

FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Funding Increase for Head Start Programs

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Program Instruction

To: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies

Subject: FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Funding Increase for Head Start Programs

Instruction:

President Biden signed Public Law 117-2, the American Rescue Plan Act, 2021 (ARP), into law on March 11, 2021. The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan includes \$1 billion for Head Start programs. All Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership grantees are eligible to receive additional funds proportionally based on funded enrollment levels.

When combined with the \$750 million in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the \$250 million in supplemental funds in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, the Head Start program has received a total of \$2 billion in additional funding to support staff, children, and families during this unprecedented time.

This Program Instruction (PI) provides examples of activities grantees can consider as they continue supporting children and families and investing in safe and high-quality early childhood learning

opportunities for children. This PI also describes the application requirements for these funds.

Use of Funding

The Office of Head Start (OHS) strongly encourages grantees to prioritize additional weeks of Head Start and Early Head Start programming with this funding, through summer programs or as extensions of the program year. At this time, Head Start programs are serving one-third fewer children than before the pandemic began. With ARP funding, programs have an opportunity to reach eligible children and families who did not enroll last year, or who did not engage in a full program year, due to the many uncertainties caused by the pandemic. Grantees are encouraged to prioritize programs for rising kindergartners, children with disabilities, children experiencing food or housing insecurity, children that were not able to receive any in-person services this year, or other areas determined by community needs.

Grantees do have flexibility to determine which one-time investments best support the needs of staff, children, and families, while adhering to federal, state, and local guidance. In making these determinations, grantees should consider how the use of the one-time funds could meet both short- and long-term needs and determine whether purchasing, leasing, or contracting for services is more prudent.

Other uses of funding include, but are not limited to, the following:

Reach More Families

- **Enrollment and recruitment.** Now is the time to focus on re-enrollment and enrolling new families. Programs can use funds to purchase services, materials, and technology to ramp up recruitment and enrollment efforts so that as a program you are able to enroll the eligible children and families in your community.
- **Additional weeks of Head Start or Early Head Start programming.** Extending the program year or offering summer programming to increase the time children and families receive services.
- **Family supports.** Addressing families' economic security by partnering with them on employment, education, and career goals. Investing in the development of partnerships with local community colleges, apprenticeship programs, and local employers committed to helping Head Start and Early Head Start families find meaningful employment and career tracks. Assessing families' nutritional, health, and wellness needs more frequently. Ensuring materials and resources are available in languages families understand.
- **Mental health support for children and families.** Employing additional family service workers and mental health consultants to assist families with adverse circumstances, including families who may be experiencing homelessness.
- **Provision of meals and snacks not reimbursed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture,** including purchasing kitchen equipment and supplies to support in-person meal service.
- **Transportation.** Hiring bus drivers and monitors to allow more trips with fewer children per bus. Purchasing buses and other vehicles that support continuity of program service and reaching families most in need of services, including families experiencing homelessness.
- **Partnerships to increase the inclusion of children with disabilities.** Providing more training for teachers and families and more support for families. Remodeling classrooms and playgrounds to be accessible.
- **Partnerships to increase the enrollment of children experiencing homelessness.** Partnering with local shelters and public schools to identify and serve children and families experiencing homelessness.
- **Addressing unique needs within their communities,** such as providing internet access to support extended learning.

Get Facilities Ready for In-person Comprehensive Services

- **Ventilation to reduce risk of indoor transmission and make facilities safer.** Installing new heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems or other improvements, such as windows that can open with safety measures to prevent falls.
- **Outdoor learning and play.** Purchasing or enhancing outdoor learning spaces, including nature-based learning and outdoor classrooms. Creating play areas and landscape features that promote exploration and discovery in a natural environment, such as plantings, gardens, and “loose parts” (i.e., materials for construction and pretend play), rather than traditional play structures or playgrounds.
- **Cleaning supplies and services.** Purchasing necessary supplies or contracting services to clean and disinfect facilities and vehicles.
- **Renovations or other space modification.** Converting available space into classrooms, modifying current classroom designs with room dividers, or adding well-ventilated modular classrooms.
- **Additional space.** Renting additional classroom space, due to physical distancing, to increase opportunities for more children to return to in-person services. Contracting for slots with child care providers in center-based or family child care settings to deliver comprehensive services.
- **Other locally determined facility, staff, and equipment or partnership actions** that are necessary to safely resume and maintain full in-person program operations.

Support Head Start Employees

- **Planning sessions for staff.** Preparing for a return to in-person comprehensive services starts to ensure everyone has the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to operate effectively. This funding can be used to invest in planning sessions to prepare for providing services now and in the summer and fall.
- **Staff wellness and mental health support.** Conducting employee wellness surveys or engaging in other data collection to better understand the needs of team members. Increasing access to mental health consultation and therapy services for staff, contracting with an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and instituting a staff wellness program that includes activities such as mindfulness breaks and opportunity for self reflection.
- **Additional staff.** Hiring additional classroom staff to meet physical distancing requirements or reduce group size. Bringing in full-time floaters to reduce the need to bring in outside substitutes.
- **Professional learning and development for staff.** Providing professional learning experiences on key topics such as equity, diversity, inclusion, bias, economic mobility, trauma-skilled practices, and other topics.
- **Other personnel costs.** Offering fringe benefits and expanding sick leave.
- **Vaccine support.** Providing transportation assistance to vaccination sites and temporary coverage to allow absence from the workplace for vaccination. Offering paid time off, sick leave, or other paid leave for the time spent receiving vaccination and if staff members experience side effects post-vaccination.

Grantees should carefully plan to engage in activities that are one-time or temporary in nature but have a long-term impact. Additional funding cannot be made available to sustain ongoing, long-term, or permanent expenses. For any ongoing activities, grantees would be responsible for sustaining additional costs either within their existing operations budget or securing outside support to continue activities beyond what is allocated through this opportunity.

Application Requirements

All Head Start, Early Head Start, and EHS-CC Partnership grantees are eligible to receive additional funds. Each grantee may apply for a proportionate amount of the \$1 billion based on their total funded enrollment. Funds will be made available through a supplemental application in the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES). The funds will be awarded as supplements to the HE, HA, and HN grants currently used

for the \$250 million in CRSSA funds. Additional instructions will be forthcoming. Note that grantees will also be asked to report on the ARP funds in HSES, similar to the fall prior data collection.

Waiver of Non-Federal Match

The COVID-19 pandemic is a national emergency seriously affecting economic conditions in communities throughout the U.S. The Head Start Act recognizes that lack of resources in a community adversely impacted by a major disaster may prevent Head Start grantees from providing all or a portion of their required non-federal contribution. OHS has determined that the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacts all Head Start grantees. Consequently, OHS will approve requests for waivers of non-federal match for the funds awarded from the ARP. To request a waiver of non-federal match, enter \$0 in SF-424A Section C of your application. No additional justification of the waiver is required. The issuance of a notice of award constitutes approval of the requested waiver.

Additional Information

Additional information and materials related to the pandemic are available on the [COVID-19 and the Head Start Community](#) webpage on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website. This webpage continues to be updated on a regular basis.

Please direct any questions regarding this PI to your Regional Office.

Thank you for your work on behalf of children and families.

/ Dr. Bernadine Futrell /

Dr. Bernadine Futrell
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