Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) Program Development and Management Manual

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the **Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) Program Development and Management Manual – herein referred to as the Manual**. The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) is thrilled to bring this much-needed resource to the field. Marriage and relationship education (MRE) is a relatively new field within social services. Although the roots of MRE reach back to research conducted in the 1940s MRE as a field began in the 1950s and 1960s and grew out of the premarital education classes and counseling offered to engaged couples (primarily by religious organizations) to help them prepare for marriage. In the 1970s and 1980s, clinical psychologists began to integrate ideas from family, cognitive and behavioral therapies and laboratory-based marital interaction research to develop psycho-educational program models designed to prevent marital distress, and dysfunction. In the 1990s (following the skyrocketing of the U.S. divorce rate in the 1980s), divorce prevention efforts and psycho-education approaches to strengthening marriages emerged. In the late 1990s and 2000s, government entities (primarily social service providers and policymakers) began to consider how MRE could support the fragile families accessing government services.

In recent years, community and faith-based social service providers across the U.S. have begun offering relationship education services to youth, single people, and couples (both married and unmarried) to strengthen their relationships and teach skills that foster healthy relationships. This Manual builds on their experience to help practitioners and administrators create an MRE program that meets the needs of your target audience, building on the experiences of those who have gone before.

Funded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, the NHMRC was designed as a clearinghouse to advance the field of MRE. The NHMRC has developed numerous resources and provided training and technical assistance to the 125 federally funded healthy marriage grantees for five years. During this time, the MRE programs learned many lessons about how best to operate a successful MRE program. This Manual enhances and integrates previously developed resources created by the NHMRC.

The goal of this Manual is to support the work of social service providers in delivering MRE. Starting with building capacity in your own organization and among other community stakeholders and extending through evaluation activities, this Manual draws from the experiences of a wide variety of practitioners in a range of community-based settings.

There are many opportunities for social service organizations to expand the MRE work to reach couples and individuals throughout the life course. We hope that you find this resource answers your questions, helps you think through various strategies, and assists you with implementing an effective program. Our overall goal is to strengthen families by improving the relationship of the parents/adults who are the foundation of the family.

CHAPTER 1
LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The objective of this chapter is to help you lay the foundation as you prepare to either start up an MRE program or identify MRE topics to teach that will most benefit the people you serve. This chapter will help you walk through the process of selecting appropriate services, target audience(s) and goals for your program's success while considering how these fit within your organization's mission.

Program administrators who want to offer stand alone marriage and relationship education programming or consider how to enhance current programs with ancillary MRE lessons will find strategies, tips, and tools to determine the best fit for MRE in your organization. You do not need to have prior experience in organizational development or program design to do this work well.

Section 1: Aligning with the Organizational Mission and Vision
Key Points:
- Familiarize yourself with your organization's mission statement
- Assess strengths and weaknesses of your organizational capacity
- Determine how MRE services can help the organization reach its goals

Section 2: Identifying Your Target Audience
Key Points:
- Consider a population you already serve and how an MRE program will be beneficial in addressing their needs
- Tailor your services to the demographics of your community or geographic catchment area
- Conduct a Community Needs Assessment to better understand your potential clients

Section 3: Selecting Program Type
Key Points:
- Identify the "type" of program you want to offer and keep it simple in the beginning
- Make sure your service design complements your organizational framework
- Additional program elements may be added over time once the program is well-established

Section 4: Setting Program Goals and Expectations
Key Points:
- Develop a logic model to illustrate program processes to achieve specific outcomes
- Use the SMART goals approach when setting goals for the program

Section 1
Aligning with the Organizational Mission and Vision

When considering how to best incorporate MRE into the current work of your organization, the first step is to become very familiar with your organization's mission statement. To gain support from your organization's leadership, board of directors (or other governing body) and staff, you will need to make certain that the intended program is complementary to the vision and mission of the organization. If your mission talks about strategies to "improve lives," you need to consider how and when relationship education can improve lives. Often times, unhealthy relationships send individuals of all ages on negative trajectories. The ability to recognize healthy relationships and learn how to function better in relationships can ultimately benefit the individual, the individual's family and the community.

Many organizations begin marriage and relationship education programs or services because of how those services can assist the organization in achieving specific goals (e.g. child well-being, family stability and family reunification). Efforts to achieve these goals are backed up by recent research that shows that children who grow up in a healthy, two-parent family do better, on average, on a host of outcomes and that healthy relationships yield many benefits for adults and communities. Some examples of benefits correlated with healthy marriage[1] include:

Benefits of healthy marriage for adults:
- Lower mortality
- Better health
- Greater financial well-being
- Fewer incidents of suicide
- Greater happiness
- Less violence by intimate partners

Benefits of healthy marriage for children:
- Better school performance and decreased likelihood of being a dropout
- Fewer emotional and behavioral problems
- Less substance abuse
- Less abuse or neglect
- Less criminal activity
- Less early sexual activity and fewer out-of-wedlock births

Benefits of healthy marriage for communities:
- Higher rates of physically and emotionally healthy citizens with the skills to better manage relationships
- Lower rates of domestic violence and other crime
- Lower rates of teen pregnancy and juvenile delinquency
- Decreased need for social services

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1   Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences http://americanvalues.org/pdfs/why_marriage_matters2.pdf

Whatever service(s) your organization provides, assess how MRE can enhance or supplement it. Review program goals and the curricula/tools used to determine what skills they address. For example, if you have a pregnancy prevention program, do you teach about healthy relationships? If you offer parenting classes, do you discuss problem-solving skills between co-parents or do they focus only on the dynamics between parent and child? If you offer employment services, do you teach the basics of emotional intelligence, such as how to regulate your emotions? These are examples of places where relationship education can enhance existing services.

