



Developing Data Capacity

A Toolkit for Head Start Leaders

All programs need to collect and analyze data to meet requirements in the Head Start Program Performance Standards, support program operations, and grow. **But what if you don't currently have much, if any, data capacity on your staff?**

Building capacity to use data to make better decisions is not a one-time, quick-fix project. It requires an organizational shift that will take time and require deliberate changes in process, capacity, and approach. This toolkit has been designed as a tool for program leaders and management teams to help with the process of enhancing the amount of data skills on board at your program.

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Data Maturity Assessment

A great place to begin is to do a self-assessment of your program's data work. This process will help you identify areas of strength and need when it comes to knowledge, staffing, and data tools. The following Data Maturity Assessment will serve as your starting point on your data journey. (You may consider having multiple people on your leadership team take the assessment independently and then comparing answers.)

1. Which of the following best describes how your program currently uses data?

- A.** We collect data required for the PIR and to fulfill OHS and internal monitoring requirements.
- B.** We collect data required for compliance and use some of our data to measure our progress against program goals.
- C.** We collect all data points required for compliance, but focus mostly on data for decision-making and program improvement.

2. Which best describes how your program addresses the issue of data quality?

- A.** We train all our staff on how to enter data into our systems.
- B.** We periodically review our data for quality and accuracy.
- C.** We have specific data quality and assurance processes led regularly by assigned team members.

3. When was the last time your program leadership had a discussion about data-driven decision-making?

- A.** Within the last year
- B.** Within the last month
- C.** Within the last week

4. Does your program have a designated data staffer?

- A.** No
- B.** We have some staff with data as a defined part of their job
- C.** We have at least one person whose job is specifically about data

5. When was the last time your program looked at child development data broken down by demographics?

- A.** Never
- B.** Within the last year
- C.** Within the last month

6. How does your program create graphs or visuals for things such as your annual report or board committee presentations?

- A.** We use the graphs and reports built into the data systems we use
- B.** We use the graphs and reports built into the data systems we use, plus we create some custom graphs in Excel
- C.** We use the graphs and reports built into the data systems we use, plus we build dashboards in Power BI, Tableau, or similar.

Calculate Your Score:

For each A response, give yourself 1 point. For each B response, give yourself 2 points. For each C response, give yourself 3 points. Total up all your points and see your data maturity ranking below.

Remember, these results are not about comparison to other programs or in ranking your program as good or bad. This is just meant to be an honest assessment of where your program is and what the right next steps may be for you to learn and grow! Just like the kids we work with, you have to learn to sit up, then to crawl, then to walk, then to run. Each milestone is important and valuable!

Read Your Results:**Getting Ready (6-10 points)**

You've probably heard people talking about data-driven decision-making in Head Start, but what does that really mean? What does it look like? Don't put the cart before the horse - your program would be best served by digging into your data quality. You'll want to look at the quality of your data, not just its completeness. Examine your data workflows and understand how you can improve and/or streamline them. Start asking your staff about their data use to learn what is happening on the ground and begin setting program goals that you can answer with simple data.

Getting Set (11-15 points)

You probably know exactly what data in your program is high quality and what data is low quality, and while you're working to improve the data that's rougher around the edges, you're also ready for what's next. Now is the time to really dig into your data workflows to enhance data quality and minimize the burden of collection for your staff. If you haven't already, make sure you have procedures in place for regularly reviewing the quality of your data. You're now working to grow from data for compliance to data for program improvement. This involves thinking about bringing data together across systems to answer important questions, like how to increase attendance or improve recruitment and enrollment.

Getting Going (16-18 points)

Your program is well on your way when it comes to data! With processes already in place to improve data quality and intentional analysis for data-driven decision-making, your program is in a good place to make strong decisions. Consider what your program's internal capacity is for additional staff or an external consultant to take your analyses and decisions to the next level, including answering much more complex questions about the efficacy of things like your curriculum and teacher PD plans.

Data Workflows

Data workflows describe the data generation process within your program. Your program has hundreds of workflows in action every day, whether you realize it or not. Understanding your program's workflows opens up possibilities to improve processes, data quality, and even outcomes for children and families. Use this handout to review your program's data workflows one at a time, identifying opportunities to clear bottlenecks, improve data quality, and make critical program planning decisions.

