



Case Study #3: Telamon North Carolina Corporation's Collaboration with a County Agency

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Telamon North Carolina (NC) provides a range of services, including Head Start and Early Head Start, to children and families. This case study describes their partnership with another community agency to link their data to data from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to improve enrollment in and coordination between TANF and Head Start services. It describes what they did and how the project helped strengthen their collaboration to better serve families in their programs. This case study highlights an example of linking data that involves staff from two different agencies entering data on families into a joint spreadsheet.

With locations in twelve states, the Telamon Corporation is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to improve the lives of those in need. First established in 1965, Telamon offers a wide range of services such as early childhood education, job training, youth employment, and housing opportunities. In Wake County, North Carolina the Telamon program provides youth, housing, and immigration services to families in need, has a national farmworkers jobs program, and is a Head Start provider. Currently six states offer Head Start through Telamon Corporation, with North Carolina (NC) having the largest program, providing Early Head Start, Head Start, and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start.¹ In the 2014-2015 year, Telamon NC served 1,786 children birth to five years in home-based and center-based Early Head Start and Head Start programs. In 2015 they also received an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant.²

To support their mission to better improve the lives of those in need, Telamon NC refers Early Head Start and Head Start

¹ To learn more about Telamon NC, please go to: <http://www.telamon.org/>

² [The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships](#) are federal grants funded by the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The grants allow new or existing Early Head Start programs to partner with local child care centers and family child care providers to help expand high quality early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers from low-income families.

families to Wake County Human Services (WCHS), and WCHS then determines if families are eligible for additional services, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Although Telamon NC has referred families to WCHS for many years, they did not do so consistently and were not able to access data from WCHS to determine the outcome of those referrals (i.e., if those families referred were eligible for and receiving TANF services). Telamon NC leaders believed that a closer collaboration with WCHS on TANF would help them better serve their families and possibly foster other joint efforts to benefit families in need. Therefore, in January 2014, Telamon NC and WCHS jointly applied for a grant from the North Carolina Head Start State Collaboration Office that would provide funding and support to strengthen their collaboration with WCHS to better serve their families. Telamon NC and WCHS were awarded the grant and began work in July 2014. This case study highlights how these partner agencies used funding from this grant to link³ Head Start and TANF data and then used the linked data to coordinate family support services and increase TANF enrollment for families who are eligible for both Head Start/Early Head Start and TANF services, as well as identify Head Start-eligible families who might be prioritized for services.

Head Start/Early Head Start-Work First Program Collaborations Grant

In an effort to create a stronger collaboration between Head Start and county Health and Human Service agencies in NC, the NC Head Start State Collaboration Office (NC HSSCO) announced a mini-grant competitive funding opportunity to support partnerships between Head Start/Early Head Start programs and county Divisions of Social Services administering the State's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program (known as Work First in North Carolina). Both Head Start and Work First serve similar populations of families; both are anti-poverty programs that have similar goals and are funded by the same federal agency. If a child is being served by TANF, they are automatically eligible to be served by Head Start/Early Head Start. The Region IV Administration for Children and Families office in Atlanta had encouraged the NC HSSCO Director to consider ways to strengthen collaboration between the two programs and increase the number of families enrolled in both TANF and Head Start/Early Head Start services. Funding was awarded in installments to partnerships contingent on meeting and sustaining specific project benchmarks throughout the grant period.

Specifically, the grant required Head Start and Work First programs to jointly achieve three project goals:

1. Increase the number of cross-agency referrals of children and families potentially eligible to receive services or benefits between partner programs, with the aim of increasing the number of families who are enrolled in both Work First and Early Head Start/Head Start.
2. Develop an effective system of communication, information-sharing, and reciprocity between Head Start programs and county Work First programs that facilitates their ability to develop a coordinated system of seamless services for children and families, and streamlines duplicative services.
3. Convene a series of targeted joint training opportunities for Head Start and Work First staff that have similar job responsibilities and functions.