An organizational self-assessment will help you assess the strengths and weaknesses of your organizational capacity to deliver MRE services. First, talk with staff or board members to understand their viewpoints about MRE services. This will also give you a better sense of organizational goals, budget and grant management capacity, staffing needs, and leadership to support an MRE program. The questions below can help you conduct an organizational assessment. The information obtained from the assessment will provide you with insight into how well MRE will fit within your organization.

1. Who do we currently serve that could benefit from MRE?
2. Are we set up to offer evening/weekend workshops? (Is the building open during non-traditional hours? Are security or janitorial staff available?)
3. In what ways is our space welcoming and family-friendly? Will both men and women feel comfortable there? Can we serve meals?
4. Do we have staff who are trained to deliver MRE and/or work with couples?
5. What other services do we provide that can support the needs of our clients (child care, transportation assistance, etc.)?
6. How do staff members demonstrate respect and effective communication to our target audience?
7. In what ways are healthy relationships modeled in our organization?
8. In what ways do our staff communicate to program participants that violence is not part of healthy relationships?
9. Would our staff benefit from relationship skills? How could relationship skills benefit our internal team problem solving and communications?
10. In what ways does our organization demonstrate that our organizational values are supportive of healthy marriage and relationships?

Before you begin to provide services, you need to have everyone on board with the value of MRE to your clients and organization. The organizational assessment can help you determine how easy it will be to deliver MRE in your current environment and how prepared your staff may be to implement MRE.

In addition to aligning the mission of your MRE program to your organization's mission statement and conducting an organizational self-assessment, adopt an organizational philosophy that will not only guide how things are to be done within your program, but that will define the expectations for staff about the value of this work.

Section 2
Identifying Your Target Audience

Carefully consider the population your organization serves and their need for MRE. Are they single parents? MRE teaches conflict resolution skills that can help them more effectively co-parent. Do your clients work with case managers, parole officers, and teachers? Good communication skills can help them interact successfully with those professionals. Identifying who your specific target audience is and what issues your program will address is important because it will influence other decisions about how to start your MRE program (i.e. service design, curriculum selection, etc.). For some, a first step in narrowing the focus may be to identify a population already being served and think about aspects of an MRE program that might meet their needs. For others, a broader view of the community may help glean more data to make decisions about where to begin.

Conducting a Community Assessment

A great way to address this decision is to gather data about your community. This process is typically called a "community assessment" or "needs assessment." By conducting this assessment, you can identify the needs of the community you intend to serve and structure your interventions strategically to address those needs. A community needs assessment can familiarize you with local rates of marriage and divorce, out-of-wedlock and teenage births, teen sexual activity, domestic violence and child abuse, as well as other data relevant to the demand for MRE services. You can also learn about the demographics of the population to whom you intend to provide MRE services (i.e., geographic area, ethnic/racial makeup, income level, family size, etc.). Identify what other social services are available in the community that are meeting needs relevant to your target population (i.e., housing, job training/placement, transportation, parenting, education, etc.).

There may already be some types of MRE services provided in the community. Therefore, learn what is being offered and by whom. You will not want to duplicate services in your community. However, demand may exceed current supply or you may decide to partner and offer complementary services to an existing program in order to meet the needs of the community more comprehensively. (See **Chapter 2: Developing and Engaging Service Delivery Partnerships** for more information.)

Conducting a community needs assessment will require you to spend time in the community talking with local leaders, agencies and program staff as well as the general public. One great way to gather this kind of data is to form several focus groups representing different areas of the community to assess the unmet needs of the population you intend to serve.

See the end of this chapter for a **Sample Community Needs Assessment** worksheet. It provides questions that you might want to ask your focus group participants (or other community leaders) to help inform the development of your MRE program.

Section 3
Selecting Program Type

Once you have gathered the relevant data, you will need to determine the focus of your MRE program implementation. Will it address a need in the community? Will it fill an identified gap in services available? Will it help you make a positive impact on families in your community in some other way? While these are all commendable motives, it is necessary to spend time thinking through the specific focus of your program, or the goals and expectations set forth may not be reasonable or attainable. For example, expectations such as "reducing the divorce rate" or "strengthening marriages" are highly complex issues and difficult to tackle on a large scale. Although addressing those issues may be your ultimate vision, set specific goals that are achievable. Begin with a solid foundation for your work and specify the type of services you want to provide.

There are many ways to positively impact relationships and marriages with MRE programs. One initial thought that many developers have is that their MRE program should be designed with multiple curricula to provide a comprehensive continuum of services to people, including youth in dating relationships, engaged couples, and distressed couples considering divorce. Although your organization may desire to reach every stage of couple relationships in your community, start at a more focused level. This allows you to deliver services in a way that complements the organizational framework within which you are operating.

