Head Start *A to Z*:
Using Data in Head Start and Early Head Start
—*The Leader's Role*

Background

The use of data has become increasingly important, not only in Head Start and the education community but also in the nonprofit and for-profit business sectors. In fact, a recent issue of the *Harvard Business Review* featured a cover story on "Big Data." In Head Start and Early Head Start, the move towards more accountability and the need to show results have led to a need to look at data in new ways—and to a push for data-driven decision-making.

We often hear people say, "Head Start programs are data rich but information poor." James V. McGee and Laurence Prusak, in their book *Managing Information Strategically* (Copyright 1993 by Ernst & Young), describe the difference this way: "Information is not just data collected. Rather it is data collected, organized, ordered, and imbued with meaning and context … . In order for data to become *useful* to a decision-maker as information, it must be presented in such a way that he or she can relate to it and act upon it."

They further say, *"*Information must *inform* while data has no such mandate. To a degree, information is in the eye of the beholder … . Data can be considered and discussed in isolation. Information must be discussed in the context of specific users and decision-makers. … We are surrounded by data and organizations are abuzz with data that may turn out to be valuable information to some users with a decision problem."

Often in the past, Head Start programs did not make the best use of their data. They only collected data to satisfy compliance; data flowed upward from local programs to the federal government, but it wasn't used at the program level. Data were not delivered to users in a timely manner, and programs did not feel comfortable with the quality of the data. Effective use of data requires us to reframe our thinking so that (1) programs collect and analyze data in order to answer critical questions; (2) data turnaround is fast; and (3) information is presented so that it can be used by staff, teachers, parents, governing bodies, and policy groups in real time. When data are reframed in this way, analysis is richer and programs are able to use the information they glean from the data to set strategic directions, find systemic solutions, answer critical questions, and continually improve their services to children and families.

In his article "The Next Information Revolution," Peter Drucker describes two functions of data: to manage operations and to guide decisions. Head Start programs use data in both of these

ways. Much of the data collected by Head Start programs relates to operations. Such data are collected, recorded, and reported on an ongoing basis and then used to make sure that Head Start services are being provided in a timely, efficient, and effective manner. Many Head Start programs are able to use their information management systems to track and report operational data. Head Start programs often find themselves more challenged in their efforts to use data to track progress towards their goals and to inform and guide decisions. The Head Start planning cycle can help programs approach planning supported by data in an integrated, systemic way.

There are abundant resources that Head Start directors can consult about the use of data. Many of these resources are available on the Early Childhood Knowledge and Learning Center (ECLKC) website; they include *Five Steps to a Community Assessment: A Workbook for Head Start and Early Head Start Programs Serving Hispanic and Other Emerging Populations*, *Introduction to Data Analysis Handbook,* "The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation," and "Leading with a Vision: Managing Change and Creating Quality: The Director's Professional Development Planner." Some other excellent non-Head Start resources include the following:

➢ *W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook*, developed for use by projects funded by the Kellogg Foundation, features a section, "Part Two: Blueprint for Conducting Project-Level Evaluation," that provides a clearly written overview of the steps in project evaluation. http://www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2010/W-K-Kellogg-Foundation-Evaluation-Handbook.aspx

➢ *From Data to Decisions: The Power of Analytics* and *From Data to Decisions II: Building an Analytics Culture* (published by the Partnership for Public Service and the IBM Center for the Business of Government) make the case that the extensive and systematic use of data (known as analytics) drives fact-based actions for effective management, and that turning data into meaningful information enables program staff and agency leaders to make decisions and look at day-to-day practices that can help build and sustain an analytics culture, drive meaningful changes, and achieve mission results. http://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/From%20Data%20to%20Decisions.pdf and http://www.businessofgovernment.org/sites/default/files/From Data to Decisions II.pdf

➢ *Sustaining School Improvement: Data-Driven Decision-Making* (by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) addresses three key elements of data collection, analysis, and use: purposeful data collection and analysis, the provision of resources and other supports, and communication. It discusses the role of leadership teams and includes a continuum of sustainability strategies that programs can use to assess their

data-driven decision-making process.
https://titleiidgrants.wikispaces.com/file/view/5031tg_datafolio.pdf