Data Collection	The process of gathering information You collect data from a variety of sources, from enrollment forms to daily attendance sheets, child assessments, and even conversations with parents.
Data Coding	The process of sorting collected information or observations into a set of categories After information is collected, it needs to be coded. Some codes require converting yes/no answers to 1s and 0s. Attendance, family strengths and needs, and screening results are more complicated, but require coding nonetheless.
Data Entry	The process of placing collected, coded data into a digital form Even when it happens at the same time as coding, as a staffer transfers attendance forms from paper to your database, data needs to be entered into a digital system to allow for analysis.
Data Analysis	The process of evaluating information Once in digital form, data can be aggregated, sliced, diced, and analyzed to identify patterns, trends, outliers, and more.
Decision-Making	The process of using the data to inform program decisions Once the data is analyzed, it still requires understanding and intervention to inform program decisions. Even a clear trend in something like attendance requires an action plan to make change.

Data Tasks and Their Roles

All of the steps in the data workflow above represent actual tasks that you and your staff will be completing on a regular basis. Use the worksheet below to examine the different tasks, the skills needed to complete them, and consider who on your staff is responsible for each. You'll want to consider what each staff member or department's responsibilities are so that you are focusing on the right part of the process with the right staff.

This first page contains a few sample categories to get you started. The following page is a blank worksheet for you to fill in the left-most column with the categories that are most relevant to your program.

Category of Data	Who collects this data?	Who codes this data?	Who enters this data?	Who reviews the quality of this data?	Who analyzes this data?	Who makes decisions based on this data?
Eligibility						
Enrollment						
Attendance						
Health records						
Family goals and needs						

Data Tasks and Their Roles

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Hiring vs. Training vs. Contracting

Before you write job descriptions, find room in your budget, or write up an RFP, you need to identify what is best for your organization. You can increase capacity internally (either by hiring dedicated data staff or having existing staff participate in data-specific professional development) or externally by outsourcing to a consultant. With the help of your program’s management team, give yourselves an honest rating on the following questions about your program’s current capacity.

	Capacity Rating		
	Emerging	Moderate	Significant
Staffing: Who on staff has experience working with data? Is this experience more with data for compliance or data for quality improvement?			
Technology: Where is program data currently stored? Is most of it on paper, in Excel, old data systems, or updated data systems?			
Budget: What financial resources are available? What is the actual dollar amount available for data work, and is that available one-time or ongoing?			
Leadership: What skills do program managers and leaders have when it comes to data analysis and data-driven decision-making? How much time do they have available to supervise new staffers and/or a consultant?			

There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to deciding whether to hire new data staff, train existing staff on data skills, or work with an external contractor. However, your program’s current capacity in each of the areas explored above will play a significant role in the success of whichever option you choose.

Sample Job Descriptions

You should use your program's standard job posting format, including a description of your organization, salary information, and details on how to apply. The following job description, responsibilities, and qualifications are an example of the content to include for this role.

Data Entry Specialist

Job Description:

We are seeking a meticulous and detail-oriented **Data Entry Specialist** to join our Head Start program team. The Data Entry Specialist will be responsible for accurately entering and maintaining student and family data into our database system. This role plays a crucial part in ensuring the smooth operation of our program by maintaining accurate records and facilitating efficient communication between various departments.

Job Responsibilities:

- Accurately inputting student and family information.
- Ensuring data integrity and consistency by performing regular quality checks and audits.
- Collaborating with program staff to collect necessary data and resolve any discrepancies.
- Generating reports and assisting in data analysis as needed.
- Maintaining confidentiality and security of all sensitive information.
- Assisting with other administrative tasks as assigned by supervisors.

Qualifications:

- High school diploma or equivalent; associate's or bachelor's degree preferred.
- Experience in data entry or administrative role, preferably in a social services or education setting.
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office Suite and data entry software.
- Excellent attention to detail and accuracy.
- Strong organizational and time management skills.
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team.
- Understanding of and commitment to the mission and values of Head Start. Previous experience working with Head Start or similar early childhood education programs preferred but not required.

Data Manager

Job Description:

We are seeking a dynamic and experienced **Data Manager** to oversee the collection, analysis, and utilization of data within our Head Start program. The Data Manager will play a vital role in ensuring that our program operates efficiently and effectively by managing student and family data, generating reports, and providing valuable insights to inform decision-making processes. This position offers an exciting opportunity to contribute to the success of our program and make a meaningful impact on the lives of children and families in our community.

