

# NHSA State/Regional Profile Survey

## Final Report

June 2014

### Introduction

NHSA established the Early Learning Innovation Consortium (ELIC) in January 2012 for the purpose of supporting and strengthening Head Start's role in state-level early learning systems development. The first round of Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grants had been awarded in late 2011. This new funding opportunity served as a catalyst for state-level investment in birth-to-five planning, policy and programming. Although only nine states received awards in the first round, the framework established by RTT-ELC became a blueprint for building state systems. Over the past two years, 11 additional states have joined the original nine, for a total of 20 "ELC" states. Other states which have applied but not yet received grants are using their applications to guide statewide initiatives around some or all of the key system elements.

Simultaneously, an increasing number of state and local governments are entering the world of early learning. Two states, Indiana and Mississippi, recently passed preschool legislation, bringing the number of states with preschool programs to 41. Many states are proposing increases in their existing investments. Cities like Boston, Denver, San Antonio, New York and Seattle are in various stages of planning and implementing locally-based preschool programs. At the federal level, the Obama administration's first step in the Preschool for All initiative is moving forward through a \$250 million Preschool Development Grants to be awarded by the end of this year.

In mid-2012, NHSA conducted an initial survey of state and regional associations to assess their involvement in state system building. At that time, half the responding states (15 of 30) reported being very involved with some variation by system element(e.g., Quality Rating and Improvement, Data, etc.). However, some associations reported that their member programs were skeptical or reluctant to become involved in elements they believed were already in place for Head Start, particularly in the area of quality rating. The level of understanding and sense of relevance for Head Start were higher in those states where commitment and investment were high, and where association capacity was strong.

This report documents the current level of Head Start engagement and influence in state systems and presents conclusions and recommendations to guide NHSA's support of our affiliate network as we move forward.

## **Methodology**

NHSA developed a "State/Regional Profile Survey" in late 2013 to assess associations' capacity and structure and determine their level of engagement with state early learning systems development. The survey was created using SurveyMonkey software with input from NHSA staff and several state and regional executive directors. An e-mail introduction and link to the survey was sent to NHSA's affiliate leadership list, which includes Presidents and/or Executive Directors of all state, regional and territorial associations, as well as the Migrant/Seasonal and American Indian/Native American associations. The original e-mail was sent on December 3, 2013, from Tommy Sheridan and Mary Baskett, with a subsequent reminder in January. By January 20<sup>th</sup>, 75 percent of states had responded, and a preliminary report was presented at the NHSA Winter Leadership Institute in late January 2014. Subsequently, additional responses were encouraged before the final cutoff date of March 15, 2014.

A total of 43 associations responded, of which 40 are state associations, one is regional and two are territorial or sub-state associations. The 40 states represent an 80 percent response rate among the 50 states.

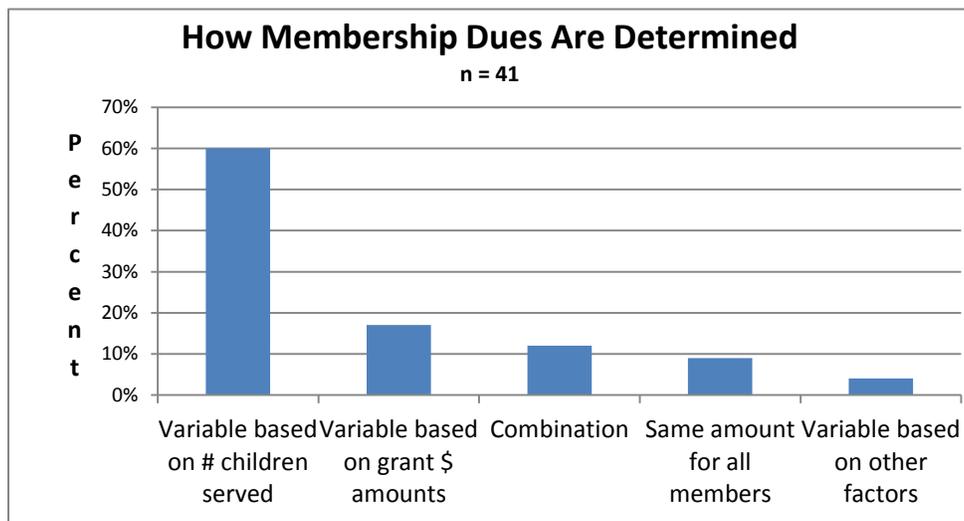
## **Survey Findings**

### Affiliate Structure and Capacity

Effective engagement in state system building requires a new level of capacity and resources for Head Start associations. With the rapidly increasing role of states in early learning, there are multiple needs and opportunities for Head Start to be represented, engaged and influential in planning, policy and advocacy work. For this reason, a section on association capacity and structure was included as a component to the survey. Here are the key findings:

- The average number of grantee members is 31, with a median of 28 and a range from 5 to 93 members, serving between 1,500 to over 100,000 children and families.