Consider offering only one curriculum in the beginning. (See **Chapter 4: Curriculum** for more information). You may also want to deliver MRE services to a small group of your target population in an effort to obtain feedback from these participants. Then, you can refine your curriculum selection and focus on the relevant program components based on their experiences. For example, if your MRE program is going to be operated in a hospital or health-care clinic you may want to focus on services that teach couples skills specific to a life circumstance such as the birth of a child, diagnosis of a chronic illness, support of one partner with a mental health challenge, etc. Another example may be a youth-focused program that serves parents and teens congruently so that both teens and parents are learning healthy relationship skills and have a shared language for talking about tough issues. Once you have established the initial program structure and service, additional program elements, different curricula for other populations, and services in multiple languages can be added over time.

The following table provides a list of various program service "types" for clients in different life stages. This may be a helpful tool for you to use as you begin to design your MRE program.

Program Types

Mentoring Programs	These programs typically serve married or engaged couples. They offer one-on-one or small group interactive relationship education provided by a married couple. Meeting with marriage mentors can provide hope, focus and insight for the marriages of the participants, as services are tailored to fit the needs of specific couples. Mentoring can also be an enriching experience for the mentors themselves.
Marriage Enrichment	This is a form of primary prevention for married couples. It is strength-based and focused on skill-building. Workshops in a variety of formats (typically a weekend retreat or weekly sessions) teach spouses communication and conflict resolution skills as well as how to connect more effectively as a couple. Marriage enrichment may also include inventories or other one-on-one support. These programs can serve a diverse audience since anyone can attend, regardless of how many years they've been married, how many children they have or the issues with which they may be struggling.
Engaged/Pre-marital	The focus of these programs is on marital preparation. These programs prepare participants for life after the wedding with skills training on conflict management and effective communication in addition to tools to facilitate discussion about expectations and commitment.
Expectant Couples	These programs focus on the relationship between couples who are expecting a child or have recently had a child. Expectant parents discuss how a new baby can affect the couple relationship, learn skills to manage those challenges, and talk about expectations and strategies around parenting.
Distressed Couples	These programs are still skill-based, but they focus more on intervention for couples. The immediate goal is to reduce marital distress and minimize the incidence of psychological harm or even divorce among participants. These participants can be self-referred or referred by courts, human services or other entities.
Step Families/ Blended Families	The program is offered to re-married couples in which one or both spouses have children from a previous marriage. In addition to core relationship skills, these programs present tips to help the couple resolve conflicts and guide their children through the transition to a new family structure and relationship dynamics.
Youth	Youth relationship education typically focuses on topics such as knowing one's values, making smart choices, dating, selecting a partner, breaking up, dating safety and determining what a healthy relationship looks like. Programs discuss sex to varying degrees. Some programs are designed for school-based implementation.
Singles	Programs for singles teach healthy relationship skills such as effective communication, conflict management, relationship expectations, and healthy boundaries in dating. Some also talk about domestic violence and/or discuss decision-making around living together and marriage.

Considering Your Program Model

There are two general MRE programming strategies to consider:

1. *Integrated MRE Program*: Selecting an MRE curriculum or certain MRE lessons to be integrated into a current program with the goal of enhancing it and offering a more comprehensive experience

2. *Stand-alone MRE Program*: An MRE program that is regularly offered as part of your organization's services

Integrated MRE Services Model

Your organization may have an existing program or service that could by enhanced by MRE lessons. Many adult services (for couples or individuals), can be enhanced with the addition of MRE lessons. For instance, your fatherhood or parenting program could integrate a special session on communication skills that focus on co-parenting. Or, you may offer a pregnancy prevention program to teens that could be enhanced with certain lessons (e.g., the difference between love and infatuation, problem-solving and emotional intelligence) to help young people think about sex/pregnancy within the context of an intimate relationship. Since relationship choices affect other critical areas in life like employability, educational pursuits, and initiation/continued involvement in sexual activities, relationship skills can be integrated into a variety of employment, vocational training, parenting, and life skills programs.

Stand-alone MRE Program Model

Stand-alone MRE programs may be one-time events lasting as little as 4-8 hours or extending for 30-40 hours over a period of weeks. They are typically delivered through workshops led by trained facilitators using a relationship education curriculum. Launching a stand-alone MRE program may be difficult because it will require marketing, and may be more costly than the integrated model. However, offering it in a stand-alone format can improve curriculum fidelity and help normalize the service.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for a stand-alone program model. Some communities offer it in the evenings or on the weekend, as a retreat model. The structure of your program will vary greatly based on the needs of your community and your experience with various program models. The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) has many additional resources on program planning, start-up, and operations at www.healthymarriageinfo.org.