Telamon NC and Wake County Human Services decided to apply for the grant for three main reasons. First, they had informally, but not routinely, referred families between the two programs and were interested in developing a way to more effectively share and communicate information with one another. Second, both programs were separately working with enrolled families to establish family priorities and goals, and the goals were often overlapping or conflicting between the programs. This was creating unnecessary burden for the programs and families were expressing confusion over the goals from each program, as well as feeling burdened to address two sets of goals that often were similar in scope. Thus, they wanted a better way to coordinate family goal-setting activities. Third, they wanted to use the funds from this grant to increase staff training and support for working with families across the two programs.

³ In this resource, data are considered linked when information from two or more separate data systems or databases are shared, connected, combined, or merged. These data systems or databases may be housed in the same program or in multiple programs or agencies. Linking can occur in various ways ranging from simple, (e.g., sharing a spreadsheet) to more complex (e.g., merging two databases into a single file), to very complex (e.g., fully integrating data across multiple agencies). However, all linked data has the potential to provide useful information to support ECE program improvement.

Linking Head Start and Work First Data

After receiving the grant, data specialists from Telamon NC Head Start and Work First met to figure out how to safely and efficiently share their data. First, they created a joint referral form that both agencies used to collect key eligibility information from families, creating a single entry point for families to access both programs. Families complete the form and an email is automatically generated notifying the other agency of the new family so that both programs can determine eligibility of services at once, greatly reducing the burden on families as well as shortening the timeframe for enrolling families into services.

Next, the data specialists from both programs worked together to create an Excel spreadsheet to enter data about families served by each program. On a regular basis, each program enters information about the families they are serving. The data and family specialists from both programs meet weekly to review the spreadsheet and determine which families on the list are dually enrolled in both programs, if any other referrals need to be made between them, and to ensure that the information reported in the spreadsheet is accurate and up to date. The dually enrolled families are then highlighted so that program staff can track them as they move through both programs to ensure they are receiving the services they need, including access to additional services for which they may be eligible. The information also helps staff from both programs work together with families to develop joint family goals and plans.



Children and parent names are used to match individual children and families across agencies. Programs use this approach to matching data because they assign their own unique identification numbers (IDs) rather than use the same ID across the two programs. Telamon NC Head Start stores their Head Start/Early Head Start data in ChildPlus, an online software program that assigns specific ChildPlus IDs, and Work First assigns their own case numbers to every family they serve.

While the spreadsheet allows both programs to enter data into one document, it still requires coordination between Telamon NC Head Start and Work First on data entry and verification. As a next step, Telamon NC Head Start is working with their information technology staff to develop a central cloud-based data system that both agencies can access and use simultaneously. They are thinking carefully and working hard to ensure that any solution they develop will protect the privacy of families and children and will allow for the data to be stored securely.

Ensuring Privacy and Security of Data

The agencies have developed several steps to ensure the privacy and security of the data that are shared and linked. First, a memorandum of agreement (MOA)⁴ was created between Telamon NC and Wake County Human Services. The MOA specifies which programs are participating in this partnership and can share and use data. It also provides information on each participating program to make sure there is a common understanding of the mission and goals of all programs. Because Work First is located in WCHS along with all other social services programs in Wake County (e.g., Food and Nutrition Services; Woman, Infants and Children, etc.), the MOA for the project was developed for the agencies, not just the specific programs. The MOA allows WCHS staff in other programs serving Work First families to view HS/EHS enrollment data. Therefore, when establishing the MOA, any program within WCHS that could potentially access data for families who are enrolled in both Work First and other social service programs were also included in the MOA. Second, both agencies were already requiring parental consent to collect and use data, so they modified their existing procedures by developing another consent form to ask for permission to not only use data internally but also share data across these agencies. As is required by their Head Start programs, Telamon NC Head Start had a parent consent form that families

⁴ For more information about developing a Memorandum of Agreement or data sharing agreement, please refer to *Data Direction #4: Building a Data Sharing Partnership with Other Organizations*, another resource in this series.

signed when enrolling their children in the program. This form outlined data collection for internal use and required reporting purposes. Work First also had a data release form that families signed, allowing their data to be shared with other programs within the county department of WCHS, but not with Telamon NC. After establishing this partnership, Telamon NC and WCHS created a consent form to use with families that is specific to sharing of data between Telamon NC and WCHS and authorizes each program to exchange and release data to the other program. When requesting their consent, both WCHS and Telamon NC describe to families how data will be shared between the two agencies and for what purposes.⁵

