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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Research consistently shows an extensive and growing need for high quality, out-of-home child care for infants and toddlers from all families, but particularly for low-income families. To meet children's developmental needs and parents' workforce needs, government leaders and policymakers have expressed support for early care and education (ECE) partnerships at the point of service delivery to build more seamless care systems and promote quality across settings. These partnerships involve two or more organizations working together to jointly provide ECE services to young children and their families. Organizations can work together by combining funding, resources, materials, and staff to serve additional children, provide comprehensive services, enhance service quality, or provide full-day, full-year ECE. In fiscal year (FY) 2014, the federal government further highlighted this approach by funding an expansion of effective early learning opportunities for children from birth to age 3 through Early Head Start–child care partnerships. The \$500 million in new grants will allow new or existing Early Head Start grantees to partner with local child care centers and family child care homes serving low-income families with infants and toddlers. Partnership grantees might be existing Early Head Start grantees, agencies that operate family child care networks, child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&R), or states. Partnership grantees work collaboratively with child care centers and family child care providers to deliver full-day, full-year child care and comprehensive services to infants and toddlers and their families.

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), awarded a contract to Mathematica Policy Research and its partners to carry out the Study of Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships. ACF's goal for the study is to understand whether these partnerships provide continuity of care; meet families' needs for child care; and improve outcomes for providers, families, and children.

As part of the project we developed a theory of change that includes four sets of constructs: (1) inputs to the partnerships, (2) partnership activities, (3) short- and long-term outcomes, and (4) organizational and contextual factors that influence the partnerships.<sup>2</sup> This document provides a roadmap for measuring all aspects of the partnerships included in the theory of change. These recommended measurement approaches will inform the evaluation design and data collection plan for the Study of Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships.

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## KEY FINDINGS

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The report describes our suggestions for measures of constructs in each section of the theory of change: inputs, activities, short- and long-term outcomes, and organizational and contextual factors. We describe the constructs, data elements, data collection methods, and recommended measures, as well as the types of questions that can be answered and how the proposed data collection can inform policy, practice, and research. We conclude with a description of our approach to developing and pre-testing new measures and qualitative data collection protocols.

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<sup>2</sup> The term construct refers to a trait or concept in the theory of change that we seek to measure.

## **Measuring Inputs**

Collecting data on the inputs to partnerships is important for building the knowledge base about the resources needed to support high quality implementation of partnerships. Items that measure input constructs are largely available from past data collection efforts. However, for some constructs, we did not find appropriate survey items and thus propose new items.

We also recommend several topics for qualitative data collection, such as individual semi-structured interviews or focus groups to explore some inputs in more depth. Document reviews also may help in understanding inputs from ECE systems, such as policies, regulations, and standards that govern partnerships and the communities in which they operate.

## **Measuring Implementation Activities**

We have grouped the activities needed to develop and implement partnerships into four categories: (1) partnership development activities, (2) partnership operation activities, (3) family activities, and (4) activities of other ECE systems that interact with the partnerships. To measure these constructs, we recommend collecting data from a range of respondents through surveys and qualitative interviews and focus groups. The types of respondents include partnership grantee directors and staff who work directly with the child care partners (such as a child care specialist), child care center directors, child care teachers, family child care providers, families, and directors of other ECE systems. We identified survey items from past data collection efforts that can be adapted to measure activity constructs. When we could not identify appropriate survey items, we proposed new items. To supplement survey items, we recommend qualitative interviews and focus groups to explore topics in more depth than is possible in a survey.

## **Measuring Short- and Long-Term Outcomes**

Short-term outcomes for partnerships include enhancing capacity to offer high quality service options, develop strong partnerships, and increase staff professionalism. For families, short-term outcomes include increased access to services, continuity of caregiving for children, and parental involvement in work and children's early learning. For other early childhood systems, expected short-term outcomes include alignment of rules and regulations across funding streams and quality improvement and professional supports. Longer-term outcomes, expected two years or more after formation of a partnership, include sustained partnerships, increased supply of high quality infant and toddler care, improved family and child well-being, and well-aligned early childhood systems.

We recommend using standardized measures and survey times to collect quantitative data for assessing partnership outcomes. We also recommend collecting information on child care supply from QRIS and CCR&Rs operating in the partnership service areas. Many of these topics also could be explored through qualitative data collection on the successes and challenges partnerships faced in achieving outcomes, as well as lessons learned about implementation factors that helped or hindered progress.

## **Measuring Organizational and Contextual Factors**

Partnerships can be shaped by organizational culture and supportive leadership within the grantee and child care partners. Shared goals and mutual respect between partners can influence

the experience of collaboration and keep lines of communication open. In addition, organizations with existing infrastructure for self-assessment and continuous quality improvement may be better prepared to work in partnership toward these goals. Local, state, and national contextual factors can create conditions that are more or less conducive to forming and sustaining successful partnerships. Some partnerships will take place in states with existing QRIS systems or other ongoing quality improvement initiatives. At the national level, all partnerships will take place in the context of the Head Start Designation Renewal System (DRS), which could make some Early Head Start grantees hesitant to partner.<sup>3</sup>

Measures of many organizational and contextual factor constructs are available from past data collection efforts or can be adapted to be appropriate for this study. We did not find existing survey items for a few constructs and thus propose new items to measure them. The primary respondents for surveys include partnership grantee directors, child care center directors and teachers, family child providers, and other partnership staff. We also recommend document reviews to obtain information on quality improvement initiatives that partnerships can access in their states and communities. In addition, qualitative interviews with selected respondents, such as directors of quality initiatives and local CCR&Rs, can yield more in-depth information than can be collected through a survey.

