

Appendix M: Competition In-Depth Interview: Program Managers

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Evaluation of the Head Start Designation Renewal System

Competition In-Depth Interview: Program Managers

(90 minutes)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to meet with us today. I'm [INTERVIEWER NAME] and this is my colleague [ASSISTANT NAME], and we're researchers from the Urban Institute, a non-profit policy research organization in Washington, DC.

As part of a research study funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, we are visiting 9 organizations from across the country that were awarded Head Start grants through the competitive process. Some of these organizations are incumbent grantees that had to reapply for their grants competitively, and some are new awardees. The goal of these visits is to better understand the Head Start Designation Renewal System (DRS) competitive process through the experiences of your organization and the others we are interviewing including how it affected your relationships with Head Start and partners in your community, the challenges you expected and experienced, changes you made, and how your organization arrived at the decision to compete. We will combine the information we gather across programs to understand how the competitive process of the DRS effects Head Start at the community level.

During our visit to your program, we will be meeting with program leaders and members of your policy council and governing body to get different perspectives. Our meeting with you today will last about 90 minutes. The structure will be rather open-ended, meaning we have a list of specific questions to cover but we welcome any responses you may have.

There are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of the interview is to learn about your experience with the competitive process of the DRS and your organization's decision to compete. You should answer based on what it means to you, your program, and your community.

INFORMED CONSENT

Before I begin my questions, I'd like to give you a copy of a consent form that describes our study procedures and your rights as a participant. If you agree to the study procedures, I'll ask you to sign and date your copy.

[NOTES TO FACILITATORS: Give copy of consent form to participants. Each participant must sign and return one copy and may keep the second copy.]

- I'll point out that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any question and may stop the interview at any time. Participation in this study has no bearing on your Head Start grant.
- Everyone who works on this study has signed a *Staff Confidentiality Pledge* prohibiting disclosure of anything you say during the interview that would allow someone outside the research team, including government staff and officials, to identify you. The only exception is a researcher may be required by law to report suspicion of immediate harm to yourself, children, or others.
- Your name and other identifying information, such as the program's name and specific location, will be removed from the notes we take during the conversation.
- We value the time and information you will share with us today and want to make sure we accurately capture all the details. With your permission, we will audio record the session and take notes (written and/or on a laptop computer). Those notes will not include your name. The recording will serve as a back-up tool to ensure we capture all your comments in as close to your words as possible. Once the project is complete, all recordings will be destroyed. During the discussion, if you would like to stop the recording while you make a particular comment, please let us know and we will do so.

Before we get started, do you have any questions about the study, our study procedures, or the Urban Institute?

[If anyone objects to recording the discussion, the researcher who is not leading the interview will need to take thorough notes.]

[NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: Use the version of this protocol that is relevant to the organization you are visiting. There are three versions of this protocol: (A) incumbent organizations that had this Head Start grant before and after competition (pp. 4-8), (B) new awardees that existed as organizations prior to application for award but had not previously administered the grant for [name of Head Start program] (pp. 9-12), and (C) new awardees that are also organizations that are newly formed, likely for the purpose of administering [name of Head Start program] (pp. 13-16).

Remember that new awardees may have been affiliated with Head Start or even this grant in the past. You will know their status prior to the interview by reviewing responses to the Competition Data Capture Sheet (CDCS) that they completed when they applied for the grant.

You will meet as a group with selected agency Head Start managers. This interview should be conducted after meeting with the Agency and Head Start Program directors. The responses of the Agency and Head Start Program directors will help you to tailor the questions you ask of the other groups.]

Protocol A: Incumbent Organizations – Program Managers

1. To start, would each of you please tell me your official job title, how long you've worked in this position, and a little bit about your history with the organization?
 - Tell me about the ways in which you are involved in managing your Head Start Program.
2. And could you give me an overview of your organizational structure?
 - a) Is your program part of a single-purpose or a multi-purpose organization? What other services does the organization provide? For early childhood programs or services, tell me about how those programs operate and funding sources. (Clarification, if necessary: A single purpose organization only provides Head Start and Early Head Start services, a multi-purpose organization operates other programs in addition to Head Start and Early Head Start).
 - b) What roles are represented on your management team?
 - Are these the same as they were before the competitive process?

Protocol A: Incumbent Organizations – Program Managers, continued

3. Do you have any delegate agencies or Head Start slots through child care partnerships? Are these the same as they were before the competitive process?

Probe if necessary: Tell me a little bit about your roles in managing those agencies/partnerships.

[Interviewer note: Review PIR in advance to obtain preliminary information about delegates/child care partnerships.]

