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## Candidate's Guide

# Completing the Certification Portfolio

**Just do it... it's really that simple!** If you are performing well in your role, you are ready to earn your certification. The competencies, functions, and certification activities include the key elements of your job, as indicated in the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

**Activities must be written in your own words.** The portfolio is a demonstration of your individual skills, knowledge, thoughts, and ideas. Therefore, the responses to the activities must be in your own words. Do not duplicate or reword another candidate's responses. In addition, in your responses, refer to what you do using "I" statements. For example, when describing your role, avoid general statements such as, "Health Services Workers establish trust with families by..." Instead, state, "I establish trust with families by..." While this portfolio is to be a demonstration of your own work, you are encouraged to use the expertise around you to help you write clearly.

**Include reference material.** In many of the activities, a document or exhibit of actual forms, guidance, regulations, minutes of meetings, or descriptions are required to complete them. Include these documents along with your commentary on how they are used in your program and what your role is in using them.

**Respond to each part of an activity.** Many activities have more than one part. For example, an activity may require you to write a narrative that includes a description of two, three, or more elements, your role in the activity, and to provide an example. It is important that you address each part. Use the checklist at the end of each activity page to ensure that you answer each question.

### Ten Guidelines:

- 1. Establish a portfolio completion timeline.** There are 12 competencies and you have four months to complete the entire portfolio and return it to NHSA. Remember, you can submit the portfolio as soon as it's complete—you don't have to wait four months! In fact, as you submit activities, they become available to the grader for review. Some programs and candidates have found that it works well to plan one week per competency. That gives them time, in the end, to re-read everything and make sure it's exactly as they want it, have someone else review it, etc.
- 2. Read through the entire portfolio before you commit anything to writing.** Make sure to review all 12 competencies and the portfolio submission form in detail before you begin your portfolio, as some activities may require more time than others. Identify your resources and sources of information within and outside your Head Start agency. Ask for clarification of anything you don't understand.
- 3. We recommend you move through the competencies in order.** Although it is not required, there is a natural flow and they will make more sense if you complete them in order.

4. **Write draft answers to the activities before you submit your responses.** You can use a notebook, Word document, or whatever works best for you to draft your answers before entering them for submission.
5. **Read and re-read your written answers.** For the more complicated questions, it might help to write them, leave them alone for a day or two, and go back to re-read and edit them. Be sure to correct any misspellings or other errors—this is where a proofreader comes in handy! Be open to others' corrections—consider them constructive and a chance for you to improve.
6. **There are no specific length requirements but work on typing clearly and to the point to explain examples efficiently.** Remember, someone has to read through your work. The more precise and concise it is, the better! IMPORTANT: Remember to mark out any personal information to protect confidentiality—don't use real names in your examples and descriptions.
7. **Locate all of the printed procedures, forms, and policies that are called for to answer the activities.** Printed materials can often be reduced to fit the page. You may attach these at the end of your portfolio if needed.
8. **Upload each section into the appropriate credential activity in your course.** You will only have one opportunity to submit for each function, so be sure to double-check your work.
9. **Keep your final draft copies of all answers in a safe place as backup,** just in case there is an error in the uploading process.
10. **Most of all... have fun with this!** Keep the positive attitude of a lifelong learner and see the credentialing process as a way for you to show your best. Don't get discouraged if it seems overwhelming at times—that is all a part of the learning process! Ask for help when you need it and take breaks to come back with fresh eyes. Keep your "eyes on the prize" of completing this distance learning course and earning your credential!