- The 43 responding associations represent 657,594 children and their families, which is 78 percent of total state Head Start enrollment.
- Almost three-quarters (72 percent) have paid staff. Of these . . .
  - 24 states/regions have an Executive Director (75 percent)
  - 5 have an Associate or Assistant Director (16 percent)
  - 35 have other staff (an average of 2 per association) (69 percent)
  - 39 percent of staff are salaried; 35 percent are contracted and 26 percent use a combination of salaried and contracted positions.
- Over three-quarters of associations assess membership dues through a variable approach, based on the number of children served by each member (60 percent) or on the dollar amount of grants (17 percent). The following graph compares assessment methods, showing that an additional 12 percent use a combined (variable plus fixed amount) approach, and 9 percent assess the same amount for all grantees. 9 percent assess the same amount for all grantees.



- The table on the following page shows the primary sources of revenue by category. Membership dues represent an average of 50 percent revenue, followed by conferences and meetings at 34 percent. Over 60 percent of respondents receive state grants and contracts, which represent the third largest source of revenue, at 18 percent. Although corporate sponsorships account for only 3 percent of average revenue, it is important to note that they provide in-kind donations and other indirect benefits:

n = 41	Average % Revenue	% Reporting
Membership Dues	50	100
Conferences/Meetings	34	85
Grants/Contracts		
State	18	61
Federal	9	39
Private	5	41
Corporate Sponsorships	3	51

- The average Board size is 23, with a median of 17 and a range of 9 to 132. (The two highest data points--120 and 132--were not included in the calculations.)  
Board composition by category is as follows:
  - 95 percent of associations have director members
  - 80 percent have staff and parent members
  - 66 percent have partner members
  - 54 percent report “other categories,” which include ex officio Past Presidents and Collaboration Directors, as well as “friends.”
- When asked if they would be willing to share resource materials with other associations, 83 percent would share their bylaws; 61 percent, their Executive Director position descriptions; and over 40 percent would share advocacy materials, strategic plans, annual reports and Board policies.

### State Early Learning Systems

This section of the survey asked about the structure and status of state early learning systems, including enrollment in state-funded programs, information about key state agencies and Head Start representation on advisory councils and advocacy coalitions. To place this section in context, 39 states were funding preschool programs at the time of the survey. In 27 of these 39 states, Head Start enrollment exceeds state preschool enrollment, further demonstrating the critical role Head Start plays in state early learning systems. (*NIEER 2012 Preschool Survey and FY2012 OHS enrollment data*) Here are the key survey findings:

- The state Department of Education is the lead agency for early learning in about half the states (52 percent), with 21 percent of states reporting a designated Office of Early Learning. Departments of Human Service, Public Welfare or similar titles lead early

learning in only 12 percent of states, while 15 percent report a shared responsibility among agencies (typically Education and Human or Social Services).

- State Advisory Councils are active in 29 of the 33 states responding (88 percent). Fifty-eight percent of respondents rate the Councils as “somewhat” effective and 19 percent, “very effective” in providing leadership and influence in their states.
- Ninety percent of 30 responding states believe Head Start is represented (i.e., issues and perspectives are adequately voiced) on Advisory Councils. Thirty percent report Head Start is “well-represented,” while 60 percent believe it is “moderately represented.” The average number of Head Start representatives is two.
- 26 associations report active state-level advocacy coalitions, with 80 percent rating them “somewhat” (37 percent) to “very” (43 percent) effective in influencing state-level policy and funding. Head Start is “very” (47 percent) to “somewhat” (37 percent) involved in these coalitions.
- States provide funding to Head Start in seven of the reporting states, and to Early Head Start in five states.
- Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV): Early Head Start is an eligible evidence-based model in 23 of 32 states (72 percent). Twelve of these states provide funding to Early Head Start through their state grants. In 20 of 32 states (63 percent), MIECHV is not administered by the primary early learning agency.

### Head Start Engagement in State Early Learning Systems

This section describes Head Start engagement in state systems, with a particular focus on Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) and Data Systems—two priorities identified by the Early Learning Innovation Consortium as most critical for Head Start.