Overarching Theme

This session focuses on the roles that leaders play in fostering the use of data-driven decision-making in their organizations. It clarifies the difference between data and information; describes a coordinated, predicable annual planning cycle and shows how the use of data is integrated into and supports that cycle; and delineates four sets of data activities: (1) preparing, (2) collecting, (3) aggregating and analyzing, and (4) using and sharing data. It explores the leader's role in pulling together a variety of data sources to tell a program's story.

Outcomes

➢ Explore practices that leaders use to foster their effective use of data in their programs
➢ Understand the planning cycle and how the use of data is integrated into the cycle
➢ Identify four data activities that programs carry out throughout the cycle

Materials

➢ *Voices From the Field* data montage video clip
➢ PowerPoint presentation
➢ Handouts
  ✓ Program Planning in Head Start
  ✓ Data Activities Inventory (Leaders and Individual Levels)
  ✓ The Four Data Activities
  ✓ Telltale Data
  ✓ Nifty Notes
  ✓ Data Resources
  ✓ Key Messages (New Leaders Version)
➢ Data Wall charts
➢ Leader's Role cards (1 role on each a card)

Planning Ahead

➢ This is a two-hour session.
➢ Review the PowerPoint presentation and estimate the time you will need to complete each part of the session based on the size of the group.
➢ Review background information (pages 1–3).
➢ Preview the *Voices from the Field* data montage video clip.

➢ Make colored copies of the data wall charts to post around the room. We recommend that you make a poster-size copy of each chart. Depending on the size of the group, you may want to make one or two additional 8 ½ x 11-inch sets of the charts for each table group. (You may choose to omit the posters and only do the activity at tables or post smaller charts on the walls.) If using the poster-size charts, post them on the walls of the room prior to conducting the "Telltale Data" activity.

➢ Copy the "Leader's Role" cards on card stock. (The size of your group will determine the number of copies that you need.)

➢ Make copies of the handouts:
   ✓ Program Planning in Head Start
   ✓ Data Activities Inventory (Leaders and Individual Levels)
   ✓ The Four Data Activities
   ✓ Telltale Data
   ✓ Nifty Notes
   ✓ Data Resources
   ✓ Key Messages (New Leaders Version)

➢ (Optional) Review the online module *Data in Head Start and Early Head Start: Creating a Culture That Embraces Data* on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC website).

Let's Get Started

1. Welcome the participants and introduce yourself. If you have one or more co-facilitators, invite them to introduce themselves too.

   Offer the following beliefs/ideas/facts about *Head Start A to Z*:

Say to participants, "*Head Start A to Z* sessions are designed to emulate the concept of the 'learning organization.' We recognize the key building blocks of learning organizations: a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes, and leadership development—all of which reinforce learning.

"Each one of us has an important role to play in the success of this session. Those with experience remind us where we've come from and what we must do to maintain our identity and uniqueness. New members bring a fresh perspective and remind us of what we must do to prepare for the future. All roles are essential for Head Start as a learning organization to continue to grow and flourish.