### **Recommendations for Pretesting Survey Instruments and Qualitative Protocols**

Because not all constructs in the theory of change can be adequately measured using measures drawn from past data collection efforts, we have recommended new items to cover these gaps. We have developed these new items based on findings from the literature review (Del Grosso et al. 2014) whenever possible, and have drawn ideas for phrasing and language from prior research on Early Head Start and child care. Some new items were developed with input from expert consultants. For all new and adapted items, users will have to assess the measures' reliability and validity for their intended purpose. After these decisions have been made, a final step in the measurement development process involves pretesting all new and adapted measures.

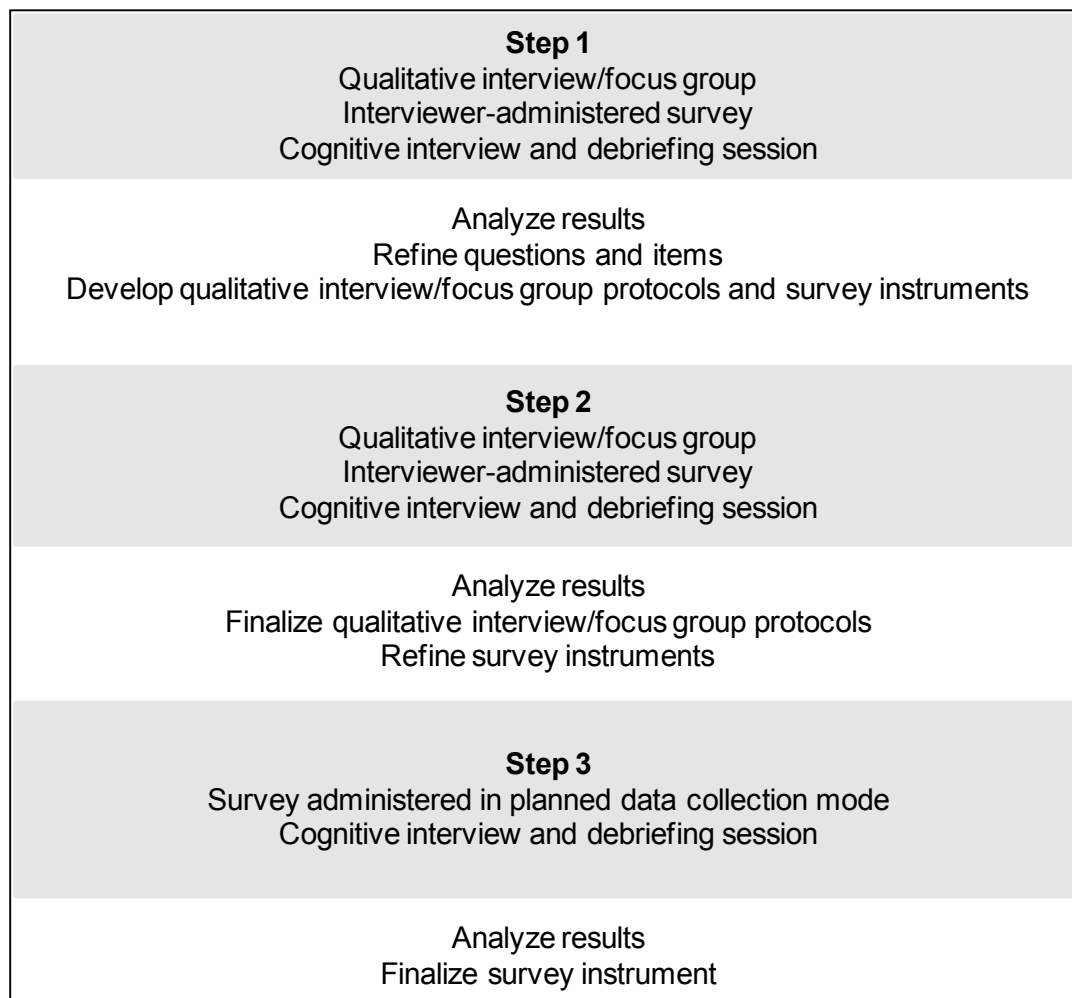
We recommend an iterative pretesting process to ensure that (1) survey items and qualitative interview and focus group questions are understandable and use language familiar to respondents, (2) survey items and qualitative interview and focus group questions are understood by and function similarly for diverse respondents, (3) qualitative interview and focus group questions elicit fully elaborated responses, and (4) response categories for survey items are adequate to capture typical responses ([Figure 1](#)). The pretest also will inform the best order of

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<sup>3</sup> The Head Start DRS, established in 2011, is a system for grantee renewals that determines whether each existing grantee is providing services of sufficient quality to qualify for a five-year grant renewal. The DRS builds on the existing triennial monitoring visits that ensure compliance with the HSPPS, but it also requires annual audits of budget and fiscal management, as well as an assessment of preschool center-based classroom quality using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). At this time, Early Head Start programs are not observed with a measure like the CLASS as part of the triennial monitoring system, but this could change over the life of the Study of Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships.

questions and items within the larger data collection protocol or instrument and will provide an estimate of how long data collection will take. Using the results from the pretest, survey instruments and qualitative interview and focus group protocols can be finalized and used in data collection.

**Figure 1. Iterative approach to pretesting**



## Conclusions

This report provides recommended measurement approaches for Early Head Start-child care partnerships that will facilitate data collection that can begin to fill the knowledge gap about these partnerships. We developed this report with a broad range of stakeholders in mind, including researchers, administrators, and practitioners. Our aim was to provide a roadmap to data collection and to learning how to implement high quality partnerships that produce positive outcomes for children, families, partnerships, and communities.