Section 4
Setting Program Goals and Expectations

Once you have reviewed your mission, gathered data, and narrowed your focus, you will want to think about the potential impact of your MRE program. A useful strategy for setting goals and expectations is developing a logic model for your program. A logic model is a visual illustration showing the sequence of what a program will do and the desired results, or outcomes for your clients. Thinking through the broad inputs, processes, and outputs necessary to reach the overall goal/outcome will help you set specific short-term and long-term goals.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Immediate Outcomes	Subsequent Outcomes	Ultimate Goal(s)
What resources are required to operate the program?	What interventions and/or services will be provided?	What is produced by program interventions and/or services?	What will participants learn? How will they react to the program? What short-term behavior changes are expected?	What long-term learning and behavior changes are expected of the participants?	What is the desired impact of your program on your target audience and the community?

It is a good idea to incorporate a logic model into your broader strategic planning efforts and revisit it frequently as a reminder of your goals and expectations as well as to determine if they remain effective (See **Chapter 12: Evaluation** for more information on logic models). The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has developed a tool for developing a logic model and setting goals: Creating and Using the Logic Model for Performance Enhancement (see **http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/resources/logic-model/**).

One philosophy for setting goals is the SMART model. This model assists you in designing and wording goals well so that they are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely (see **SMART Goals Assessment Worksheet** at the end of this chapter). In other words, "reducing divorce in my community" may not be a realistic expectation, whereas "increasing successful conflict management skills among couples" might be a more achievable program goal. When establishing your program's goals, you will also want to think about how to evaluate how effective your program or program participants are at reaching these goals.

This chapter includes considerations to help you with the initial steps of laying the foundation for your MRE program. The initial steps—aligning MRE with the organization's mission and vision; assessing the needs of your organization and community; identifying your target audience and setting program goals and expectations can be a challenging process. However, the planning process will help you ensure a strong foundation for your MRE services.

CHAPTER 1 WORKSHEET

Sample Community Needs Assessment

(for community leaders, agency representatives, and social services staff)

Background Data	Comments
1. What are the demographics of your community (i.e., African American, Hispanic, military, low-income, etc.)?	
2. What is the divorce rate in the community you serve?	
3. What is the marriage rate?	
4. What is the rate of out-of-wedlock child births and teenage pregnancies?	
Focus Group Questions for Discussion	**Comments**
5. What types of family services are already available within the community?	
6. What MRE services are currently available, and what is the target audience(s) of those programs?	
7. How well do existing services currently meet family needs (i.e.,health care, job training, public transportation, GED preparation, after-school programs, etc.)?	
8. Discuss the quality of services already provided. How might agencies better serve the community?	
9. What are the opportunities to develop and disseminate resources and services to families?	
10. What barriers are preventing agencies from addressing certain needs of families in this area?	
11. What do community members say they need?	

CHAPTER 1 WORKSHEET
SMART Goals Assessment

SMART GOALS	
SPECIFIC	☐ Uses action word(s) to describe what the program is going to do ☐ Describes what the program wants to accomplish ☐ Specifies when the program is expecting to see results
MEASURABLE	☐ Identifies the indicator of what the program will see when it reaches the goal ☐ Ensures there are data that will be collected to demonstrate results (in quantity or quality) that can be calculated
ATTAINABLE AND ACHIEVABLE	☐ Stretches the program to improve but is possible to attain ☐ Targets the population(s) that data show is in greatest need
REALISTIC AND RELEVANT	☐ Implementation is possible within the capabilities of the program ☐ Goal is consistent with the mission ☐ The bar is set high enough for significant achievement ☐ The goal does not contradict other goals
TIMELY	☐ The goal has an end point ☐ Time frame for accomplishment of the goal is realistic

CHAPTER 2
DEVELOPING AND ENGAGING SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

A successful partnership can enhance your MRE program. Partnerships, like any relationship, however, take work. A key to good partnerships is setting and managing expectations. This chapter talks about how to identify and approach partners, and manage these relationships.

Section 1: Selecting and Approaching Potential Partners
Key Points:
- Determine social services agencies where your program could meet a need or enhance existing services
- Describe how the partnership will advance their mission and intended outcomes
- Potential partnerships may be found in various social service systems, so think broadly
- Use appropriate language and examples that resonate with your partner's target audience
- Identify areas of your program that are adaptable and may be matched to your prospective partners needs
- Understand the challenges and needs of your potential partners
- Seek partnerships in places where you already have some influence
- Partner with well-established and trusted organizations in your community

Section 2: Formal and Informal Partnerships
Key Points:
- Your program can benefit from both formal and informal partnerships
- Not all partnerships are financial agreements, but all should be documented in writing
- Program participants can be future partners

Section 1
Selecting and Approaching Potential Partners

A variety of marriage and relationship education programs have found that the following guidelines can support positive partnerships:

1. MRE services must align with the mission, goals and objectives of the organization/program with which you wish to partner in order to be a good fit.
2. Gaining "buy-in" from other organizations to partner for services takes time and multiple interactions that can span weeks or even months. Therefore, having a positive attitude and focusing on building the relationship will lead you to not only be treated respectfully, but will lead to your partnership success.
3. Creating a mutually beneficial, long-term relationship is key for the sustainability of your MRE program or initiative.
4. Put it in writing. Having a document which both parties agree to is essential.

Partners can play many roles. They may provide funding, referrals, or deliver MRE services. Regardless of the scope of the partnership, you need to consider the roles of each partner and clearly define expectations up front.

