Service Area Agreement Guidance Document

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) requires ECEAP Contractors to complete written Service Area Agreements with neighboring Head Start grantees and ECEAP contractors. The purpose of this agreement is to establish clear service area boundaries for recruitment and enrollment of eligible children and families with neighboring programs. Agreements support policies and procedures for working collaboratively, reducing duplication of services, leveraging funding through efficient use of state (and federal) resources and ensuring responsiveness to family need.

The agreement must include:
- Specific areas for recruitment and enrollment of families for each party.
- Process for referral of families between parties.
- Plans for collaborating with service area partners to ensure efficient use of state and community resources, when practical, for:
  - Ongoing communication and problem resolution.
  - Developing community assessments.
  - Coordinating work with community partners, including Health Advisory Committee.
  - Planning joint staff and parent training opportunities.

Guidance for establishing an agreement:
- Meet with your new partners and learn about the services they provide and their program's philosophy. Use this opportunity to begin building a relationship and collaborating on creating a purpose and scope statement. This statement describes how agencies will work collaboratively with common goals of serving income eligible children and families within a shared service area. This could include a description of related services each program provides (such as home-based services, child care or full-day programs).
  - Describe how agencies will collaborate on assessing the needs and strengths of the population within the service area(s) such as coordinating community assessment efforts.
  - Define enrollment and service area boundaries. This could include how many families an agency will enroll within defined geographical areas such as:
    - County lines: When parties both serve families in one county, they may divide the county geographically or by school districts.
    - School District Catchment Areas: Defining boundaries by school district catchment areas may be appropriate when parties are physically located in different catchment areas. This may be feasible when one or more parties are a school district that is providing ECEAP or Head Start services.
    - City Limits: When parties share a geographical area, but one is physically located within a city and the other physically located outside the city limits.
    - Neighborhoods: When parties share a school district catchment area, it may be feasible to define boundaries by neighborhoods or street names.

- Discuss outreach and recruitment. In some communities, neighboring programs coordinate services in one geographical area through a joint outreach and recruitment process to serve as many families possible between agencies and to reduce duplication efforts. These efforts can include:
  - Shared outreach and recruitment materials.
  - One common application for multiple agencies.
  - Joint coordination with community partners.
  - Collaboration in response to possible gaps in services.
- Develop a process for referring families between agencies. Describe how agencies will communicate and prioritize enrollment for families moving between service areas. Considerations include:
  - Family choice
  - Neighborhoods
  - Transportation services
  - Days and hours that classes meet.
  - Serving special populations (i.e. children who qualify under the McKinney/Vento Homeless Assistance Act, children who are receiving Child Protective Services or Family Assessment Response (FAR) services, etc.)
  - Services a family is already receiving from another agency (i.e. Birth to Three services, Special Education services, etc.)
- Actively seek opportunities to work together with other community partners to reduce the impact on the partners' time and to best use agency staff resources. This could include:
  - Conducting a joint Health Advisory Committee that provides information and guidance for all partners.
  - Participating in local and regional early learning coalitions to collaborate on strengthening P-3 alignment efforts, including WaKIDS.
- Actively seek opportunities to conduct joint trainings to support staffing development, including:
  - Planning events together.
  - Inviting partner agencies to in-house trainings.
  - Sharing facility or costs.
  - Sharing costs of hiring trainers.
- Plan for ongoing communication and problem resolution that promotes good communication, giving agencies an opportunity to assess how collaboration is working. Discussion topics could include:
  - Sharing professional development opportunities.
  - Sharing information about recruitment practices and current enrollment data.
  - Sharing community assessment data.
  - Addressing concerns in a timely manner as issues arise.
  - Making mutually agreed upon changes.