

program currently serving annually over 900,000 primarily young children in low-income families, from three years of age to the age of mandatory school attendance. Since the addition of Early Head Start in 1995, children from birth to three, pregnant women and their families are also included. Grants for Head Start and Early Head Start programs are awarded to local public and private agencies by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Over 2,100 grantees and delegate agencies provide these programs in every state, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Outer Pacific, as well as American Indian/Alaska Natives and Migrant/Seasonal Farm Worker populations.

Head Start has a long tradition of delivering comprehensive services designed to foster healthy development in the most vulnerable young children, including those with disabilities. Head Start and Early Head Start grantees and delegate agencies provide a range of individualized services in the areas of education and early childhood development; medical, dental, mental health and nutrition; and family and community partnership development through parent involvement. In addition, the entire range of Head Start services is responsive and appropriate to each child and family's developmental, ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage and experience.

Part II: Priority Areas

This request for abstracts, and subsequent planning grant applications from a successful sub-set of those abstracts submitted, is an effort to meet program needs and enhance and support current Presidential and Departmental Initiatives related to the mission of the Head Start Bureau. The priority areas to be addressed in this announcement include, but are not limited to, Early Literacy Development; Improving Services to Rural Areas; Positive Youth Development; and Strengthening Families/Fatherhood. Eligible applicants are invited to submit applications for innovation and improvement in any aspect of Head Start services. Conceivably proposals could address improvements in transportation services, nutrition services, services to special populations, program management and a number of other areas.

Early Literacy Development: Research shows that early literacy development is a strong predictor of later success in school and work. With well-developed language and early literacy skills, all children can enter school ready to learn.

Many risk factors that affect academic progress may be ameliorated by the efforts of early care providers armed with solid information and skills about how to best systematically engage children and their families in the use of language and the joy of reading.

Improving Services to Rural Areas: Ensuring the health and welfare of the 65 million rural residents is an essential part of a national policy that promotes the self-sufficiency of all Americans. These rural areas frequently experience difficulties related to inadequate funds, personnel and support networks that hinder services. The intent of the Rural Initiative, as it relates to Head Start, is to examine ways to improve and enhance the provision of health care and human services to rural communities serving Head Start children and families.

Positive Youth Development: This initiative includes providing technical assistance and support to after-school and summer programs; exploring the impact on adolescents of intensive parental employment under welfare reform; and partnering with other federal agencies, states, communities and private organizations in support of youth development services. In the context of Head Start, projects could include ways to involve older youth and siblings in the family partnership process and supporting services as well as learning and community building opportunities for youth. **Strengthening Families/Fatherhood:** Nearly 25 million children in the United States are growing up in homes without fathers and the potential impact is troubling. These children are more likely to live in poverty, perform poorly in school, engage in criminal activity, and abuse drugs and alcohol. The President has made promoting responsible fatherhood a national priority. The following principles guide this initiative in support of improving the stability and healthy development of our nation's children and youth: (1) All fathers can be important contributors to the well-being of their children; (2) parents are partners in raising their children, even when they do not live in the same household; (3) the roles fathers play in families are diverse and related to cultural and community norms; (4) men should receive the education and support necessary to prepare them for the responsibility of parenthood; and (5) government can encourage and promote father involvement through its programs and through its own workforce policies. Projects under this priority could include efforts to help Head Start fathers establish positive relationships with their children, provide financial and

emotional support, and develop responsible parenting skills.

Part III. Competitive Criteria and General Instructions

Applicants must first submit an abstract as described in the application section below. *Please read this section carefully.* Abstracts must comply with the application guidelines. Abstracts that do not comply with the application guidelines will not be considered. Abstracts must be received in the following format: 12 point font size;

Single spaced text with double spaces between paragraphs; maximum ten pages; 1-inch top and bottom, left and right, margins.

Title Page

This page should include a reference to the program announcement: Head Start Innovation and Improvement Projects—Abstract; title of proposed project; name of applicant; mailing address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address of the lead contact. (This will be the information used by ACYF to request full proposals from selected applicants.) The title page must include the total number of months needed for completion of the planning phase, the total federal budget requested and the project's proposed start and end date. This should be the only information on the title page.

Abstracts must include the material indicated below. The information provided in items 1 through 5 is not to exceed ten pages. Abstracts will be scored using criteria 1 through 5, maximum points 100.

1. Objectives and Need for Assistance

Clearly identify the physical, economic, social, financial, institutional, and/or other problem(s) requiring a solution. The need for assistance must be demonstrated and the principal and subordinate objectives of the project must be clearly stated; supporting documentation, such as letters of support and testimonials from concerned interests other than the applicant, may be included. Any relevant data based on planning studies should be included or referred to in the endnotes/footnotes. Incorporate demographic data and participant/beneficiary information, as needed. In developing the project description, the applicant may volunteer or be requested to provide information on the total range of projects currently being conducted and supported (or to be initiated), some of which may be outside the scope of the program announcement.