessment. The data is important for targeting recruitment efforts on these vulnerable populations." Another critical area sometimes overlooked is capturing homeless and foster care children and outreach to local social services and homeless agencies, which can really help those underserved families in your community. I remember doing this for my program when I was a program director, and it really made a difference in our enrollment. I don't know if there's anything you'd like to add, Karen.

Karen: Yes. I'm just thinking, too, about the requirement to reserve 10 percent of your slots for children with disabilities. While you're screening children that are already enrolled and getting some of that disability enrollment that way, it's also important to locate those children that already have diagnosed disabilities through the community assessment process and identify those partners that can help you in their work with children with disabilities – just wanted to remind people of that.

Vernex: Yes. Very, very helpful information. As you heard from my colleague, Karen, talk about the community assessment helps programs, let's take a look at and talk a little more about the community assessment as it relates to the management system wheel for planning for ERSEA services. You also heard throughout the plenary, you may have heard the discussion about thinking systematically and how that helps when you understand, in terms ERSEA, it helps us understand how each of the elements influence one another and how they encourage us to think about the impact ERSEA has on the management systems that are integral to operating effective Head Start programs.

The community assessment helps us provide critical data for ERSEA-related decision-making. With all Head Start services, data is critical for understanding the program needs, making decisions, evaluating services, and planning for continuous improvement. Data provides the ability to respond to change in community, family-child needs, and addressing ERSEA services. I'm going to go to the next slide and take a closer look at the decision areas informed by the community assessment.

As you look at this slide, which areas would you identify as ERSEA-related? Take a moment. Just take a look at it and feel free to drop your comments in the chat. While some may seem obvious to you, such as the service area, recruitment areas, and program locations, it's easy to see how these can all be related to your ERSEA efforts.

For example, programs may have goals around facilities that impact recruitment efforts. Then this is where you can see in your program the use of the community assessment data to establish long-term goals, along with your self-assessment to meet the program objectives. The data in your community assessment may have identified an increase in children in your catchment area, and your program may need to add an additional classroom to meet the community needs.

Another area where the community assessment data released to ERSEA efforts involves services and coordinated approaches, which also impacts the ability to reach and enroll eligible children and families. Some things that come to mind – there may be an influx of a particular population in your catchment area, and it may be helpful to identify the languages spoken in the community you serve. This data can be beneficial in planning for costs, interpretation services, training staff to become familiar with those ethnic backgrounds and heritage of the families that are being served in your program.

One could also take it a step further by analyzing the data to make informed hiring practices. Your program may look at ways to recruit more diverse staff to meet the needs of the families and the children being served. The next is the community assessment data is also useful in establishing collaborative partnerships – you want to go back? We're not done yet. [Crosstalk]

It's also useful in establishing collaborative partnerships – so you do see that there – which, as we know, is critical for connecting with families and enhancing the service delivery model. For example, there may be another daycare in the area or other daycares, I should say, in the area that your program could partner with and utilize as a feeder to your program. Or if you have an Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships grant, that may be a good opportunity to collaborate and recruit more eligible children and families. That's something I did when I was a program director.

As you can see, the community assessment provides data that is crucial for identifying and recruiting eligible families. It also provides a framework for your ERSEA planning, which may be something you want to conduct at least once during the five-year grant period and update annually. It could be a valuable tool if used in conjunction with your self-assessment and other crucial data.

Now we can turn to the next slide. Here we wanted to review what the Office of Head Start has recently said about their Enrollment Forward webinar, about community assessment data. In that, what they've communicated and shared is that all recipients should update their community assessment to guide their intensive recruitment efforts and to ensure they are reaching families most in need of services.

If a program determines that their pre-pandemic-approved program option will not meet the needs of the community, they must submit an updated community assessment and request for approval for a change in scope. That's really important. Programs should also revisit their established selection criteria based on the findings from their updated community assessment. The funds that recipients have received from the Cares Act, the CRRSA Act, and the ARP funds can also be used to support the enhanced community partnerships and related recruitment efforts.

This turns us to this slide. As you're aware, the community assessment data is essential for planning for ERSEA services. The community assessment data is used to identify and recruit eligible children and families in the service area. The community assessment provides up-to-date community assessment data to establish the selection criteria. The community assessment is updated and used to monitor changing demographics and family needs in helping to identify enrollment priorities. Next, the community assessment data is also used to identify trends,

health concerns, and cultural traditions that may impact regular attendance. You can see that the community assessment is important in every one of the ERSEA elements.