How can your MRE services support an agency's mission or goals?
Successful partnerships start with being able to communicate clearly how the outcomes of your program can help the agency advance their mission and achieve their goals. Finding those organizations that serve the same or similar populations as your program will make it easier for you to demonstrate how your relationship education program can enhance their services and help them achieve their desired outcomes. To prepare yourself for an initial meeting with a potential partner organization, outline three or four main points that you want to convey such as:

- Background data that demonstrates a problem area (state and local statistics that relate to their client population)

- Benefits of healthy marriage program services to their primary clientele

- How MRE services connect with and enhance the goals of their organization

- An example of another program in another state or community that has had success with the type of services or partnership you are proposing

There are many potential partners who may be interested in working with you to offer MRE in your community. The following table includes information about various social service systems you might consider for potential partnerships.

Potential Partner	Their Primary Mission	Potential Connections
Child Welfare and Child Abuse Prevention	Protects children and encourages family stability. These services are typically aimed at supporting at-risk families, so they can remain intact.	Incorporate MRE as part of their prevention services for parents. Single or two parent families can receive relationship skills to help reduce conflict in the home and improve relationships, and co-parenting, and foster healthier family interactions.
Foster Care and Adoption	Provides safe temporary homes and services for children focused on reunification with biological parents, transferring from a foster home to a permanent adoption, or placing a child in another legally permanent family.	Adding a child to the home through adoption or foster parenting can place stress on couple relationships. MRE can strengthen the couple relationship to create the most stable environment for the child(ren). MRE can augment certification training requirements.
Child Support	Enforces court ordered periodic payments for the financial care and support of children resulting from a relationship or marriage that has been terminated, or in some cases never existed.	Child well-being is enhanced through positive and effective parenting and co-parenting skills taught in MRE. MRE programs that target fathers (custodial or non-custodial) can contribute to effective communications with Child Support Enforcement Workers and co-parents; fiscal responsibility for and engagement with the child; and fewer dads going "underground" to avoid payments.
Refugee Programs	Helps refugees and their families gain self-sufficiency by providing social and financial services and medical assistance.	Culturally appropriate MRE can help families deal with increased and unique stressors associated with living in a new country/culture.
Child Development (Early Head Start/Head Start)	Provides parent education, health and nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.	There is generally a parent involvement requirement that could be fulfilled through participation in MRE services. MRE can also help improve parent/child relationships and reduce chronic conflict in the home.
Maternal and Child Health	A broad range of services to pregnant women, mothers, infants, children and families — and children with special health care needs. This may include Women Infants and Children (WIC) or the state children's health insurance program (SCHIP).	Providing opportunities for single parents and couples to learn skills and strengthen their relationship through stressful times can add value to these programs. MRE can also help improve parent/child relationships and reduce chronic conflict in the home.
Youth Development Programs	Prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and help them to become socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.	MRE includes youth-focused relationship education. Similarly, some programs offer relationship education for adults whose youth are participating in the programs for increased healthy parent-child communication and conflict resolution.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF-previously known as "welfare")	Provides cash assistance to needy families with dependent children. States are provided with block grants to design and administer programs which provide prevention services for single parents, couples, fathers, and families.	Two goals of TANF are related to strengthening families and marriage making MRE services a suitable activity for TANF recipients, low-income couples or others to encourage self-sufficiency.

The preceding table outlines general opportunities for partnerships, however, you will need to access a potential partner's mission statement and consider the fit for your service with their clients. Ask other human services professionals in your community about likely partner organizations and the culture of that entity. Partners not only need to align with your program mission but need to do business in a way that fits with your organizational structure.

How should you present MRE services?

How you present your proposal for partnership is dictated by knowing who you are talking to and tailoring your message accordingly. Know what areas of your program are flexible and can be matched to your prospective partner's needs. For example, messages related to "the benefits of healthy marriage services" would likely work with those programs that are already working with couples and families. However, this tactic will probably gain little traction if you were attempting to develop a partnership with a women's correctional facility. In this situation, you may want to approach a partner with this information: Research suggests that most incarcerated women have experienced unhealthy relationships in the past, and that women in prison have experienced far higher rates of physical and sexual abuse than their male counterparts. Therefore, for many women, their incarceration is directly tied to a history of unhealthy relationships and partners. Relationship education has been shown to reduce recidivism rates among female offenders because it teaches participants to recognize unhealthy characteristics and interactions and how to choose healthier relationship behaviors. In this example, you have tied the benefits of your MRE program to the goals of the correctional facility.

This approach illustrates the value that your program can bring to an existing service or organization by adjusting how MRE services can be more aligned with the service objectives of your potential partner's organization/program. You should thoroughly understand the priorities of a potential partner before seeking a partnership.

As noted above, understanding what challenges your potential partners face and where their needs are most critical is a good way to gain leverage or negotiation space to discuss a partnership. Describe the ways in which your partnership will alleviate some of their unmet needs and help meet their organizational goals. For example, an under-staffed organization might at first be reluctant to allocate staff time to starting a new program/service but may be open to a co-facilitated MRE program jointly staffed with one "in-house" staff member and one from your organization. This creates a "win-win" partnership for both parties.

