

# Stage 4: Strengthening Your Program

## Overview

### Key participants in Stage 4 include:

Your team of managers and program leaders designated to coordinate the process, as well as analyze and incorporate the results into program improvement efforts. Again, you may want to include your TA specialist as you incorporate your results into program improvement efforts.

### In this stage you will:

- Recall the areas to strengthen that you identified in Stage 3 and develop plans for program improvement by:
  - Identifying resources available to you that can support your program improvement effort such as:
    - ✓ Expertise within your program
    - ✓ Regional Office staff
    - ✓ Other Head Start programs
    - ✓ Outside consultants, trainers and technical assistance providers
    - ✓ Head Start Technical Assistance Network
  - Designing specific plans to achieve your goals that include:
    - ✓ Goal identification
    - ✓ Desired outcomes
    - ✓ Action steps
    - ✓ Persons responsible
    - ✓ Resources
    - ✓ Timelines
- Develop your Training and Technical Assistance Plan
- Determine how you will evaluate your progress toward completing your Program Improvement Plan
- Reflect on your experience with the Self-Assessment process and determine ways that it can be improved for the following year
- Provide your Head Start program specialist with a brief summary of your Self-Assessment including program strengths identified by the Self-Assessment team and your plans for addressing areas that need improvement

## Stage 4: Strengthening Your Program

### Developing Plans for Program Improvement

Now it is time to develop the goals for program improvement with members of the leadership team and make concrete plans to move the program forward in its quality improvement efforts. Leadership team members may choose to use the attached **Program Improvement Plan** on page 7 or use a format more familiar to the program for this purpose. The team begins this process by identifying all of the available resources that can be applied to the plan. Your TA specialist is available to assist you in this regard.

### Identifying Resources

Engage members of the team in a discussion to generate a complete list of resources that can be incorporated into your plan for strengthening the program. Record their ideas in the **Identifying Resources Worksheet** that is attached on the following page. As you compile your list of resources, include resources that are available within the program, external to the program and within the TA Network.

Resources available within the program might include:

- Members of the governing body, Policy Council parents and community representatives, and members of your various advisory groups who have expertise in a variety of different areas
- Staff members who hold expertise in specific areas
- Other professionals within the grantee agency

External sources include:

- Community Partners
- Peers in other Head Start programs
- Workshops, conferences, and seminars
- Academic institutions and courses
- Consultants and trainers

Resources within the TA Network include:

- Your locally-based TA specialist who is available to support your improvement effort, can link you to TA content specialists, and help you to identify and access other resources both within and outside the TA Network

If you are seeking clarification on Federal policy or Head Start regulations, you should contact your Head Start program specialist at the Regional Office.

### Identifying Resources Worksheet

The following resources are available to assist in program improvement efforts. These resources should be incorporated, as needed, into the action plans developed for each goal area.

Resources	Comments



## Developing Your Program Improvement Plan

In Stage 3 you determined the specific health and safety, short-term, and long-term improvements you would like to see in your program. Your next step is to involve team members and staff with distinct expertise in designing specific action plans to serve as your roadmap for change.

### Goals

Revisit the priorities you identified during Stage 3 and determine how they can be translated into goals that will strengthen the program and improve outcomes for children and families. Examples of goals might include:

- Redesigning Head Start management systems such as communication, record-keeping, or ongoing monitoring
- Improving services in a particular content area
- Strengthening professional development of staff

### Outcomes

The team should identify the desired outcomes relative to each goal. A desired outcome should be stated as an end-result that will demonstrate improvement. For example, if the Self-Assessment or other data sources indicate that there is a lack of documented follow-up in child/family health files, a desired outcome might be: “All identified child/family health issues are tracked and appropriate follow-up action taken.” However, if the issue is actually that the health issues are being tracked and follow-up actions taken, but not documented, then the desired outcome statement might be: “All follow-up actions taken are documented in children’s health files”.

You may want to divide your leadership team into small groups, assigning members to work on one or two goals most aligned with their area of interest and expertise. Assign managers and your program’s content area specialists to address goals related to the service areas in which they work.

### Action Steps

For each of your goals, you must identify the necessary steps to reach the desired outcome successfully. As you work through this process, consider ways in which the program can build upon its existing strengths.