Job Responsibilities:

- Develop and implement data management systems and protocols to ensure the accurate collection, entry, and maintenance of student and family data.
- Oversee the integration of data from multiple sources, including enrollment forms, child assessments, and attendance records.
- Conduct regular data audits to ensure data integrity, consistency, and compliance with federal, state, and local regulatory requirements.
- Analyze data trends and patterns to identify opportunities for program enhancement and innovation.
- Generate custom reports and dashboards to track program performance indicators, monitor progress towards goals, and identify areas for improvement.
- Collaborate with program staff to develop data-driven strategies and interventions to support student success and family engagement.
- Provide training and support to staff members on data collection procedures, database systems, and data analysis tools.
- Perform other duties as assigned.

Qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in data management, statistics, education, social sciences, or a related field; master's degree preferred.
- Minimum of 3 years of experience in data management or a related field, preferably in a nonprofit or social services setting.
- Experience with [list systems your program uses, such as ChildPlus, Teaching Strategies Gold, & ADP]
- Proficiency in data analysis and visualization tools, such as Excel, Power BI, or Tableau
- Strong analytical skills and attention to detail, with the ability to interpret data sets and communicate findings effectively.
- Experience developing and implementing data collection protocols and procedures.
- Knowledge of relevant federal, state, and local regulations governing data privacy and confidentiality, such as FERPA and HIPAA.
- Excellent organizational and project management skills, with the ability to prioritize tasks and meet deadlines in a fast-paced environment.
- Effective interpersonal and communication skills, with the ability to collaborate with diverse stakeholders and build positive working relationships.
- Understanding of and commitment to the mission and values of Head Start. Previous experience working with Head Start or similar early childhood education programs preferred but not required.

Data Analyst

Job Description:

We are seeking a highly skilled and analytical **Data Analyst** to join our Head Start program. The Data Analyst will be responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to support decision-making, program evaluation, and continuous improvement efforts. This role offers an exciting opportunity to utilize data to drive positive outcomes for children and families in our community and contribute to the overall success of our program.

Job Responsibilities:

- Collect and organize data from various sources, including enrollment forms, child assessments, and attendance records.
- Clean and preprocess data to ensure accuracy, completeness, and consistency.
- Analyze and visualize data to identify trends, patterns, and correlations.
- Develop and maintain dashboards, reports, and data visualizations to communicate key findings to stakeholders and inform programmatic decisions.
- Collaborate with program staff to develop research questions, hypotheses, and data collection protocols for program evaluations and research projects.
- Prepare written reports, presentations, and other materials for both internal and external stakeholders.
- Provide training and technical assistance to staff members on data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and data interpretation.
- Perform other duties as assigned.

Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree in statistics, data science, social sciences, education, or a related field; master's degree preferred.
- Minimum of 3 years of experience in data analysis or a related field, preferably in a nonprofit or social services setting.
- Experience with [list systems your program uses, such as ChildPlus, Teaching Strategies Gold, and ADP]. Proficiency in statistical software (e.g., R, SPSS, Stata) preferred.
- Strong analytical and problem-solving skills, with the ability to apply quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze complex data sets.
- Excellent attention to detail and ability to ensure data accuracy and integrity.
- Effective communication skills, with the ability to present technical information clearly and concisely to non-technical audiences.
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team, with a commitment to collaboration and shared decision-making.
- Knowledge of relevant federal, state, and local regulations governing data privacy and confidentiality, such as FERPA and HIPAA.
- Understanding of and commitment to the mission and values of Head Start. Previous experience working with Head Start or similar early childhood education programs preferred but not required.

Sample Consultant RFP

Request for Proposals: Community Assessment Consultant

Introduction:

[Insert brief introduction about your program here, including your mission statement.]

Scope of Work:

We are seeking proposals from qualified consultants to conduct a comprehensive community assessment for our Head Start program. The purpose of this assessment is to gather data and information about the local community, identify the needs and assets of children and families, and assess the availability and accessibility of resources and services. This assessment must be completed in compliance with the [Head Start Act](#) and the [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#). Additional details on the community assessment can be found [here](#).