Start with Your Program Staff

Another strategy to developing partnerships is to begin with your program staff's existing relationships and partnering in places where you already have some influence. This means encouraging staff members to assess their own personal connections to build program partners (e.g. faith communities, social service organizations). Partners can be sources for recruitment, volunteers, financial donations, or in-kind supports or services (such as copies, graphic design, or accounting services). Partnerships can take on many roles and potential partners are not just other social service providers (see table on page 13). For example, if your staff members have ties to a radio or television station or radio/TV personalities in the area your program may benefit by receiving reduced rate or complimentary air-time to advertise your services. You

may also consider leveraging "obvious partners," such as programs that share office space or a program with which there is a history of cooperation and collaboration on other projects.

Partnering with Well-Established Local Organizations

Partnering with well-established organizations in your community can help you gain credibility, recognition, and access additional networks. Partnering may also help your program to recruit participants as these organizations have a history in the community. If the organizations are large, you are likely to be able to recruit more potential participants from that one organization than if you were trying to recruit from a group of smaller faith-based and community organizations. Similarly, partnerships with a long history in the community are likely to be beneficial for both parties for years to come. Often, these partners will want you to train their staff on your curriculum or parts of the curriculum in order for their staff to not only benefit from the new knowledge and skills, but also to help them be enthusiastic about recruiting participants for the services.

Potential Partner Roles
- Provide funding
- Donate goods (food, items to raffle off as a participation incentive, etc.)
- Donate time (volunteers)
- Provide space
- Logistical Support (copy fliers, accounting services)
- Workshop facilitation
- Recruit participants
- Refer participants
- Advertising (design brochures, create a PSA, airtime,)

Section 2
Formal and Informal Partnerships

Your program can benefit from having both formal and informal partnerships. If they are managed well and the partners demonstrate respect toward one another, the partnership can lead into enduring relationships in the future.

Formal Partnerships

Formal partnerships may include performance-based contracts or formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that legally clarify reciprocal commitments during a specified time frame and tend to motivate accountability. The content of a MOU will vary by organization. However, the goal is to set clear expectations for both parties prior to program implementation. These tools may be developed in consultation with legal guidance, as required in your organization. Your organization may already use standard language for these purposes.

Since formal partnership agreements are usually specific and in writing, it is easier to enforce the terms of the agreement. Having a formal agreement with an organization indicates that upper management within that partner organization has buy-in to your services and has a vested interest in your program's success. Keep in mind that some organizations have internal protocols that differ from your expectations. You will need to show some flexibility in how partnership agreements are executed.

Informal Partnerships

Informal partnerships may not include a contract or financial agreement, but should still be documented in writing. A less formal partner might provide referrals or advertise your program in their newsletter or at their agency. Agree to a strategy and the goals of the partnership and put that in writing. This way if the goal is not met, you have documentation on which to fall back. This is especially important if you have to end a partnership.

Small Partnerships Yield Big Results

A final, often overlooked, partnership opportunity with the potential of supporting and sustaining your program in a powerful way, is your participants. Individuals and couples attending an MRE class will often ask upon completion "what's next for us?" Innovative programs will provide opportunities for selected program graduates to continue their relationship with the program as community volunteers. Community volunteers can support the program by serving as communication and encouragement coaches for couples practicing newly learned skills in class. Developing a competent pool of community volunteers can also significantly reduce additional on-site staff requirements by taking on tasks like greeting and/or registering participants as they arrive for class, distributing materials or serving/cleaning

if a meal is provided prior to the workshop start time. In addition, you will likely identify potential facilitator candidates from within your community volunteers since they already have a demonstrated passion and commitment to the work.

Partnerships take on many forms. The key is to clearly define the roles for each partner and to invest in the relationship. Expect the relationship to last a long time, but ensure you are able to end the partnership respectfully. Just like you teach in your MRE workshops, remember that successful relationships benefit each partner.

CHAPTER 3
Building a Budget and Funding Your Program

As with all programs, your budget is an integral part of how you make decisions about service delivery. This chapter will provide general budget guidance as well as specific considerations for delivering an MRE program. It includes tips on what to consider in determining start-up and operating costs, as well as important questions to answer before the budgeting process begins.

Section 1: Assessing Program Needs in Order to Develop a Budget
Key Points:
- Consider every aspect of the program when developing your program budget
- Assess the needs of the program including target audience, staff, facility, and

Section 2: Determining Start-Up and Operating Costs:
Key Points:
- Remember that your start-up costs will include those related to program development and implementation
- Consider your costs as necessary for operating and sustaining the program
- Use templates and tools to assist in your planning for staffing and program expenses

Section 3: Considering Factors Unique to a Marriage/Relationship Education Program
Key Points:
- Know that your budget will depend on the distinguishing factors of your program
- Budget for factors such as retention, facilitator training, curriculum, Domestic Violence training, program supports, and incentives

Section 4: Funding Sources
Key Points:
- Obtain funding from a variety of sources
- Be aware of requirements for compliance with funding guidelines
- Diversify where you search for grant funding opportunities

Section 1:
Assessing Program Needs in Order to Develop a Budget

Whether you have access to existing funds or will be applying for new funds to operate your MRE program, it is necessary to develop a realistic and affordable budget. This section highlights the main factors to consider when creating a program budget and helps you figure out how to budget for common program costs.

