



Partnering with LENA: Guidance for Head Start Quality Improvement Applications

In early March, the Office of Head Start sent a letter to Head Start grantees requesting applications for funding to increase staff salaries and implement quality improvement activities. The letter encouraged grantees to use the quality funding for a trauma-informed approach that supports children, families, and staff impacted by adverse experiences. Applications must be submitted to the Head Start Enterprise System by **May 15, 2020**.

Since that letter was sent, Head Start programs have felt the direct effect of the COVID-19 crisis. Programs have closed, staff have redirected efforts toward providing basic services for families, and some of Head Start's own staff and families have been infected. While it is hard to think beyond the current crisis, Head Start programs will be the first in the early childhood field to be back up and running. Before the crisis, many grantees expressed interest in partnering with LENA to support quality improvement using LENA Grow. When you are ready, we want to make sure that you have the information you need for the application.

LENA's value-add to Head Start programs is simple:

1. Implementing LENA programs is easy and scalable across multiple sites and contexts, from home-based programming to center-based programming. LENA is being used by Head Start and Early Head Start programs in 20 states.
2. LENA's approach is evidence based and research driven. We leverage best practices in trauma-informed programming.
3. LENA has demonstrated improvement in CLASS scores across multiple contexts.
4. Teachers and families report high levels of satisfaction with LENA programs, including an increased sense of self-efficacy and confidence and, in the case of teachers, job satisfaction.
5. LENA's ability to deliver content, training, and support remotely and to support partner sites in delivering programming to teachers and families remotely allows for cost-effective scaling.

The guidance below provides a description of LENA Grow, outlines the role that LENA Grow plays in trauma-informed care, provides an alignment to the requirements of the grant funding, and includes sample narrative language and budget. If you need additional support with your application, please contact Caitlyn Stafford at caitlynstafford@lena.org or learn more about our work with other Head Start programs and our alignment to Head Start Program Performance Standards at: www.lena.org/head-start.

LENA Grow and Trauma-Informed Care

LENA Grow is a research-based Head Start professional development program that uses innovative technology to improve the language and early literacy development of young children. Children wear "talk pedometers" that count the number of conversational interactions (or turns) between an adult and the children in a classroom or home setting. Teachers receive weekly coaching on how to boost interactions based on the data from the talk pedometers. Research on LENA Grow finds that teachers are more confident in their teaching abilities and that conversational turns increase by 34 percent. Equally important, the coaching from LENA Grow is aligned to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and programs that have used LENA Grow have seen improvements in CLASS scores.

These conversational turns and interactions are an important part of a trauma-informed care approach. LENA Grow promotes positive adult-child relationships and interactions, which are protective factors that buffer children from the effects of adverse childhood experiences. As outlined in a recent research summary by Child Trends, a foundational protective factor for children is “sensitive, responsive caregiving,” and “...talking can bolster children’s sense of safety and security during uncertain or scary times.”¹

LENA Grow consists of several components that include:



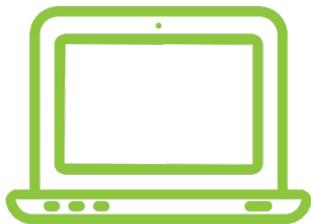
Coaching sessions

A strengths-based approach where staff work with a coach weekly to develop skills that increase interaction and enhance both child and teacher development. Tools include: weekly reports, short instructional videos, coach guides, teacher workbooks, the 14 Talking Tips, conversation starter posters and other resources to guide teachers and coaches through goal setting, focusing on building equity of interaction in the classroom and improving the environment not just for the children but for the teachers as well.



LENA technology

LENA technology is the industry standard for measuring talk with children, which is a critical factor in early brain development. LENA uses a small wearable device — often referred to as a “talk pedometer” — combined with cloud-based software to deliver detailed feedback that helps adults make proven, sustainable increases in interactive talk with children.



The LENA Online™ portal

LENA’s online secure portal provides weekly classroom and individual child reports in a data-secure manner. Additionally, it houses all of the core content resources and supplemental materials including instructional videos, videos demonstrating interactions as well as printable resources for meeting each individual child’s needs.



Training, analysis, and support

Dedicated LENA staff provide support to your program through initial conversations and training as well as weekly/biweekly support conversations to ensure successful implementation with high fidelity as well as to build your programs capacity in data literacy and scaffolding of coaching. Additionally, LENA provides additional support through monthly newsletters sharing best practices and providing in-depth information on additional resources, as well as semi-regular webinars to support on-going professional development.

¹ See: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/ways-to-promote-childrens-resilience-to-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Alignment of LENA Grow to the Application Criteria

The outcomes of LENA Grow are consistent with Head Start guidance for quality funding. The application includes four criteria that grantees must address in the narrative of their grant application. The table below provides an alignment of LENA Grow to the funding criteria in the application.