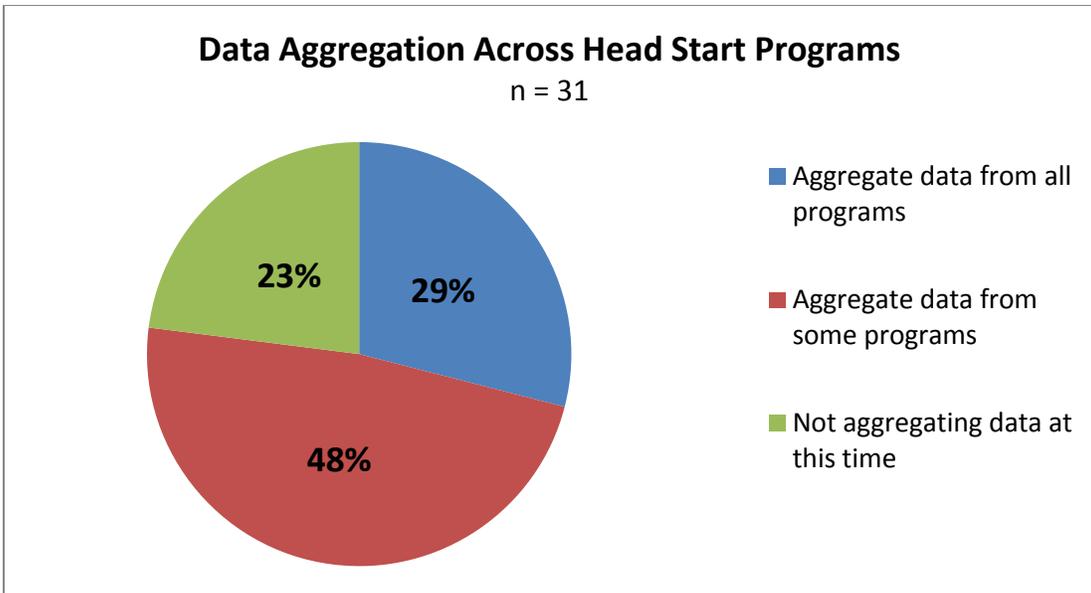
QRIS is the foundational element of state system building in the ELC framework and in other federal initiatives. It presents an opportunity to link early learning programs through a shared approach to quality and a statewide mechanism to inform parent choice. Participation is required by some states for all publicly funded programs and/or in order to access subsidy dollars or other financial incentives. Head Start programs may receive special consideration based on their federal review, either entering at a defined or minimum quality level or having an accelerated or simplified application process. Survey findings specific to QRIS:

- Current status of QRIS in 33 responding states:
  - 10 states have fully implemented QRIS statewide
  - 13 states have partially implemented QRIS
  - 7 are developing their systems
  - 3 are not yet planning QRIS
  
- Over three-quarters of states with QRIS (16 of 21) give special consideration to Head Start. Of these, Head Start is:
  - Recognized at a defined or minimum quality level in eight states.
  - Has an accelerated or simplified application process in eight states.
  - Receives incentives (e.g., higher state reimbursement for child care subsidy) in seven states.
  - Benefits from other considerations in seven states.
  
- Twenty-three states reported on grantee participation in QRIS. Six have 80 percent or greater, while two report 100 percent participation. Five states have no Head Start participation, and the remainder cluster around the mid-range.
  
- Thirty-one percent of respondents believe that Head Start is well-represented in QRIS decision making, while another 53 percent think it is somewhat represented.

