

## E. Local Research Studies

### 1. Local Research Under This Announcement

#### a. Role of Local Researchers

Under the total Early Head Start Research and Evaluation effort local researchers will have two significant roles:

(1) Under this announcement they will conduct research relevant to the issues addressed in section E.2.b. below; and (2) under a subcontract to the national contractor they will be responsible for the collection of data for the cross-site study. The local researchers will form a consortium with the other local researchers and the national contractor to insure that all the parts of this study form a cohesive whole. A Technical Review Panel will be appointed by ACYF to review all the research and evaluation efforts as a whole and provide additional input. (See Appendix B-1 for a more detailed description.) In order to ensure the minimum of intrusion for the Early Head Start programs and to ensure a cohesive study, no applicants will be considered for an award under this announcement unless they agree to serve as subcontractors to the national contractor.

#### b. Concepts

Local research studies are intended to supplement, complement and enrich the research that will be conducted in the cross-site study. (See Appendix B-1 The Statement of Work for the Cross-site Evaluation and Appendix B-2 for a list of the tentative measures proposed for the cross-site evaluation.) With full access to the cross-site data collected in their respective sites, local investigators will have an opportunity to explore mediating events or the theoretical pathways that explain the results that are obtained. In addition, local research provides an opportunity to identify outcomes, that because of data constraints, are not explored in the cross-site study or are specific to an individual site. It also expands the possibilities for multiple measures of the same construct. Another advantage of local research is the enhanced opportunity for the use of observational, ethnographic, case study and other qualitative approaches that inform our understanding of how the program functions and explain the particular outcomes that are achieved.

Four outcome domains and specific outcomes under each were preliminarily identified by the Advisory Committee on Services for Families with Infants and Toddlers for Early Head Start.

Although no one program is expected to be equally successful across all outcomes, these outcomes were identified by the Committee as particularly important for continued child, family and program development.

*Child:* Health and physical development; social competency; secure attachments with parents and other caregivers; language and cognitive development; resiliency factors; benefits to siblings.

*Family:* Attitudes towards parenting; parent-child interaction; reduction in teenage pregnancy and positive birth outcomes; having a medical home; parenting, employability and progress towards self-sufficiency; training and education; housing; physical and mental health; substance abuse; home environment; safety; involvement in the Early Head Start program; knowledge of child development; child guidance beliefs and practices.

*Community:* Collaboration among agencies serving children and families; seamlessness in referrals and actual service provision; quality of services for children and families; increase in services for infants and toddlers; safety.

*Staff:* Staff-parent/child relationships; staff continuity; staff professional development; staff compensation; staff physical and mental health; staff qualifications; and staffing patterns.

The major question for the local studies is "What mediates and moderates positive child and family development within the context of the specific Early Head Start program and the local community?" Each of the local research studies may focus on variables within one of the four outcome domains listed above. Positive child and family development are the ultimate objectives of Early Head Start, and thus, must have a prominent focus. However, well-designed local research studies which focus on particular staff or community outcomes will be considered if their relationship to the well-being of children and families can be theoretically linked through the existing literature and investigated within the time frame of the five-year cooperative agreement. Investigators focusing on the same outcome domain may find additional opportunities for cooperative research. Depending on the questions for the local research, investigators may choose or not choose to incorporate the control group, which will be part of the cross-site evaluation, in the local research study.

Within the framework of the Early Head Start program design, each site represents a unique model based upon the needs, values, resources and cultural climate of its community. Therefore,

within the array of possible outcomes, it is highly likely that each program will place different emphases among them and work toward additional objectives that are unique to the particular local site. It is therefore important for the local research studies to identify site-specific outcomes which are not explored in the cross-site study and to study intra-site differential impacts and the reasons for them. The local studies will enhance the cross-site analysis by the provision of additional explanatory material for inter-site differences and by the identification of additional effects of Early Head Start programs. The first data collection point for the child's developmental status, attachment, mother/child interaction and other child and family measures for the cross-site analysis will be around the time of the child's first birthday. (See Appendix B-2 for a list of tentative measures.) If applicants see a need for earlier data collection for their local research studies, they may propose such data collection using the same or other measures as part of the local research data collection and analyses.

#### c. Study Parameters

##### —Design

*The program sites whose local research partners receive awards under this announcement will be sites in which both local research and the national cross-site evaluation are conducted.* However, if less than 12 proposals receive an acceptable rating, additional sites may be selected to participate only in the national cross-site evaluation to ensure 12 sites for the cross-site effort. The sites with local researchers will become the potential sites to continue on with the follow-up longitudinal studies. For the cross-site evaluation, all 12 sites, whether they are additionally local research sites or not, will be required to participate in random assignment of those families who have applied to the Early Head Start program and in which there is a pregnant woman or a child under one year of age. Such families will be randomly assigned to either the program or control group under a system designed by the national contractor with participation from the local researchers. The Early Head Start program must agree to fully cooperate with the random assignment as a condition for the research partner to receive an award under this announcement.

As noted above, applicants are not required to utilize the control group in their local research designs unless the proposed research questions require such a design. However, since the cost