The first step in building a budget is to assess the needs of the program. There are various factors that influence a program's budget including target audience, staffing, facility costs, and the curriculum to be used. See table below for the list of factors and questions to consider for budget purposes.

FACTORS	QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
Target Audience	• Who is the target audience? How will they be recruited? • What is the best learning environment for this audience and how will this impact service delivery expenses? • How many participants will be in the program? • What time of the year is this target audience most likely to attend this type of service? How often will you offer the program? • What type(s) of incentives or support services, if any, will be paid for participants to encourage attendance (i.e., child care, meals, transportation vouchers, gift certificates, etc.)?
Staff	• How many staff members are needed to effectively run the program? • Will you use paid staff, volunteers or a combination of both to provide services? • How will staff be paid? Hourly? Salary? Contract basis? • What will you pay staff (recruiters, intake workers, facilitators, etc.)? • Will outside contractors (individuals and/or organizations) be utilized?
Facility	• Where will staff be located? • Where will workshops be held? Do you need to rent space? • What kind of furniture will be needed for staff and for workshops to adhere to the learning/workshop setting of the program?
Curriculum	• What is the best curriculum to use for the program? • What quantity of curriculum needs to be purchased? • Does the curriculum require the purchase of additional materials (LCD projector, modeling clay, DVD players, etc.)? (See Chapter 4: Curriculum for more information on materials and equipment) • Does curriculum require staff/facilitators to be trained? If so, what is cost for this training? Will travel costs be incurred?

Additional factors to consider include the role of partners, project planning/management time, evaluation costs and marketing or public awareness. Once you have considered these questions, you can begin to identify your start up and operational costs. These variables may not be present in all programs but can be costly if not considered up front. Furthermore, project management and evaluation expenses are an investment in the sustainability of the program. Being able to document what you did and measure your success is important to on-going funding efforts.

Section 2:
Determining Start-Up and Operating Costs

There are two parts to a program budget: start-up costs and operational costs. The costs associated with the implementation of the program are the start-up costs. Often these are thought of as one time purchases. Operational costs are those associated with operating and sustaining the program.

Start-Up Costs may include but are not limited to:

Training	Cost for staff/facilitator training (on-site or off) on the curriculum, domestic violence training, other program specific trainings such as working with couples, father engagement, recruiting, etc.
Curriculum materials	Cost of purchasing curriculum materials for staff.
Furniture and equipment	Any furniture/equipment purchased for program services such as tables, chairs, desks, computers, printers, projectors, etc. Some equipment may be required by the curriculum.
Management Information System (MIS)	Costs related to developing a new system or adapting a current MIS system as needed for data collection and/or reporting requirements.
Design cost	Graphic design/layout of program logo, brochure, etc.

Operational Costs may include but are not limited to:

Staff salaries	All salaries paid for employed staff.
Fringe costs	All benefit costs for employed staff.
Professional services	Any fees paid for program related professional services, which includes accounting/auditing services, legal services, consulting services, etc.
On-going training/conferences	Any fees paid for training and/or conferences for staff.
Travel	Mileage, airfare, meals, ground transportation and lodging fees, including program related services as well as travel for training and conferences, or staff vehicles if delivering services in multiple locations.
Program supports	Transportation assistance, food, gas cards, child care and other assistance.
Incentives	Raffles/drawings, gift certificates, etc.
Advertising/outreach marketing	Expenses related to the creative design and purchase of program advertising in a publication or public service announcements, and other outreach activities.
Rent/lease	Any program related facility rental or lease fees (Note: some funders will not fund leases for space that is multiuse and already a part of your normal operating expenses (refer to Indirect/Overhead costs below)).
Postage/delivery	Costs associated with mailing/shipping.
Office supplies/equipment (<$1,000)	Office supplies such as paper, pencils, pens, paper clips. Small equipment purchases such as calculators, rulers, envelopes, cell phone purchase, and any anticipated equipment purchases with a per unit cost of less than $1,000.
Reproduction	Costs for copying materials such as flyers, brochures, and other marketing material, forms, etc.
Indirect/overhead	Business insurance (e.g. workers' compensation, auto, liability insurance), rent (if additional programs are working out of the same office space), utilities, telephone, depreciation.

There are many tools and templates to help you in building a budget. The templates provided at the end of this chapter will assist you in your planning for staffing and program expenses. These templates should not be considered exhaustive but will provide areas for consideration in the budget process.

Section 3
Factors Unique to a Marriage/Relationship Education Program

In Section 2 of this chapter, the major components of a basic program budget were discussed with questions to help determine specifically what your program will look like. Since every program has aspects that distinguish it from other programs, each budget will be different. In this section you will learn the unique factors that need to be budgeted for a marriage/relationship education program.

Retention Rate of Participants

Although highly desired, rarely will 100 percent of the participants attend all of their scheduled classes. In addition, some participants will drop out of services over time for various reasons. As you develop your budget, calculating costs based on a potential participant retention rate of 70% is probably more realistic than assuming a 100% attendance/retention rate.