Grantees must demonstrate: LENA Grow Alignment	
<p>Quality investments are consistent with Sec. 640(a) (5) of the Act, which allows for quality improvement funds to be spent on “... staff training...and other services necessary to address the challenges of children” served by Head Start programs.</p>	<p>LENA Grow is a research-based staff training for Head Start and Early Head Start teachers that increases the number of conversational turns between teachers and children. These conversational turns are linked to better language and literacy outcomes for young children in Head Start programs.</p> <p>Techniques for increasing talk in LENA Grow comprise the research-based strategies of following the child’s lead and creating joint attention, and recasting child vocalizations. Concentrating on conversational turns is in line with recent research validating LENA conversational turns as a quality measure of children’s language experience, and one directly linked to increases in children’s composite language scores. Classrooms with intentionally crafted learning opportunities and frequent, responsive, and stimulating adult-child interactions promote language and literacy skills, early brain development and kindergarten readiness. The types of coaching activities included in LENA Grow (data-driven feedback, cycles of reflection and analysis, and video examples) have been shown to increase effective teacher behaviors. The techniques for increasing talk are designed to produce a responsive style of interaction, which is associated with accelerated language and cognitive growth worldwide.</p> <p>LENA Grow is aligned with the HSELOF and the PFCEF. A full crosswalk is provided here. One example is HSPS 1302.31 “Emphasize nurturing & responsive practices, interactions, and environments; are communication & language rich; promote language development.” LENA Grow meets this by providing teachers with guidance and feedback on increasing interactive talk to promote stronger language development in their classroom.</p>
<p>Investments made in Quality Improvement will be ongoing;</p>	<p>LENA Grow is an ongoing training that consists of 10 weeks of coaching. Classrooms complete 10 “LENA Days” where the number of conversational turns are measured and then coaching sessions are conducted based on data from the LENA Days. LENA coaching uses data to drive and adjust coaching sessions so that they target the needs of individual staff.</p> <p>Following the completion of the LENA Grow coaching sequence, the increased teacher-child interactions are sustained through a program’s mentoring and coaching infrastructure. Optionally, teachers can complete refresher sequences of LENA Grow to continue developing skills in this topic as desired.</p>

Grantees must demonstrate:	LENA Grow Alignment
<p>How investments support children, families, and staff impacted by trauma; or justify the reasoning for investing in an activity not directly related to addressing trauma.</p>	<p>The Office of Head Start Guidance on Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach discusses how the effects of trauma are lessened by protective factors such as “strong parent-child relationships [and] relationships between staff, children, and families in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.” The foundation of these relationships, particularly for infants and toddlers, is communication. LENA Grow increases the amount of conversation between teachers and children, a primary reason why it is used a part of a trauma-informed approach in healthcare institutions.</p> <p>LENA will enable the program to: enhance mental health consultation, enable staff to further identify signs and symptoms of trauma due to improved relationships with children and increased interactions, will increase classroom quality, will foster continuity of care, and will promote consistent, predictable and nurturing environments which are important elements of trauma informed care.</p>
<p>For programs using flexibility in the proportional share of the funding for Head Start and Early Head Start, justify how that approach fully supports the greatest needs of communities.</p>	<p>It is important to direct additional funding towards supporting professional development, like LENA Grow, in Early Head Start due to the lack of resources in the community for infant/toddler mental health as well as for targeted professional development for infant and toddler teachers and caregivers.</p> <p>Since there are fewer publicly funded birth-to-three programs, there is an increased need to direct funding towards infants and toddlers as opposed to preschoolers. Using LENA Grow enables your program to intervene in the achievement gap earlier in a child’s life.</p>

Suggestions for the Application Narrative

If you want to use quality funding for the implementation of LENA Grow, the application narrative could include:

A discussion of the role of communication in trauma-informed care.

Research has shown that the presence of “protective factors” in children can play a large role in buffering the effects of adverse early childhood experiences. The key to strong relationships is communication, especially with very young children. More frequent talk can promote stronger relationships between children and adults, as well as a sense of safety and security among children. LENA Grow provides the tools to support more frequent talk between teachers and the youngest children in Head Start programs.

A discussion of the current uses of LENA in trauma-informed care approach.

LENA partners with Head Start agencies in 20 states, serving both rural and urban children and families. As an example, Porter Leath in Memphis supports both their center-based children and their home-based services with LENA. Through collaborative work with families and building trust with children, they have been able to fully integrate a safety-first trauma-informed approach. By leveraging a strengths-based approach, Porter Leath has been able to implement programming that supports each child individually and has demonstrated growth towards their school readiness goals.

Research on the outcomes that have been achieved by LENA Grow when it is implemented as intended.

With the implementation of LENA Grow, we anticipate a significant increase the number of conversational turns between teachers and children, supporting a stronger teacher-child relationship and early language and literacy outcomes. In addition, it is expected that CLASS scores will increase, given the alignment between the LENA Grow coaching and CLASS.

Sample Budget and Budget Narrative (for 100 children)

SF-424A: Budget Categories

Object Class Categories	Federal	Non-Federal	Total
a. Personnel			
b. Fringe Benefits			
c. Travel			
d. Equipment			\$8,215.00
e. Supplies			\$1,200.00
f. Contractual			\$8,300.00
g. Construction			
h. Other			
i. Total Direct Charges			\$17,715.00
j. Indirect Charges			\$300.00
k. Total (sum of 6i and 6j)			\$18,015.00

For approximately 100 children, the cost of implementing LENA Grow would be \$18,015.00. In this sample budget, LENA Grow would be used in 3 cohorts (spring, summer, fall), including 4 classrooms per cohort (assuming 8 children per classroom). This would require 35 talk pedometer devices (\$199/ea) and 50 vests (\$25/ea), for **a total of \$8,215 for equipment**. For each classroom, there is a materials fee of \$100, which covers the materials for the teachers and classroom to participate, for **a total of \$1,200 in supplies**. There is a one-time fee for the initial program set-up, training, and materials for coaches and directors (\$6,500) and an additional classroom support fee (\$150/room), for **a total of \$8,300 in contractual charges**.

An important note about budgeting for LENA Grow is that the equipment can be reused from year to year across classrooms. A sample budget for Year 2 and beyond would include the classroom materials fee (\$100/classroom), classroom support fee (\$150/classroom), and any replacement vests due to wear and tear (\$25/ea).