

# GETTING AN EARLY HEAD START IN CALIFORNIA

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The Office of Head Start has just issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to increase the number of infants, toddlers, and pregnant women served by its Early Head Start program (EHS). In the past Early Head Start expansion dollars were often open only to current Head Start (HS) and/or Early Head Start grantees. However, the current round of \$619 million dollars budgeted for Early Head Start expansion in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is open to new applicant agencies, in addition to current grantees. \$58.9 million is available for California to expand Early Head Start throughout the state. Providing services to infants, toddlers, and pregnant women may be new to many of the agencies that respond to the RFP. Many applicant agencies may also be unaware of all of the services that are required of Early Head Start grantees. In addition, a number of applicants will surely be unfamiliar with all of the federal program requirements including the Head Start Performance Standards, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regulations, and rules specified in the Head Start Act. WestEd, First 5 California, Preschool California, and the California Head Start Association recently collaborated on a series of webinar presentations and regional trainings on the essentials of providing quality Early Head Start services to infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. While the purpose of these trainings was not to scare away potential applicants, the information provided certainly served as a wakeup call for any agency that thought operating an Early Head Start program will be easy.

Yet California, even with its strong base of current Early Head Start grantees, will need to do much more to plan, to prepare, to ramp up capacity, to be ready to effectively serve approximately five thousand two hundred additional infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. While EHS expansion in our state will fulfill a major goal of ARRA funding, creating over one thousand new jobs, California must have a coordinated plan and effort to ensure that programs will be able to “start up” once grant applications are approved. This coordinated plan will need to include many public and private stakeholders in California, and should map out the specific roles each of them will need to play.

## **PLAN MANAGEMENT**

### California Department of Education – Head Start Collaboration Office

While many public and private agencies throughout California will be involved in the expansion of Early Head Start, I suggest that the California Department of Education’s (CDE) Head Start Collaboration Office is best positioned to coordinate EHS planning efforts in the state. Building on its intra-governmental connections with the Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division, Department of Justice, Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and university, state university, and community college systems, the CDE through its Head Start Collaboration Office should initiate, coordinate, and facilitate statewide planning for: 1) human resources; 2) facilities; and 3) recruitment.

## **1) HUMAN RESOURCES PLANNING**

### Institutions of Higher Education

All California colleges, including the UCs, the Cal States, and especially, the community colleges, should reevaluate their course offerings immediately and identify any classes that should be added to meet the education needs of teachers of infants and toddlers. Colleges should also determine if new courses need to be added for the Early Head Start staff who will provide health, nutrition, mental health, disabilities, and family services to EHS children, pregnant women, parents, and their families. If they haven't already, colleges and WestEd should consider a statewide collaboration to support current and prospective teachers of infants and toddlers. WestEd's proven effective *Program for Infant/Toddler Care* (PITC) could provide core course content for many programs and would offer colleges immediate access to a high quality infant and toddler care and education syllabus.

### Head Start Regional Training and Technical Assistance Providers

The Office of Head Start contracts with private for-profit and private non-profit companies to provide training and technical assistance (T&TA) services and support to Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Existing Head Start and Early Head Start grantees develop training and technical assistance plans for their programs and then work with their T&TA provider, as necessary, to achieve the goals of these plans. T&TA providers employ specialists with content area, fiscal, program design and management expertise. Many of these T&TA providers, especially the providers awarded the contracts to serve California grantees, will need to plan for their own expanded capacity to serve any new EHS grantees and/or current EHS grantees that receive expansion funding. (Note: American Indian/Native Alaskan and Migrant EHS and HS grantees in California receive support services from a different T&TA provider than other EHS and HS programs in the state.) For this significant EHS expansion T&TA providers should work closely with the CDE Head Start Collaboration Office to coordinate and target regional trainings across the state, especially trainings for new grantees. These T&TA providers will also need to plan to support a variety of probable EHS program designs including center-based, home-based, combination (center-based/home-based), and family child care home program models.

### California Department of Education – Commission on Teacher Credentialing

In anticipation of an increase in college students and graduates seeking employment as teachers in EHS programs, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing should assign additional staff to expedite processing of Child Development Teacher permit applications to facilitate program start-up.