Action steps might include:

- Modifying policies and procedures
- Shifting resources from one program area to another
- Securing new resources
- Developing new partnerships
- Obtaining training or technical assistance

Provide each team with copies of the **Program Improvement Plan** on the following page. The plan provides space for team members to identify:

- Goals
- Outcomes
- Action steps
- Person(s) responsible
- Resources that will be applied to the effort
- Expected dates of completion

As a final step, program leaders should coordinate the new **Program Improvement Plan** with other plans that address program improvement efforts such as a *Quality Improvement Plan* or strategic plan. This will help you to:

- Reexamine and identify the goals that are most critical to the program
- Avoid moving in too many different directions and spreading resources too thin
- Improve the likelihood of attaining goals and reaching higher outcomes for children and families
- Use the results to develop a comprehensive T/TA Plan for your program

# Program Improvement Plan

GOAL:			
DESIRED OUTCOMES:			
ACTION STEP	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	RESOURCES	DATES



## Training and Technical Assistance Plan

One strategy related to the overall continuous quality improvement process will be the development and implementation of a Training and Technical Assistance Plan. The development of this plan should be a natural progression from the Self-Assessment process and the development of the Program Improvement Plan. The Regional Office and the TA Network will work with you as you develop and implement your T/TA Plan. This plan will need to be submitted with your annual grant application.

Your Regional Office and the TA Network will work together to support you through this process and help you implement the specific activities outlined in your T/TA Plan.

## Monitoring and Assessing Progress in Reaching Goals and Improving Outcomes

To ensure that programs achieve the goals they have established, it is critical to identify a process for monitoring and assessing implementation of the Program Improvement Plan. When following up on the Program Improvement Plan it is important to ask:

- Have we completed the action steps as outlined in the plan? If not, why not?
- What barriers do we face in implementing change? How can they be overcome?
- Do we need to make adjustments to our plan?
- Are we making substantial and timely progress towards reaching our goal?
- Are we likely to attain our anticipated outcome at our present rate of progress?

By conducting routine follow-ups, the team can identify barriers to change and make necessary adjustments to the original plan. You may discover during a follow-up review that you need to institute new strategies and action steps to achieve your intended outcome or that you may want to apply new and different resources to the plan.

## Evaluating Your Self-Assessment System

Before adjourning your Self-Assessment leadership team, while memories are still fresh, you should solicit their assistance in evaluating the entire Self-Assessment process. The feedback they provide will give you valuable information that can be used to refine and improve the process for subsequent years. The following **Evaluating Your Self-Assessment System Worksheet** can help you in that evaluation.



## Evaluating Your Self-Assessment System Worksheet

Think about the process that you recently used to conduct your Self-Assessment. What worked well for team members, staff, parents, etc.?

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What aspects of the Self-Assessment did not work well?

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Were there enough participants so that the team was inclusive and able to spread the work out appropriately?

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Was adequate time allowed for team members to complete their work? Did the time frame cause undue interruptions for staff or others who had to be responsive to the Self-Assessment team's need for information?

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How do the results of the Self-Assessment compare with your most recent Federal monitoring review?

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What would you do differently next year? Make specific recommendations that can be considered for next year's Self-Assessment.

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## Sharing Your Results with the Regional Office

The Head Start Bureau views Self-Assessment as a critical management and evaluation tool. Strong, well-managed programs conduct comprehensive Self-Assessments based on *Head Start Program Performance Standards* and use the results to guide continuous quality improvement towards program excellence. The following **Regional Office Summary Report** should be used to summarize the results of the Self-Assessment.

The following information should be submitted with your annual grant reapplication: summary of the annual Self-Assessment, Program Improvement Plan, and T/TA Plan.

## Celebration

Now that you have completed this year's Self-Assessment process, it is time to celebrate this important team accomplishment and to acknowledge and thank all who have participated.



## Program Self-Assessment Results Regional Office Summary Report Program Year 20\_\_

Program Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates of Self-Assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

**Participants in the Self-Assessment Process:** Provide the positions or titles of the various stakeholders who participated in the Self-Assessment process such as staff, parents, Policy Council, governing body, community partners (no need to list specific names).


**Program strengths identified:**

Strength	Description
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
Other	



**Goals for program improvement:**

Goals for Improvement	Description
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
Other	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Head Start Director      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Policy Council Chair      Date

Attach your Training and Technical Assistance Plan here.