My question to you – "Is your community assessment data current and used to inform your ERSEA practices." In other words, does your community assessment inform all of these areas we've outlined, and are you using the data to inform ERSEA practices?

The community assessment matrix is also a great tool to ensure that you're gathering the right data. However, more importantly is that your program is utilizing the community assessment data to inform your ERSEA practices. Don't let your community assessment sit on the shelf. However, think about the usefulness of the community assessment as an ongoing assessment tool to inform your decisions in your program. Now I'm going to turn it back over to Karen to assess your knowledge.

Karen: Thank you, Vernex. Such good information about community assessment. I'm thinking, get those community assessments out and make sure it's doing what you need it to do. Perhaps you need to make some changes, but it's critical. It's always important, but even more important these days.

 I'm going to shift gears a little bit with our next true false question. Let's assess your knowledge once again. "The program's over income allowance is up to 10 percent of enrollment and an additional 35 percent of participants whose incomes are below 130 percent of federal poverty guidelines." Is this true? Is it 10 percent plus 35 percent? Or is this false? That's way too much. What do you think? True or false?

Vernex: I see some responses coming in. [Crosstalk]

Karen: People are like, "Yes. That's the story." Yes. [Crosstalk] If you said "true" … I'm spilling the beans if you said "true," it's correct. If you want to go back and look at – we've been telling you about some standard numbers – if you want to jot down standards, I will tell you that this is in 13 02 12, and I'm going to read from it just a little bit. The ability to accept children from families with incomes above federal poverty guidelines is addressed in 13 02 12 C2.

It says that "a program may enroll a child who does not meet the income eligibility requirements if the child would benefit from services and provided that these participants only make up 10 percent of the program's enrollment." Then it goes on to say in a separate standard, which is D, there's an additional allowance that says, "a program may role an additional 35 percent of participants whose incomes are below 130 percent of poverty line, if additional outreach and reporting requirements are met." We'll look at those in just a little bit.

I want to just point out, there's been lots of talk about this allowance and this standard, there's minimum wage going up, and people are really struggling and needing to get into services. It's comer up in one of our Enrollment Forward webinars, the one on February 22. We want to make that link available to you, too.

The question was asking whether a program should use the number of enrolled children, rather than the funded enrollment to calculate this percentage. The answer was "the number of enrolled children." The Office of Head Start is saying that, because they're recognizing that these days there may be some fluctuation in enrollment. People might not be at their full

enrollment and in order to comply with the intent of that record – with the intent of the law, I mean – you need to go by the actual enrollment. They recognize that it's a lot easier to plan when you know that you're doing the percentage of your funded enrollment. You want to pay attention to that in the future. Again, you can check that out.

I want to note that the disability enrollment is 10 percent of the funded enrollment. I'm going to move us on to look a little bit more at this over-income allowance. Again, you see the standard. There it is. It talks about "programs are allowed to enroll." This is the additional 35 percent of participants, because this is the one that has some additional criteria that talks about making sure that you've established and implemented outreach and procedures to ensure that it's meeting the needs of those below federal poverty guidelines and that your selection criteria is ensuring that you're serving those children below federal poverty guidelines for us.

This has always been the case. We're always about serving the neediest families. This is just about making sure that you have the systems in place to do that, and that your selection criteria addresses … Makes sure that when families are over those income guidelines, they're still being considered with selection criteria based on what's happening to be able to identify those that are in need.

The standard also goes on to talk about being able to report these things to the Regional Office if they ask. It talks about being able … You can do this because you have the systems in place that ensure you're meeting the needs of the families, for being able to talk about those outreach efforts and the policies and procedures, and being able to talk about your enrollment, your enrollment for the previous year, who's on the wait list and how they rank on that wait list. Again, OHS does not want this to be a deterrent, but you need to be able to understand who you're serving and why you're making the choices that you make. You can do that.

I'm going to move us on. We talk a lot about data and community assessment and ERSEA planning. These are some questions. You may be watching this without your teammates, and hopefully you can bring some of this back and you can engage in some conversation about your ERSEA data.