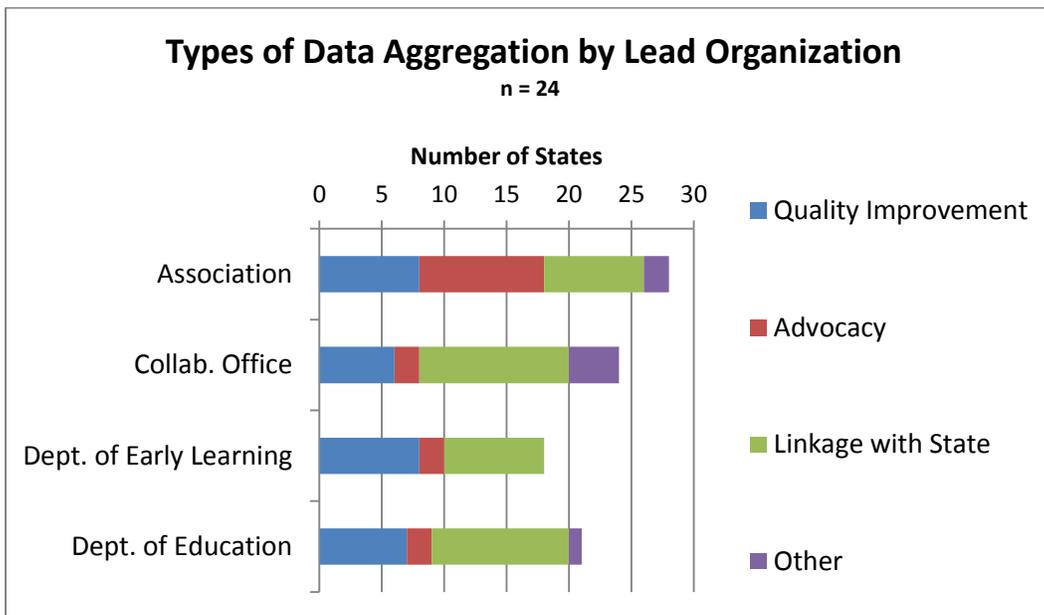
Data Systems have gained significant momentum over the past two years as the majority of states have received and are implementing State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) grants, and also investing ELC funds in linking data across early childhood programs, as well as with K-12 data. There is a more recent emphasis on Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS), which focus on the opportunities and challenges of linking the diverse programs serving young children. As noted by Stephanie Irvine of AEM Corporation, which provides state technical assistance, “Head Start programs are primary partners in ECIDS and critical to informing research, policy, and practice; without Head Start, an ECIDS could be missing more than 25 percent of the early childhood population.”

The ELIC survey of 2012 found that data systems were still in the early stages of development in most states, significantly behind QRIS. That has changed dramatically since then, and Head Start is also moving forward. Our survey shows that:

- Of 31 states responding, 24 (77 percent) are aggregating data among some or all Head Start programs. The following graph shows the distribution by the level of program participation.



- The following graph shows what types of data are being aggregated and by what lead organization. As shown, associations are leading data aggregation more often than Collaboration Offices or Departments of Early Learning and Education. Respondents could enter more than one type of aggregation (e.g., quality improvement, advocacy). The data represents 16 associations, 16 Collaboration Offices, 11 Departments of Early Learning and 13 Departments of Education.



- The following table illustrates the types of data being shared with other state data systems by all or some Head Start programs. Nineteen of the 25 states reporting (n=25 less 6) are sharing at least some data outside the Head Start community.

n = 25	Child/Family	Program	Workforce	Other	Total
<b>All Head Start Programs</b>	5	7	4	1	8
<b>Some Head Start Programs</b>	11	12	7	1	16
<b>No Head Start Programs</b>	4	3	4	1	6

- Three-quarters of respondents think that Head Start is represented (38 percent “well” and 48 percent “somewhat”) in data systems decision making.

Survey respondents were asked about other ways Head Start is involved in state system building. Of 27 responses:

- 96 percent are engaged in professional development/workforce initiatives
- 67 percent, in family engagement (e.g., mentoring other providers, incorporating Head Start standards in QRIS, aligning family engagement approaches)
- 63 percent, in child assessment (developing or revising assessment tools, identifying common measures across programs, etc.)

### How NHSA Can Be Helpful

Respondents suggested a variety of ways NHSA can be helpful with their state/regional work:

- Continuing to provide updates, information and resources on initiatives at the national and state levels
- Offering leadership training
- Providing data for advocacy, and templates that can be used at the state level
- Ensuring that parent advocacy is included at all levels
- Continuing to participate in state conferences
- Providing outreach to state child care partners

## Conclusions

### Association Capacity:

1. State associations are highly diverse in their size and scope, ranging in membership from 5 to 93 and representing from 1,500 to over 100,000 children and families. While almost three-quarters have paid staff, only 24 have Executive Directors. This number has remained relatively constant over the past decade.
2. The majority of associations are receiving revenue from grants and contracts, with 61 percent reporting state funding, which provides an average of 18 percent of their revenue. Whether from Collaboration Office contracts or other sources, these figures indicate the importance of strong, stable state-level relationships.
3. The average size of association boards is 17, with a range of 9 to 132. The BoardSource survey, "A Snapshot of America's Nonprofit Boards," reports that the average size of a board is 19 and the median is 17. Although BoardSource and other respected nonprofit advisors do not think there is one "best" or "ideal" size, they do caution against boards that are too large to be effective.

