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Head Start Basic Definitions

Agency

An **Agency** is “a public or private non-profit or for-profit entity designated by ACF to operate a Head Start, [Migrant and Seasonal Head Start,] or Early Head Start program.”¹ The Program Information Report (PIR), an annual survey filled out for every Head Start program, classifies agencies into five types:²

- Grantee that directly operates program(s) and has no delegates
- Grantee that directly operates programs and delegates service delivery
- Grantee that maintains central office staff only and operates no program(s) directly
- Grantee that delegates all of its programs; it operates no programs directly and maintains no central office staff
- Delegate agency. A **delegate agency** is an agency that is contracted to operate a grantee’s Head Start, Early Head Start, and/or Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program (similar to a subcontractor). In other words, a delegate agency is “a local public agency or a nonprofit or for-profit organization to which a grantee has delegated all or part of its responsibility for operating a Head Start Program.”³

Grantee

“Agencies that receive grant awards directly are referred to as **Grantees**.”⁴ In other words, grantee “means the entity receiving financial assistance from ACF that is legally responsible for carrying out the Head Start program.”⁵ In many instances, the term ‘grantee’ is used interchangeably with the above term ‘agency.’

Program

A **Program** consists of the set of services that agencies provide to participating children and families; that is, “a program of services provided by a Head Start agency or delegate agency and funded under the Head Start Act.”⁶

There are four types of programs:

- Head Start (serving ages 3-5),
- Early Head Start (serving ages 0-2 and pregnant women),
- Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (serving ages 0-5 and pregnant women), and
- American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start (divided into AI/AN-specific Head Start and Early Head Start programs).

An agency may run multiple types of programs – for example, it may oversee both a Head Start program and an Early Head Start program. In general, only AI/AN agencies may oversee AI/AN programs,⁷ but they may oversee both an AI/AN Head Start program and an AI/AN Early Head Start program. Agencies receive a separate grant for each type of program they provide.

Because an agency/grantee may operate only one program, in some cases ‘Head Start program’ refers to “a Head Start grantee or its delegate agency(ies).”⁸ In general however, “grantee” or “agency” refers to the entity receiving Head Start funding and “program” refers to the funded tailored package of services actually provided to children and families (by the agency or by a delegate agency).

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Program option

A program option refers to the setting of the program. Program options include:

- **Center-based:** “Head Start services provided to children primarily in classroom settings.” An agency can run multiple centers within a program.
- **Home-based:** “Head Start services provided to children, primarily in the child's home, through intensive work with the child's parents and family as the primary factor in the growth and development of the child.”
- **Combination:** “Head Start services provided to children in both a center setting and through intensive work with the child's parents and family at home.”
- **Family child care:** “Head Start and Early Head Start and child care services provided to children receiving child care primarily in the home of a family child care provider or other family-like setting, such as space in a public housing complex which has been licensed by the state and set aside specifically for the provision of or purpose of providing family child care.”⁹

Sources & notes:

- ¹ Policies and procedures for designation renewal of Head Start and Early Head Start grantees, Definitions, 45 CFR § 1307.2 (2011). Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1307#1307.2>
- ² 2011-2012 Head Start Program Information Report. (2012). Office of Head Start, Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Head Start program directory. (n.d.). Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. Retrieved from http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/hslc_grantee_directory
- ⁵ *Application and grant award process narrative*. (2007). Fiscal Assistant. Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Resources. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/operations/fiscal/grants/application/ApplicationandG.htm>
- ⁶ Head Start transportation, Definitions, 45 CFR § 1310.3 (2006). Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1310/1310.3%20Definitions..htm>
- ⁷ The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, 42 U.S.C. § 9801 *et. seq.* (2007), p. 31.
- ⁸ Eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment and attendance in Head Start, Definitions, 45 CFR § 1305.2 (2007). Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1305/1305.2%20Definitions..htm>
- ⁹ Staffing requirements and program options, Definitions, 45 CFR § 1306.3 (2007). Retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/Head%20Start%20Requirements/1306/1306.3%20%20Definitions..htm>