What new data are you collecting to plan, assess, and strengthen ERSEA service delivery? I heard about programs and recent webinars collecting different kinds of data about attendance, about families' fear, about different attendance concerns during the pandemic. How are you capturing what's happening and use it to improve those ERSEA services?

What systems are in place to ensure that we track trends and make decisions critical for providing appropriate ERSEA services? For example, do you track how long it takes from application to enrollment? Do you track the progress to see if there's some common obstacles that people are facing, whether it's a place where things get bogged down or a place where they have difficulties providing certain paperwork that might improve with some work with different agencies – so about making sure that you use your data. Are you collecting data that you don't use and maybe you don't need to be collecting it? How does that data collection system support our eligibility selection and enrollment processes?

Lots of good questions to stimulate that conversation. I want to remind you – this might look familiar to you. This is a tool that was shared in another session, but it's just so connected to that conversation about data, that conversation about best practice. This is hot off the press. We put this together at PMFO, and we got it out to you quickly because ERSEA is such a hot topic.

We wanted to identify what we call "success indicators" and encourage a process for teams to come together and talk about those success indicators so you could learn from each other. Sometimes when you do work across program areas, it's the best way to bring in new ideas. You can identify your strengths. You can identify areas needing improvement. Again, there's a place for action planning.

If you haven't kept up, this ERSEA attendance tool, assessment tool – excuse me, I got excited – you can see the ratings scale … [Crosstalk]

Vernex: We got a little bit of everything ERSEA, so.

Karen: [Inaudible] Assessment session, you can see community assessment woven in each of the ERSEA elements. You make that connection again to community assessment.

Vernex: Karen, I just want to say it was fun working on this with you. We did a lot of really good work. I'm so excited about this tool. Like Karen said, feel free to check it out when you have an opportunity.

Karen: Yes. It really is. Another tool that we like to tell you about – and you see a picture of it right there – it's called Community Assessment: The Foundation for Program Planning in Head Start. This is quite a comprehensive one, I call it "The Book." It's the book on community assessment, and it's done by the five steps of community assessment. It connects back to standards, what you have to do. It gives a lot of tips for people in the field, gives a lot of examples, but it really gives you information on how to complete a comprehensive community assessment. One of the things that I love about this – you can see on the left, the list of the appendices list, and you can see all of the different things within that resource.

A couple of them I want to highlight that we included in the widget box with your handouts. One is the community assessment matrix. That's a worksheet that has everything that you're required to collect data on based on the standards. You can make sure you're planning for that and think about where you're going to get it, and who's going to do it. I like things that spell everything out, but it also has some tickler, so to speak, or some ideas or suggestions on all different kinds of data. You can figure out if there's something beyond the standards that you want to capture as part of your community assessment. That's the Community Assessment Matrix.

The other one is called the Community Assessment Analysis. You know in the old days, when we got together in person, we would bring this out to teams, and they would take their community assessment and take that analysis alongside of it and assess the assessment and really look at if it captured everything it's supposed to.

Beyond that, it then helps you to apply it. It helps you to think about what trends you see, and how do those trends impact your enrollment, how it impacts your program options. It actually

helps you to engage in and plan for using what's in your community assessment. What a great opportunity to sit with your team and think, "Are we using it? Does it have everything it needs, and are we using it the way that we should use it?" Check those out. OK. I think Vernex is going to take us to another "Assess Your Knowledge."

Vernex: Absolutely. Definitely great resources. I'm going to test your knowledge again, and this is a true- and false. The first question is: "A program can reserve up to 3 percent of its slots for pregnant women and children experiencing homelessness and children in foster care. Should the community assessment data determine such a need?" Is this true or false? I'm going to give you a moment or two to drop your responses in the chat and see what comes in here. We're getting a few responses. Looks a little mixed right now.

Karen: I think they're being sleepy.

Vernex: Great. Now I see more "trues" That's good. The answer here is "true." The Head Start Program Performance Standards 1302.15C states – "If a program determines from the community assessment there are families experiencing homelessness in the area or children are foster care that could benefit from services, the program may reserve one or more enrollment slots for pregnant women and children experiencing homelessness and children and foster care when a vacancy occurs. A program can reserve no more than 3 percent of the program's funded enrollment slots. If the reserve enrollment slot is not filled within the 30 days, then it must be filled with an eligible Head Start family." This is really important. I've had to do that, and it's very helpful to utilize this. I don't know that a lot of programs do.