"*Head Start A to Z* sessions are successful when they help us share the best of what we have to offer with a strength-based focus. As you engage in this session, we hope that you will support one another in the learning process by generously sharing your knowledge, experience, and perspective.
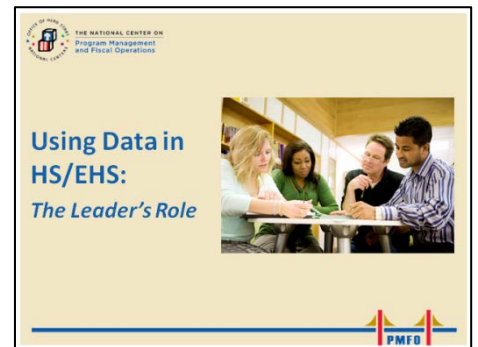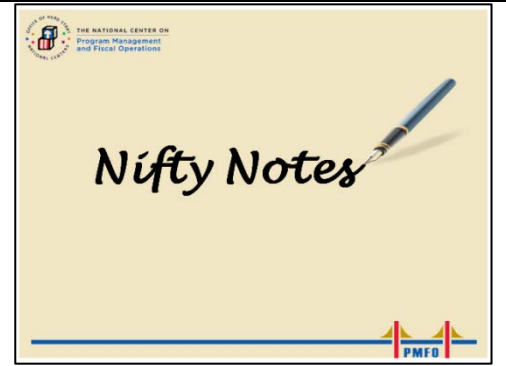
2. Guide participants to the "Key Messages" handout. Say to participants, "*Head Start A to Z* sessions are designed based on a set of key messages. For this session, Using Data in Head Start and Early Head Start: the Leader's Role, we will focus on key message #7, which is a message specifically about data."

   Read the key message and emphasize that data is so important in Head Start that there is an entire key message just about data. Data is an integral part of many Head Start systems and is the thread that links planning, ongoing monitoring, and Self-Assessment. Directors play a key role in creating a culture of data that permeates all levels of their program and in helping all staff embrace data as essential to their work. Head Start leaders use data to drive their program's decisions.
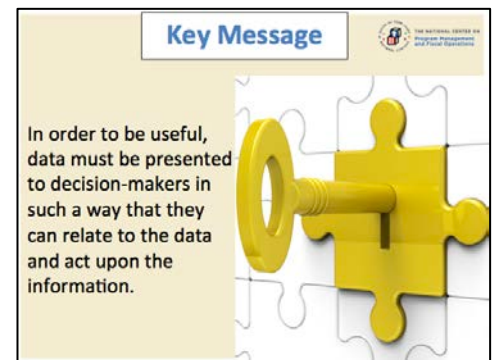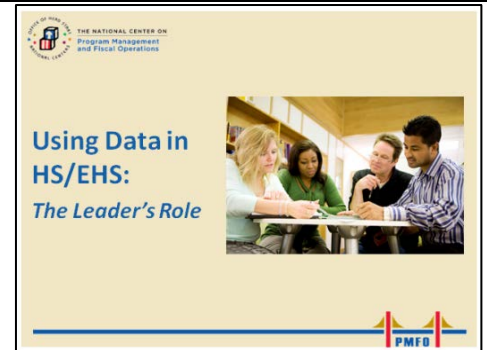
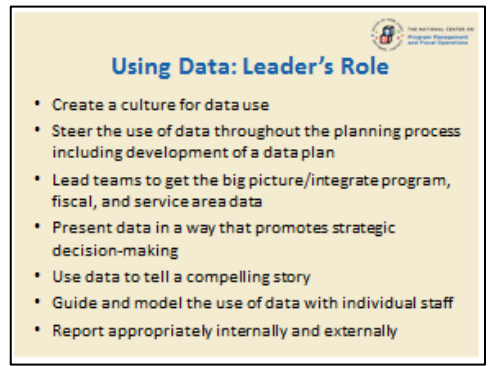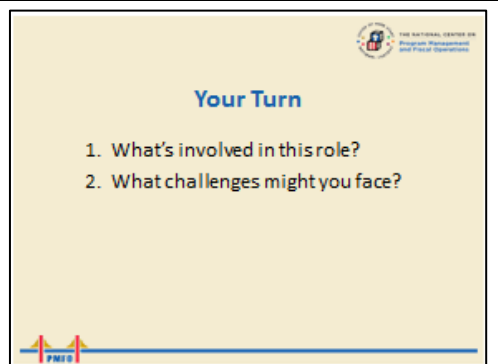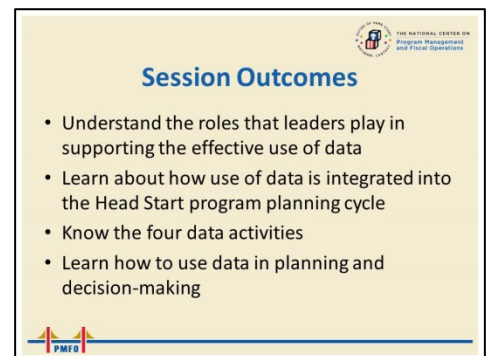|	
3. Begin by giving the "Nifty Notes" pages to participants as a place for capturing their thoughts, "A-ha!" moments, or any new knowledge they may acquire during this session. Open the session by making the point that in Head Start and Early Head Start, the move towards more accountability and the heightened expectation to show results have led to a need to look at data in new ways and to a push for data-driven decision-making. New Head Start leaders often feel that they are inundated by data. This session will help new leaders learn how they can thoughtfully and effectively use data for program improvement.	*Nifty Notes*
4. Introduce the session Using Data in Head Start and Early Head Start: the Leader's Role.	**Using Data in HS/EHS:** *The Leader's Role*
5. Review the session outcomes.	**Session Outcomes** • Understand the roles that leaders play in supporting the effective use of data • Learn about how use of data is integrated into the Head Start program planning cycle • Know the four data activities • Learn how to use data in planning and decision-making
6. Introduce the *Voices from the Field* video clip; explain that the clip is a montage of images of staff in Head Start and Early Head Start sharing their excitement about using data. Show the brief clip and invite a few people to share any points that resonated with them from the montage. You can also use the following conversation starter: "Talk about data and information that gets you excited or data that you use every day."	**What Head Start Leaders Are Saying about Data** Having the data be living numbers has helped us with planning.