Objectives:

The primary objectives of the community assessment are as follows:

- Identify the demographic characteristics of the community served by our Head Start program, including population demographics, socioeconomic status, and cultural diversity.
- Assess the needs and challenges faced by children and families in the community, including access to quality early childhood education, healthcare, housing, nutrition, and social services.
- Identify the strengths and assets of the community, including existing resources, programs, and partnerships that support early childhood development and family well-being.
- Analyze the gaps and barriers that may prevent children and families from accessing needed services and supports.
- Develop recommendations and strategies to address identified needs and enhance the effectiveness of our Head Start program in meeting the needs of the community.

Scope of Services:

The consultant will be responsible for performing the following services:

- Conducting a review of existing data related to the community served by our Head Start program, including census data, demographic studies, and community needs assessments.
- Facilitating interviews, surveys, and other data collection activities as necessary to gather input and perspectives from key stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, and service providers.
- Analyzing collected data and synthesizing findings to identify trends, patterns, and themes related to community needs, assets, and resources.
- Developing a written report summarizing the findings of the community assessment, including key findings, recommendations, and actionable strategies for our Head Start program.
- Presenting the findings and recommendations to program staff, leadership, and other stakeholders as requested.

Proposal Requirements:

Interested consultants are invited to submit proposals that include the following:

- Overview of qualifications, including relevant experience conducting community assessments, working with Head Start programs, and knowledge of the local community.
- Proposed approach and methodology for conducting the community assessment, including data collection methods, sampling strategies, and analytical techniques.
- Timeline and work plan outlining the proposed activities, deliverables, and milestones for completing the assessment.
- Budget proposal detailing the consultant's fees.
- References from previous clients or projects that demonstrate the consultant's expertise and track record of success.

Submission Instructions:

Proposals must be submitted electronically to [Contact Person] at [Email Address] no later than [Insert Deadline]. Late proposals will not be considered.

Evaluation Criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Consultant qualifications and experience (30%)
- Proposed approach and methodology (30%)
- Feasibility of work plan and timeline (20%)
- Budget proposal (15%)
- References (5%)

Selection Process:

The selection of a consultant will be based on the evaluation of proposals by a review committee appointed by the [Organization Name]. The selected consultant will be notified via email and/or phone no later than [Insert Notification Date].

Confidentiality:

All information provided in response to this RFP will be treated as confidential and used only for the purpose of evaluating proposals.

Non-Discrimination:

We are committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion and do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Cancellation:

We reserve the right to cancel or modify this RFP at any time without prior notice and to reject any or all proposals received in response to this RFP. This RFP represents the intent to enter into a contract, but it shall not be construed to represent a requirement or guarantee to do so.

Questions:

For questions or clarification regarding this RFP, please contact [Contact Person] at [Email Address] by [Insert Deadline for Questions].

Terminology

If you're not familiar with the world of data, it may sound like those who are are speaking an entirely different language. Below are a few terms that you may hear during interviews or conversations and a brief explanation of what they mean, specifically as they relate to Head Start and the way you might use them.

Power BI and Tableau

Both Power BI and Tableau are data visualization softwares. If you want to tie data from multiple systems together, or do more complex analyses than are possible by using the standard data reports, you will likely use either Power BI or Tableau to create interactive dashboards.

R, SPSS, Stata

These three tools are all statistical softwares for data science. Each has their own pros and cons, and experienced data analysts likely have their favorite, even if they are familiar with several of them. It is very unlikely that your program will need someone on staff familiar with these tools.

Data Architecture

When someone asks about your data architecture, they are asking about how your data is managed, from collection to storage, management, and integration.

Data Transfer Process, such as SFTP

This is how you actually transfer data from one location to another securely. A common method is SFTP, Simple File Transfer Protocol.

Data Warehouse

A data warehouse is a tool used for bringing data together from multiple sources. When your program reaches an adequate level of data capacity, you'll likely want a data warehouse to pull together data for analysis and visualization.

KPI

KPI stands for "key performance indicator." This term is often used in the business world, but it just means a specific metric of success. Average daily attendance, enrollment, and kindergarten readiness can all be considered KPIs.

PII

PII stands for "personally identifiable data," data that could be used to identify a specific person. This includes things like name, birthday, social security number, and address. It may also include using so many descriptors that the identity of the person in your program can be figured out.

API

API stands for Application Programming Interface. An API is a type of software interface that provides a way for data programs to talk to each other. An API is an easy and secure way to transfer data between systems, as opposed to running reports, sending them via email, etc.