Using Linked Data to Coordinate Family Support Services and Increase Enrollment

Telamon NC leaders report that it has been very helpful to have a joint referral form to determine eligibility for both Head Start/Early Head Start and Work First, as well as to hold weekly meetings with family specialists to review the information in the spreadsheet with data from both programs. With these processes in place, Telamon NC Head Start and Work First staff are able to identify new families who are eligible for both services, and this eligibility can be determined at the same time, thus reducing the burden on families to fill out multiple forms and also more quickly identifying multiple services for which families may qualify. They can also more easily identify families in one of the programs who might be eligible for the other program and, in the case of Head Start/Early Head Start, prioritize them for enrollment when openings become available. Once a family is enrolled in both services, Telamon NC enters data into the spreadsheet to indicate that this family is dually enrolled and receiving Head Start and Work First services. Since the start of the grant in 2014, referrals have increased in both programs, with over 175 referrals being made between both agencies.



The agencies have also been able to coordinate their family support services by establishing joint family goal-setting meetings, another benefit of linking data between the agencies. Previously, each agency had its own family goal-setting meeting to assess a family's needs and establish goals related to the specific program. Often, these goals were either conflicting or redundant with what families were working on through the other program. Families had to participate in two separate goal-setting efforts for each agency, which was sometimes confusing and often burdensome to families. Now that the two programs have data in one combined spreadsheet and can easily see which families are enrolled in both programs, they schedule joint family goal-setting meetings for dually-enrolled families with family specialists from each program. During these meetings, families and agency staff work

together to create a combined set of goals. Some of the individual goals may be specific to only one agency, but by having joint meetings, the families and staff from both agencies can walk away with one comprehensive set of goals and steps. For example, one goal may be for the family to work with the Head Start program to continue home visits to help prepare the child and family for kindergarten. Another goal may be for the family to work with both agencies to connect and encourage the family to utilize available community resources to develop their support circles. This collaboration helps agency staff better align their services to meet the needs of families and reduce duplication of services. It also minimizes the burden on families by having them meet and set goals only once, rather than separately for each program.

Next Steps and Sustaining the Use of Linked Data for Continuous Program Improvement

As a next step, Telamon NC is interested in linking their data with data from additional local agencies. For example, because Telamon NC has an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant to serve infants/toddlers in partner child care centers, the agency is interested in examining child care subsidy information over time to understand changes in subsidy

⁵ For additional information on how to have discussions with families about data, see *Data Direction #2: Discussing Data with Families*, another resource in this series.

use in their partnership sites. Telamon NC also recruits families into their program through a program called Project CATCH, which provides case management services and supports for children and families experiencing homelessness in Raleigh, NC. Telamon NC is interested in linking to Project CATCH data to better identify families experiencing homelessness who are eligible for Head Start services, as homelessness is another type of categorical eligibility for Head Start. By linking data from all of these programs, Telamon NC is hoping to not only increase their own awareness of other services their families are receiving or may be eligible to receive, but also to look at patterns in the data to help inform families of their options for accessing additional services to meet their needs.

Although the funding for the Head Start/Work First Collaboration Grant ended in October 2015, an important part of the grant was to develop a plan for sustaining the work and partnership between the two agencies. As one sustainability strategy, Telamon NC has modified the job expectations for its family services staff by requiring them to work and routinely meet with Work First staff, and Work First requires external collaboration with Telamon NC in their staff work plans. The joint family goal-setting meetings have become routine across agencies, which also helps maintain the collaboration beyond the grant.

Summary

Telamon NC and Wake County Human Services leveraged a state-level funding opportunity to link their data and use those linked data to enroll more eligible families and provide more coordinated family support services. Telamon NC is excited about extending their collaboration to other local programs and services to better serve young children and their families throughout North Carolina. Though linking data was only one part of their work together, it helped both agencies strengthen their services to families and foster more collaboration with each other.

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