Then for our next question – "If there are no changes in the community programs, programs can indicate that in their annual refunding application, it is not necessary to conduct a community assessment update." Let me know what you think. Is this true or false? I'll give you a moment to respond.

OK. I see the responses starting to come in. Alright. We're doing pretty good with this. Everyone seems to be getting this right. The majority of people, I should say. Not everyone, but a majority. The answer here is "false." According to the Head Start Program Performance Standards, 1302.11B2, "a program must annually review and update the community assessment." We'll take a look at those requirements in the next slide. Let's move on to the next slide here.

As you know, the community assessment is done once every five years, and then the other four years programs must review and update the community assessment to reflect significant changes. Given the changes we experienced in the past two years, it's more important than ever to gather up-to-date information on the needs of the Head Start-eligible children and their families and available resources.

The annual review must identify rates of the family, child homelessness, and shifts in the community demographics, and resources. Those shifts could be in the population or they could be economic, environmental, or related to resources. Changes may include the increased availability of publicly funded prekindergarten.

The changes can also include an assessment of how the community prekindergarten meets the needs of the parents and the children, and whether it's offered for full day. That's really important. Given what we've experienced in the past few years, what changes have you seen in the communities and what new resources of data are you utilizing? We'll be interested to hear from you. Feel free to share your responses in the chat.

Karen: Yes. it's really interesting. People have had … We've had two years of the pandemic and each year people have done an update, so they may be using different sources to get their information, or they may be learning lots about the community. I heard from a program on a webinar that used information on the pandemic where rates were higher in other communities to make decisions on how they would operate their services and just to better understand why they had absentee or lack of participation in particular communities. Those updates are so important.

Karen: Yes. They're very critical. As programs update their community assessment each year, they need to factor in new data into their ongoing planning process. It's really important. We're going to go to the next slide. Programs must be sure to consider data from the annual update in your ongoing planning process. You may need to add or revise a new goal, or your revisions to an old goal, to your objectives and existing goals based on the community assessment update.

The community assessment provides the data that you need to ensure that your program hours, calendar, and options meet the needs of the population that you're serving. Throughout, data-informed adaptions may be necessary to ensure responsive programming and maintain full enrollment. The annual update on the community assessments should generate this data, the data that's necessary to monitor the demographic changes, and the trends that may necessitate future program modifications.

Karen: This topic also came up, Vernex, in a recent webinar, I want to remind people, because all of this information is available on the COVID pages, these recent webinars on ECLKC. They talked about making changes to approved service delivery models because we know this is happening because of the changes in communities.

OHS wanted to encourage people to work closely in consultation with the Regional Office to make sure that the changes are in line, compliant with performance standards, that have been aligned with the current budget, and that, again, those decisions are based on community needs. It's really important to understand those community needs so you can make the right choices, and make sure your leadership understands that they can make that connection between what you're proposing and what the data is saying.

Vernex: Yes. We say, "Data, data, data." Really important. Offering the right services to the right populations is key to maintaining full enrollment. Programs need to use their community assessment data or external data, and their internal data, to answer these questions on the slide.

The data is helping you with answering these questions. It becomes even more critical for programs as they begin to move forward. Look at current data in relationship to answering the questions. For example, are you offering the right model? Half-day versus full-day options, 10 versus 10-month options? Are you partnering adequately? This can include building cultural

linguistic ties. For example, have you partnered with local school districts, local health departments, colleges, universities, and on and on.

Also, is your program providing services in the right locations? That is really key. Has your catchment area changed? Also, are there other untapped catchment areas where you may be able to serve more children. Then also finding, identifying, and serving children with the greatest needs. Are you partnering with local social service organizations, homeless shelters to target the population most in need? Are services provided high-quality services? In other words, are you providing the right services for the right kinds of population that you're serving. That's really important.

Next, in this handout we're sharing another resource with you. It's identifying data and databased decision worksheet. It is a great tool for making connections between the data and decision-making, especially when it comes to ERSEA related decisions like program options, calendar, your recruitment, your selection criteria, and enrollment priorities.