### State Early Learning Systems:

4. About a quarter of respondents to the survey did not complete the sections on state early learning systems and Head Start engagement with system elements. In informal conversations with state leaders, several reasons were suggested:
  - a. Data requested was not readily available to the respondent (e.g., state preschool enrollments, number of children 0 – 5 served in state programs).
  - b. There were questions about the accuracy or timeliness of this data (e.g., which preschool programs should be included; is the data they have current?).
  - c. Some respondents believed that questions requiring an opinion or rating (e.g., Is Head Start represented in QRIS decision making?) should be answered in collaboration with other partners (e.g., the Collab Director or Board members). Some did seek input, but there was not always time or opportunity to do so.

In the fast-moving world of state early learning, it is becoming more critical to have accurate and accessible data--not only about Head Start but about the broader context in which we operate. There is a need for guidance in what core data should be maintained by associations, what are the most reliable sources, but also what limitations exist with the data that is available. A uniform way for associations to track and report key data elements (e.g, preschool enrollment, waiting lists, etc.) would be very helpful.

5. State Advisory Councils are more active and deemed to be more effective than they were perceived to be two years ago. The question of what happens to them as funding has run out remains unclear. ELC states are required to have a State Advisory Council, and of course they remain a statutory requirement under the Head Start Act. Despite significant concerns several years ago that Head Start would be included, almost every state has Head Start representatives, with an average of two per state.
6. The level of Head Start involvement in state advocacy coalitions is fairly good, with almost half (47 percent) of respondents reporting they are “very involved.” However, more than a third are only “somewhat involved,” and a few are not involved at all. Since the survey indicates a positive perception of these coalitions’ influence in state-level policy and funding, a Head Start presence seems increasingly important.

#### Head Start Engagement in State Systems:

7. Head Start appears to be faring well in its positioning within state QRISs, with more than three-quarters of states with QRIS (16 of 21) reporting that Head Start receives special consideration in quality ratings, application processes and/or financial incentives. This has been an advocacy success in a number of states where associations and Collaboration Offices have worked to ensure that Head Start’s quality is recognized and that programs can participate without unnecessary duplication of effort.
8. The survey indicates a significant increase in association involvement with data systems. Over three-quarters are aggregating data across some or all of their member programs, which is a critical step in advocacy at the state level, as well as in quality improvement and linkages with other data systems. Associations are leading these efforts more often than either Collaboration Directors or state agencies. And, at least 19 states are sharing data from some or all of their Head Start programs with other state data systems.
9. Comments about data aggregation and linkages indicate a number of states are still in the early stages of development, and that this is challenging work. Some are gathering data sharing agreements, while others are using Teaching Strategies Gold (TS-Gold) licenses to access aggregated data among programs.
10. Respondents also report significant Head Start involvement in child assessment, family engagement and professional development/workforce initiatives. In open-ended responses, they also note numerous state initiatives, such as mental health and oral health, in which Head Start is actively engaged. Some commented that “Head Start is at every early learning table,” while others noted Head Start is on every committee. The Collaboration Director may be the more frequent “face” of Head Start, particularly in states with very limited association resources.

## Recommendations

Based on the survey results and the work of the Consortium over the past two years, the following recommendations are suggested for consideration:

1. Increase association staffing, particularly in the Executive Director role, to expand Head Start representation and influence in state system development.
2. Provide guidance to association leadership about changes in Board structure and composition that can strengthen effectiveness and influence at the state level. This could include adding state leaders and partners, resizing the Board so it can respond more nimbly to state-level opportunities and re-evaluating decision making policies.
3. Facilitate association partnerships at the state level by aligning with national partners (e.g., child care, advocacy groups and vendors).
4. Encourage the inclusion of state partners on association Boards and in conferences, events and training opportunities.
5. Provide guidance in developing state data resources which can be helpful in advocacy, including sources, definitions and limitations (e.g., state preschool enrollment, waiting lists, etc.).
6. Support associations in developing and implementing state-level advocacy plans to complement their national advocacy efforts.
7. Develop strategies and materials to assist in promoting Early Head Start within state Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grants.
8. Facilitate discussions with data systems vendors to assist states in aggregating and reporting data, and to develop licenses that benefit local programs and associations.
9. Provide guidance regarding Head Start engagement in state data systems, including issues of data privacy, governance, quality and reporting. This could include the creation of a Head Start Data Learning Community.
10. Expand opportunities for state and regional associations to share innovations, resources and experiences online and through interactive, archived webinars.