### California Department of Justice

With the addition of new EHS programs in California the state Department of Justice should ensure that they have adequate staff to receive, process, and report criminal background clearances for applicants seeking licenses to operate programs, as well as, teachers hired to teach in these new programs.

### Child CPR/First Aid Trainers

Many new teachers and other EHS program staff will be required to complete child CPR and first aid classes prior to employment. The CDE Head Start Collaboration Office should plan and schedule regional CPR and first aid trainings and could consider coordinating these trainings with established training providers (e.g. American Red Cross and American Heart Association).

## **2) FACILITIES PLANNING**

### California Department of Social Services – Community Care Licensing Division

While there is a possibility that there will be an increase in applications by new licensees to operate programs as a result of EHS expansion, it is more likely that there will be a flood of applications by existing program operators to license new and/or additional facilities including family child care homes. The Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) should ensure that enough Licensing Program Analysts are on staff to visit and evaluate proposed EHS facilities. Subsequent processing of facility license applications, including any required CCLD trainings for applicants should be well coordinated to expedite the start-up and opening of new classrooms and family child care homes.

### Fire Department

Fire departments throughout the state responsible for conducting facility inspections and issuing of fire safety clearances will certainly see an increase in their workloads related to EHS expansion. Community Care Licensing Regional Managers should confirm and streamline, if necessary, interdepartmental communication procedures with fire departments to speed the safety clearance process for EHS grantees and providers applying for CCLD facility licenses.

### Facility Funding

If passed, current legislation that would facilitate processing of applications for and access to funds available through the Child Care Facilities Revolving Loan Fund may not be enacted soon enough for new and current EHS grantees to take advantage of. So it may be necessary for the CDE Child Development Division to draft streamlined interim rules and guidelines for programs seeking to apply for funds to lease-purchase relocatable facilities to house new EHS classrooms. In addition, community-building agencies, such as the Low Income Investment Fund, should be prepared to work with new and existing EHS grantees seeking funding for new child care facilities.

## **3) RECRUITMENT PLANNING**

### Centralized Eligibility List Administrators & Child Care Resource and Referral Network

Each county's Centralized Eligibility List (CEL) administrator in conjunction with California Child Care Resource and Referral Network agencies should step up efforts to recruit and enter onto the CEL families with infants and toddlers eligible for EHS program services. While the CEL was not established to enroll pregnant women onto the list, CEL administrators should consider partnering with local Departments of Health,

WIC agencies, and health care providers to recruit pregnant women eligible for EHS services and then enter these women onto the CEL.

#### Local Education Agencies

The CDE should alert public school district superintendents throughout the state about the expansion of EHS services. For many families, public school may be their first contact with education programs for their young children. While EHS grantees will certainly partner with many LEAs in their recruitment areas, the size of this expansion lends itself to a statewide outreach initiative led by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

#### Department of Developmental Services and Regional Centers

The California Department of Development Services and the private non-profit Regional Centers that they contract with provide services to infants and toddlers who are at risk for having developmental disabilities or who have a developmental delay. The Head Start Act requires that no less than ten percent of the total number of children actually enrolled in EHS programs be infants and toddlers with disabilities. Regional Centers should be prepared to establish partnership agreements with new EHS grantees, as well as, maintain partnerships with current grantees. These agreements should ensure that expanded EHS enrollment slots be made available to eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities and in accordance with their IFSPs.

### **CONCLUSION**

A large and rapid expansion of Early Head Start services in California will require a comprehensive coordinated response. The above plans provide a basic framework for responding to and assisting new EHS grantees and existing EHS grantees that receive expansion funding. Coordination at the state level (e.g. by the State Head Start Collaboration Office) would help expedite human resource, facilities, and recruitment start-up tasks and processes. The California Department of Education and the Office of Head Start might also consider allocating some training and technical assistance funding to pay for expenses associated with regional CPR/first aid trainings, criminal background checks, Child Development Teacher permit application fees, and facility licensing fees. While EHS grantees may include such costs in their funding applications, a truly coordinated and jointly funded statewide approach would signal that California is indeed ready to get an early head start.