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7. Begin a discussion about the seven roles that leaders play as they guide the use of data in their programs. Point out that the data plan mentioned in "Steer the use of data throughout the planning process, including development of a data plan" will be addressed in more detail when we look at the data activities.	**Using Data: Leader's Role** • Create a culture for data use • Steer the use of data throughout the planning process including development of a data plan • Lead teams to get the big picture/integrate program, fiscal, and service area data • Present data in a way that promotes strategic decision-making • Use data to tell a compelling story • Guide and model the use of data with individual staff • Report appropriately internally and externally
8. Divide participants into seven groups, and distribute a card with one of the leader's roles to each group. Direct each team to answer the two questions on the slide in relation to its assigned role. Allow about 10 minutes for team discussions. Invite a few comments from the whole group.	**Your Turn** 1. What's involved in this role? 2. What challenges might you face?

9. Distribute the handout "Planning in Head Start," and review the points on the handout (see below) to provide an overview of the planning cycle.

(As you reach the box that says "Evaluate Progress through Ongoing Monitoring," click to bring up the inner circle of the cycle.)

Program Planning Cycle
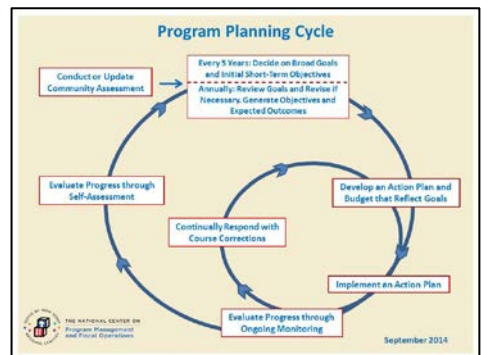
Thoughtful planning is critical to successful programming. The Program Planning Cycle graphic illustrates how the required Head Start management systems are inter-related parts of a predictable planning process. Through this process programs develop goals, objectives, and expected outcomes and monitor and evaluate progress towards their program and school readiness goals.

To learn more about the planning process, follow the arrows around the planning cycle.

1) Begin at either **community assessment** or **Self-Assessment**.
   - *New programs* begin at **community assessment**. They collect and analyze data about the needs and resources of eligible families, the program, and the community within the service area to inform their goal-setting.
   - *Existing programs* begin the process with **Self-Assessment**. They take a fresh look at updated community assessment data, data gathered through ongoing monitoring, and other relevant data to make recommendations for planning and goal setting.