4. What do you see as the primary needs of young children and families in the community (communities) you serve?

Our conversation today will focus on how your organization experienced designation for a competitive 5-year grant, the reactions your organization and community had when you found out you had to competitively apply, the decisions your organization made leading up to the application submission, and what you think may be different about your program and your role now than before the designation process.

5. Remembering back to when you first learned your organization would have to apply competitively, how and when did you learn that status of [name of Head Start program]? *[Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.]*

- Did you understand what it meant that your organization had been designated for a competitive application process?
 - What was your primary source of information for understanding the competition requirements?
- Was the news about the competition a surprise to you or did you have a sense that it was coming?
 - If you thought it was coming, why?

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Protocol A: Incumbent Organizations – Program Managers, continued

6. Remembering back to when the community you serve first learned that [name of Head Start program] would have to apply competitively to keep the grant, what was the initial community reaction? [*Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.*]
 - How did your community find out?
 - About how much time did you need to spend engaging with the community to help them understand the competitive application process?
 - Were there particular reactions that required you to do some strategic trouble-shooting in your specific positions?

7. Remembering back to when the staff of [name of Head Start program] first learned that your organization would have to apply competitively to keep the grant, what were their initial reactions? [*Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.*]
 - How did your staff find out?
 - About how much time did you need to spend engaging with the staff to help them understand the competitive application process?
 - Were there particular reactions that required you to do some strategic trouble-shooting in your specific positions?

Now I am going to ask you some questions about how the designation process affected relationships with community partners. When I ask you these questions, think about partners that are NOT funders.

8. Prior to learning that your organization had to reapply competitively to maintain its Head Start grant, do you think your organization had a strong set of community partners?
 - Were you/are you involved in managing any of those relationships?

Protocol A: Incumbent Organizations – Program Managers, continued

9. *Ask only if at least one had some involvement in managing community relationships.*

How, if at all, did the announcement that your organization would have to apply competitively to keep its Head Start grant affect your community partnerships?

[*Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.*]

- How and when did your community partners learn that your organization would have to compete to keep its Head Start grant?
- To what extent were your existing partners supportive?
 - Did they maintain the same level of supportiveness or increase?
- What kinds of concerns did your partners express?
- To what extent did new community partners come forward and volunteer to support you for the first time?
 - Did any community partners who had supported you in the early years, but had drifted away come back to support you again?

10. *Ask only if appropriate given their previous answers about community relationships.*

How strong are your community partnerships now?

- Are these the same partners your organization had before the designation announcement?
- To what extent did they help you through the competition process?

Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about the decision to apply to maintain your Head Start funding for [name of Head Start Program].

11. Did any of you have a role in your organization's decision to apply competitively to keep [name of Head Start program]? If yes, what role did you play in the decision to apply competitively to keep [name of Head Start program]?

12. Walk us through that decision process a little bit. [*Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.*]

- Did your organization know right away that you wanted to apply?
 - Who participated in the decision-making process?
- What were your key considerations in deciding whether or not to apply?
- What did you think were your organization's key strengths?
- What were the particular challenges that you saw facing the community, and why did you think your organization was well-positioned to meet them?
- What were your primary concerns?

Protocol A: Incumbent Organizations – Program Managers, continued

13. Please talk to us about the particular changes your organization made to demonstrate that it is the best one to continue serving the community. [*Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.*]
- What enabled your organization to make those changes?
 - How well do you think you will be able to sustain those changes?
14. Did you have a role in assembling the application? About how much time do you think it took to put it all together (thinking about all individuals involved)? Did you seek professional assistance in assembling the application?
15. Why do you think your application was successful?
- What do you think that your organization was able to uniquely offer?
 - What are the greatest strengths of your organization?
16. What are the key things that you think your organization will need to keep doing to avoid having to apply competitively to keep your Head Start grant in the future?

Those are almost all of my questions. Before we wrap up, I want to ask you about two things.

17. Now that your organization has competed and been awarded a grant through the competitive process, overall, for the broader Head Start community, what do each of you think is the most problematic aspect of the DRS competitive process and what do you think is the most beneficial? (*Probe for both beneficial and problematic aspects.*)

I don't have any additional questions for you.

18. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to tell us about your organization's experience with the DRS?

This has been a really great discussion. Thank you very much for your time.