This tool can be especially useful in planning forward to full in-person services, because it helps make connections between the data and the ERSEA planning that ensure that the decisions are not made without supporting evidence, which is critical in everything that we do. This is one of the many resources that can be found in the Community Assessment: The Foundation for Program Planning in Head Start guide on ECLKC. I'm going to turn it back over to Karen, who's going to assess your knowledge.

Karen: OK. Before I do that, I was thinking about all those data-informed decisions, those questions that you were asking about model and partnering and location and how important they are to that core question that we started with in the beginning of the session – "What is our strategy?" Again, those questions and that strategy are the key to maintaining, reaching and maintaining, full enrollment.

Let's shift gears again with this question. "Programs are required to establish ongoing collaborative relationships with organizations identified in the community assessment." Is that true, or is that false? That might be an easy one.

Vernex: I'm trying to see if anything is coming in. [Crosstalk[

Karen: Give them just a moment because we're coming to the end of our session. I see a couple of "trues" coming in, and that's absolutely correct. "A program must establish ongoing collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations." We find this in Subpart E in "family and community engagement," where they talk about the different kinds of partnerships, on-site services, contracts, agreements. I know that we're all doing that, and we really seen the importance of this increase in the last two years.

The standard also goes on to list many, many examples of the different kinds of organizations that you might partner with. We also see some language in Subpart J, "program management and quality improvement," that talks about a coordinated approach to service delivery to ensure the full and effective participation of children who are dual language learners and their family. We want to work with those community organizations that way.

There's so many benefits. We're down to our last five minutes, and we could have a whole session just on partnerships. We see some of those benefits on the screen – streamlining services, and expanding those innovations, maximizing funding and resources – so many benefits. We know that a partner who truly understands our services is so important to getting the word out about our services – and we know what an issue staffing is, they may also be helpful in that area, too.

We are really recruiting in a new environment these days. There are so many options for parents to choose from, and it's really important to be a good collaborator. We want to shift from that dynamic of competition to one of collaboration. I heard a program give an example of how do you deal with, and again, that competition. They talked about how long and how hard they worked on partnerships so that people referred to each other's program, so if there was a child that needed Head Start and needed the comprehensive services, that former competitor referred that child over to Head Start. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could share children like we share resources and provide the best setting for them.

I invite you to think about your program's partnerships as you are working towards the full enrollment. What new partners are a source of enrollment now? What new partnerships should you or what partnerships should you renew? It's a great time to look at all your partnerships. Are they achieving what you want them to achieve? Have they just fallen by the wayside? How can you work better with them? Are there new ones out there?

Many people are working directly with new kinds of organizations that have come up as a result of the pandemic to directly recruit from there. What kinds of work can you do together? How can your partners work together to promote safe environments for young children and families? Which partners do you want to dedicate more time to?

I know we used to have the time before each year where we looked at our partnerships closely and looked at MOUs and looked at how we might want to change them. This is a wonderful time, especially in the spirit of ERSEA and the spirit of returning to full in-person services, to do that work. Again, we could talk a lot about that. But as we come to a close, I want to just ask people … Vernex, you can ask them. How about that?

Vernex: Sure. We want to know which resource might you use to strengthen your use of the community assessment data for ERSEA planning. Or perhaps you've used one of these resources with success, and you'd like to share that in the chat. We would love to hear your thoughts on this. Tell us what you might use it for.

Karen: Vernex, while they're thinking about that – and we only have a minute – I want to say that my favorite resource is the community assessment book because of all those samples. There's a sample community partner survey that we shared with you. [Crosstalk] Would you have a favorite before we close?

Vernex: I mean, I like – there's so many. But I like the community assessment matrix. I love the one about identifying data, which I shared earlier, and databased-decisions worksheet. That's a great one as well.

Karen: There's so many. [Inaudible] Let's not forget that new assessment tool.

Vernex: That's right.

Karen: We have a list of lots of resources, and they all have some live links. There's some PMFO and some PFCE resources. I think we have to close out with that. I want to thank you very much for your time and wish you the best in the work that you do in Head Start – such important work. Vernex?

Vernex: Yes. I want to thank you for taking in our day together and giving us the gift of your time. Thank you for your efforts as you move forward in ERSEA success. Have a great day.