2) For their baseline grant applications, programs identify the long-term goals they will accomplish

during the **five-year project period**. They also identify initial SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely) **short-term objectives** linked to **expected outcomes**. During their **annual** planning process, they review their long-term goals and revise them as necessary. They continue to break down their goals into short-term objectives linked to expected outcomes.

3) Programs develop an annual **Action Plan** which is a defined set of steps that outlines what a program will do to accomplish its goals and objectives. The Action Plan is supported by a budget that is aligned with the goals and objectives.

4) As the program **implements its plan**, it collects data through its **record-keeping and reporting system**.

5) The program continually evaluates progress towards its goals and objectives by reviewing data gathered through the **ongoing monitoring system**. Effective ongoing monitoring enables programs to track progress towards their goals and objectives and ensure compliance.

6) Based on ongoing monitoring results, programs continue to implement their **Action Plan** as written, change the plan to **replicate best practices**, and/or make **course corrections** that may require changes in program activities or levels of effort.

7) Finally, the program comes full circle to the annual **Self-Assessment**. In this step, the Self-Assessment team uses its ongoing monitoring, community assessment, and other relevant data to assess the program's progress in achieving its goals, objectives, and expected outcomes, and to evaluate program compliance with federal requirements.

Two additional elements are essential throughout the planning process: effective use of data and communication with appropriate stakeholders at each step.

In describing the cycle, be sure to emphasize the inner circle, which shows the process of ongoing monitoring. Use this as an opportunity to point out the difference between ongoing monitoring and self-assessment. Ongoing monitoring is, as its name says, ongoing throughout the year, while self-assessment is an annual event built on data and information gathered through ongoing monitoring.

Invite comments and questions from the group.

10. Explain that this version of the Planning Cycle shows how data use is integrated throughout the cycle. Emphasize the following:

- Goals are developed based on data gathered during the Self-Assessment and community assessment.
- When programs develop their action plans, it is important for them to think up front about the data that they want to collect (their evidence or measures) to show progress towards meeting their goals. That is, they need to plan for data. It can be difficult to collect data after the fact.
- Checking integrity of data occurs at various times throughout the cycle. It is important for data to be complete, accurate, and up to date. Remember: "Garbage in, garbage out."
- Data is aggregated and analyzed and used to evaluate progress during both ongoing monitoring and self-assessment. The data collected through ongoing monitoring informs the Self-Assessment process.
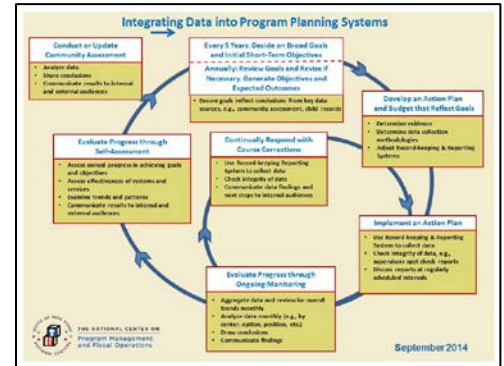
Invite comments and questions.

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11. Transition to the four data activities: prepare, collect, aggregate and analyze, use and share.

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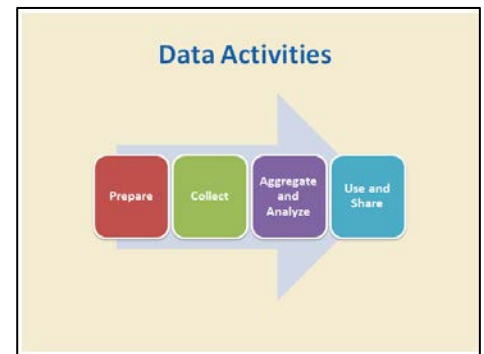
12. Conduct a jigsaw reading activity using the handout "The Four Data Activities."

- ✓ Divide participants into groups of four.
- ✓ Assign each person in the group to read one of the sections of the handout ("Prepare,""Ccollect," "Aaggregate and Analyze," or "uUse and Share).
- ✓ Direct team members to share the information from the section that they read with the others in the group of four.