Protocol B: New Awardees/Existing Organizations – Program Managers

1. To start, would each of you please tell me your official job title, how long you've worked in this position, and a little bit about your history with the organization?
 - Tell me about the ways in which you are involved in managing your Head Start Program.
2. Please provide us with a short history of your organization's role in the community prior to applying for and winning the grant to run [name of Head Start program], including the historical relationship your organization had, if any, with the organization that used to run [name of Head Start program].
3. And could you give me an overview of your organizational structure?
 - c) Is your program part of a single-purpose or a multi-purpose organization? What other services does the organization provide? For early childhood programs or services, tell me about how those programs operate and funding sources.
(Clarification, if necessary: A single purpose organization only provides Head Start and Early Head Start services, a multi-purpose organization operates other programs in addition to Head Start and Early Head Start).
 - d) What roles are represented on your management team?
 - Are these the same as they were before the competitive process?
4. Do you have any delegate agencies or Head Start slots through child care partnerships? Are these the same as they were before the competitive process?
Probe if necessary: Tell me a little bit about your roles in managing those agencies/partnerships.

[Interviewer note: Review PIR in advance to obtain preliminary information about delegates/child care partnerships.]
5. What do you see as the primary needs of young children and families in the community (communities) you serve?

Our conversation today will focus on how your organization experienced designation for a competitive 5-year grant, the reactions your organization and community had when you found out you had to competitively apply, the decisions your organization made leading up to the application submission, and what you think may be different about your program and your role now than before the designation process.

Protocol B: New Awardees/Existing Organizations – Program Managers, continued

6. How and when did you learn about the Head Start Designation Renewal System?
7. How and when did you learn that [name of Head Start program] would be subject to a competitive grant application process? *[Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.]*
 - Did you understand what it meant that the organization currently running the program would have to compete to keep the grant?
 - What was your primary source of information for understanding the competition requirements?
 - Was the news about the competition a surprise to you or did you have a sense that it was coming?
 - If you thought it was coming, why?

Now I'm going to ask you to reflect on your organization's decision to apply for the grant to operate [name of Head Start program], and the roles that community partners and funders played in that decision-making.

8. Did any of you have a role in your organization's decision to apply competitively to keep [name of Head Start program]? If yes, what role did you play in the decision to apply competitively to keep [name of Head Start program]?
9. Walk us through that decision process a little bit. *[Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.]*
 - Did your organization know right away that you wanted to apply?
 - Who participated in the decision-making process?
 - What were your key considerations in deciding whether or not to apply?
 - What did you think were your organization's key strengths?
 - What were your primary concerns?
10. What were the particular challenges that you saw facing the community, and why did you think your organization was well-positioned to meet them?
 - What did you think would be the primary challenges in meeting them?
11. Did you have a role in assembling the application? About how much time do you think it took to put it all together (thinking about all individuals involved)? Did you seek professional assistance in assembling the application?

Protocol B: New Awardees/Existing Organizations – Program Managers, continued

12. Why do you think your application was successful?
- What do you think that your organization was able to uniquely offer?
 - What are the greatest strengths of your organization?
13. Did/will your organization take over any of the space that [name of incumbent organization] had been using to provide Head Start services? If you were involved in making those arrangements, please tell us a little bit about how those arrangements were made and how the process went.
14. Did your organization hire staff who were providing services through the incumbent organization to help your organization provide services through the newly awarded Head Start grant?
- Did you or others in your organization have any concerns about hiring these staff?
 - In what ways does bringing on these staff change your roles?

Now I'm going to ask you to think ahead to the future about what you think your organization will need to successfully maintain the grant for [name of Head Start program] that you have been awarded.

15. What organizational strengths do you think your organization has that will help it provide high quality Head Start services now and in the future?
16. What are the key things that you think your organization will need to keep doing to successfully provide high quality Head Start services?
- If your organization was providing Head Start services prior to receiving this award, what do you think your organization needs to do differently, if any, to maintain high quality services now that you have this new award?
 - How does it change your roles, if at all?
17. What do you think are the most important things that your organization can do to be invited to apply for your grant noncompetitively in the future?

Protocol B: New Awardees/Existing Organizations – Program Managers, continued

Those are almost all of my questions. Before we wrap up, I want to ask you about two things.

18. Now that your organization has competed and been awarded a grant through the competitive process, overall, for the broader Head Start community, what do each of you think is the most problematic aspect of the DRS competitive process and what do you think is the most beneficial? (*Probe for both beneficial and problematic aspects*).

I don't have any additional questions for you.

19. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to tell us about your organization's experience with the DRS and the competitive grant award process?

This has been a really great discussion. Thank you very much for your time.

Protocol C: New Awardees/New Organizations – Program Managers

We understand from the information provided in your organization’s application to operate [name of Head Start program] that this organization was formed as part of a community response to the need to provide high quality Head Start services in the community. We are here to understand this community response through your experiences participating in it.

1. To start, would each of you please tell me your official job title, how long you’ve worked in this position, and a little bit about your organization?
 - What is/will be your role in managing the newly awarded Head Start program?
2. Were you involved in helping to form and/or start up the new organization?
 - If yes, what role did you play? [*Note to Interviewer: Questions 3-9 will only be relevant if at least one member of the group was involved in starting up the organization.*]
3. When and how did you learn about the change in the way that the federal Head Start system was going to maintain grants for existing Head Start programs? [*Note to interviewer: Just get a general sense.*]
4. When and how did you learn that the organization currently operating [name of Head Start program] was going to have to apply competitively to maintain their Head Start grant?
5. Thinking back to when there was a broad understanding in the community that the existing organization was not necessarily going to be able to keep operating [name of Head Start program], how do you remember the general community reaction?
 - What was your role in the community at that point? What was your reaction?

Now I’m going to ask you to reflect back on when you first remember people talking about the possibility of creating this new organization.

Protocol C: New Awardees/New Organizations – Program Managers, continued

6. Walk us through what you remember about where, when, and why people starting talking about the idea of creating a new organization. [*Note to Interviewer: Pause to see if they will tell you a story. If not, then use the following probes.*]
 - What was the setting? Was it a meeting you regularly attended for some other reason? Was the meeting specifically convened to talk about this issue?
 - How did you all come together?
 - Why did people feel like a brand new organization was needed?
 - Did these discussions start before or after you knew that the current Head Start organization would have to compete to keep its funding?
 - Did these discussions start before or after you knew that Head Start had a new funding policy for maintaining existing grants?
 - About how many groups or individuals came together to create the new organization?
 - Were potential funding organizations at the table from the start?
7. Once the decision was made to create a new organization, what was the vision for that new organization and how did that match with applying for the Head Start grant? Were any non-Head Start funders willing to commit funds prior to the application for the Head Start grant?
8. When your organization decided to apply, about how much competition did you think that you would have?
 - Why did you think that?
 - What chance did you think that you had in being awarded the grant?

[*Note to Interviewer: You are not trying to get an exact number. You are trying to determine if they thought they'd have none, a few, a lot, etc. You are also trying to determine how they thought they knew, and how good a chance they thought they had.*]
9. When your organization applied for funding, did you obtain the help of any kind of professional grant-writer? Would you mind telling us what kinds of resources that required, and how that experience was?
10. Did/will your organization take over any of the space that [name of incumbent organization] had been using to provide Head Start services? If you were involved in making those arrangements, please tell us a little bit about how those arrangements were made and how the process went.

Protocol C: New Awardees/New Organizations – Program Managers, continued

11. How many of the staff who were providing services through the incumbent organization will be/have been hired to help your organization provide services through the newly awarded Head Start grant? Do you have a role in that hiring process?
- Did you or others in your organization have any concerns about hiring these staff?
 - Please walk us through the process of how this hiring process worked/is working.

Now I'm going to ask you to think ahead to the future about what you think your organization will need to successfully maintain the grant for [name of Head Start program] that you have been awarded.

12. Please provide an overview of how your organization is structured.
- a) Is [name of Head Start program] part of a single-purpose or a multi-purpose organization? What other services does the organization provide? For early childhood programs or services, tell me about how those programs operate and funding sources.
(Clarification, if necessary: A single purpose organization only provides Head Start and Early Head Start services, a multi-purpose organization operates other programs in addition to Head Start and Early Head Start).
- b) What roles are represented on your management team?
13. Do you or will you have any delegate agencies or Head Start slots through child care partnerships? Will any of you have a role in managing those relationships?
Probe if necessary: Tell me a little bit about those agencies/partnerships.
14. What organizational strengths do you think your organization has that will help it provide high quality Head Start services now and in the future?
15. What are the key things that you think your organization will need to do to successfully provide high quality Head Start services?
- How do you see your roles supporting these efforts?
16. What do you think are the most important things that your organization can do to be invited to apply for your grant noncompetitively in the future?

Protocol C: New Awardees/New Organizations – Program Managers, continued

Those are almost all of my questions. Before we wrap up, I want to ask you about two things.

17. Now that your organization has competed and been awarded a grant through the competitive process, overall, for the broader Head Start community, what do each of you think is the most problematic aspect of the DRS competitive process and what do you think is the most beneficial? (*Probe for both beneficial and problematic aspects*).

I don't have any additional questions for you.

18. Is there anything I didn't ask that you want to tell us about your organization's experience with the DRS and the competitive grant award process?

This has been a really great discussion. Thank you very much for your time.