Debrief the activity by inviting participants to share a quick summary of prepare, collect, aggregate and analyze, and use and share (You can challenge them to summarize each in five words). If time permits, ask a few generic questions such as "At which activity is your program the most successful? Which is the most challenging? Which is the most time consuming? Which is the most important?"

Trainer's Note: If you do not have time to conduct this activity as a jigsaw reading, be sure to review the content of the handout as a lecturette, emphasizing the following points:

Prepare
- ✓ It's important to know up front what data you want to collect. If you don't identify it at the outset, it's often difficult (or impossible) to recover.
- ✓ When deciding what data to collect, think about what data you need in order to to answer your significant questions, and to measure progress towards your goals and objectives.

Collect
- ✓ Follow the "Goldilocks Principle" for collecting data –- not too much and not too little. Only collect data you will use.
- ✓ Consider who collects the data, when it is collected, and most importantly, who reviews it to make sure it is accurate. Remember: "Garbage in; garbage out."
- ✓ Use a variety of methods to collect data. Use multiple sources of data to inform your decisions.

Aggregate and Analyze
- ✓ Here is where you turn data into usable information. You examine data in different ways to identify strengths, needs, trends, and patterns and bring together different data sources to tell a story.
- ✓ Aggregated data gives you a big picture overview of your entire program.
- ✓ To disaggregate data, you break it down by different subgroups.

Use and Share
- ✓ This is the most relevant parts of the process for Head Start leaders.
- ✓ You use your data to make decisions so that you know that your decisions are based on sound information rather than hunches.
- ✓ Look at your data to make inferences and identify root causes.
- ✓ Remember that people looking at the same data sometimes interpret it in different ways.
- ✓ Data analysis often leads to more questions.
- ✓ When you share data with different audiences, make sure that it is accurate, appealing, accessible, and audience-specific..

Refer participants to the handout "Data Activities Inventory." Describe the two versions of the handout and tell participants that they can use them to assess their own and their team's proficiency in relation to the activities.

13. Introduce the "Telltale Data" activity by telling participants that they are now going have an experience similar to one that Head Start leaders undergo in their work: They will look at a variety of data sources from a typical Head Start program and work with a partner or small group to see what they can discover by considering different data sources together.

    Conduct the "Telltale Data" activity as follows:
    - ✓ Post the charts around the room and/or place sets of the data at each table.
    - ✓ Distribute the handout "Telltale Data."
    - ✓ Review the directions for the activity.
    - ✓ Ask the participants to choose a partner or form small groups to work with.
    - ✓ Allow about 20 minutes for pairs to complete the activity.
    - ✓ Invite a few people from the group to share their stories.

    Conclude the activity by asking participants to respond to the question, "What did you learn about using data from doing this activity?"

Tell Tale Data
Head Start and Early Head Start Anywhere, USA

1. Form pairs or small groups. Walk around the room with your group and review the data sources.
2. Select 3 or 4 of the data sources. Include at least 1 fiscal source.
3. Use those data sources to tell a story about the program.
4. Identify your audience: internal or external.
5. Include questions you would want answered to create a more robust story. List other data sources that would have allowed you to do this.

14. Conclude the session by clarifying the difference between data and information. Read the quote from Laurence Prusak on the slide and add: "He and co-author James McGee further say that 'Information must *inform* while data has no such mandate. To a degree, information is in the eye of the beholder. . . . Data can be considered and discussed in isolation. Information must be discussed in the context of specific users and decision-makers. . . . In order for data to become *useful* to a decision-maker as information, it must be presented in such a way that he or she can relate to it and act upon it."

Data & Information

"...In order for data to become *useful* to a decision maker as information, it must be presented in such a way that he or she can relate to it and act upon it."

-Laurence Prusak
Managing Information Strategically

15. Acknowledge to the participants that you have covered a great deal of information. Refer to or distribute the handout "Data resources," and remind participants that they can use the resources described in the handout to expand their knowledge. Open the presentation up to questions and comments.

Conclude by asking the group for final comments.