Facilitator Training

One of the most important engagement and retention features of a marriage education program is the quality of the facilitators. The program type, curriculum, and audience being served will determine whether a single facilitator may be used or whether two facilitators representing both genders are needed. The appropriate facilitator structure will ensure a more effective learning environment for the participants. (See **Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation** for more information).

Curriculum training requirements are often based on the selected curriculum and will have varying costs (for example, teach-out-of-the-box formats will be less costly than curriculum requiring a formal training). There may be other costs for trainings offered to facilitators to help them understand related topics such as domestic violence (see below) and how to work with clients in an ethical manner. Effective training of your facilitators will ensure that participants are engaged, retain the information, and are interested in future services. Facilitator training also often provides tools for working with a co-facilitator, building energy in the class, and maintaining attention and engagement from the audience.

Curriculum

On occasion, the curriculum you are using may be updated by the curriculum developers. The cost of obtaining an updated version may be passed on to you. When managing a marriage relationship education program stay in touch with the authors of the selected curriculum so changes made can be incorporated into the program. (See **Chapter 4: Curriculum** for more information.)

Domestic Violence Training

Training for facilitators and staff members on understanding domestic and family violence is crucial when operating a relationship education program. It is important that facilitators learn what to look for and how to respond to these issues. Most programs will want to build in a training/consulting fee to work with domestic and family violence experts in their community to provide this training and ongoing consultation. (See *Chapter 8: Working with Couples* for more information on responding to domestic violence.)

Staffing

Program choices related to staffing have huge budget implications. Many MRE workshops are held evenings and weekends. This may require flexible work schedules, overtime hours, or the use of contracted labor. Similarly, the best workshop facilitator may not be the right person to recruit participants, organize the child care, or enter participation data. Determining the right staffing structure for your program depends greatly on your available staff resources and program design. The following positions may be necessary to effectively operate your MRE program: (See **Chapter 7: Program Management** for more information on these positions.)

- Program Manager

- Supervisors

- Outreach and Recruitment Workers

- Intake Workers

- Workshop Facilitators or Marriage Educators

- Family Support Coordinators or Case Managers

- Evaluator

- Data Entry

- Child Care Provider

- Other support staff, which includes accountants, maintenance workers, information technology (IT) staff, janitorial staff, human resources staff, marketing or graphic design staff, grant writers, and more. Each of these people will help you meet your program goals and should be in your budget (if not accounted for in program overhead).

Program Supports

Depending on allowable activities for your funding, program supports may be offered to participants. Child care and transportation supports may be necessary to encourage more program participation, particularly if the program is serving a low-income population. For example, if your program is couple-based, child care will be necessary. If your program meets in the evenings, dinner will be necessary.

Incentives

A little motivation may be required to keep your MRE workshops full of enough energy to engage participants. An incentives program might also be included in your budget to keep program participants actively engaged for the duration of your program. Determine a maximum value that each participant would receive in incentives and identify what types of incentives would relate to and support programming content. Examples of incentives might be a prize drawing in each class or earned credits for participation that could be redeemed for fun items or entertainment. Incentives should be earned and be appropriate. For example, couples who complete 10 hours of a program may be eligible for a date night (gift certificate to a local movie theater and restaurant).

Section 4:
Funding Sources

When starting a new program, an obvious consideration will be how to fund the new program in a sustainable way. Usually, this means seeking funding from outside sources. Private foundations, businesses, agencies, and federal or state Departments of Health and Human Services are possible resources. Finding other organizations or funding sources that align with your mission can be a challenge at times. One difficulty you might face is that it can be tempting to try to fit your program to what a funding source or partner is willing to fund, rather than to find funding that fits with your program's purpose and mission. Therefore, you will want to be clear about your purpose prior to seeking funding. Regardless of the funding source, be aware of their allowable activities, regulations and reporting requirements so that your program remains in compliance at all times.

Private foundations and organizations typically list funding opportunities on their websites. You can easily find information about the types of activities the foundation is interested in supporting, eligibility requirements to apply (some only allow for non-profit entities to receive funds), and application cycles and requirements. Reviewing their prior funding award announcements or annual reports may help you identify whether they may be a possible and appropriate source of MRE funding. In addition to their own websites, these resources may be found at sites such as The Foundation Center (Foundationcenter.org), Council on Foundations (cof.org) and Guidestar (guidestar.org).

Federal and state funding opportunities are typically led by the specific governmental department overseeing the funds. Grants.gov and usa.gov (for federal funds), state agency websites, and listservs are excellent sources for finding funding opportunities. These resources are generally given through competitive grant applications or requests for proposals.

Since MRE can overlap with the goals of multiple funding organizations, consider the mission and objective of the grant maker when determining if it is a good fit. MRE could be funded by education, human services, justice, labor and health organizations. Finding the right funder with shared goals is a similar process to identifying strategic partners. (See **Chapter 2: Developing and Engaging Service Delivery Partnerships** for more information.)

Private and government sources prefer to maximize their return on investment by funding organizations that can show additional income sources either from cash or in-kind contributions, so that the program is not being solely resourced by their dollars. Examine other partner organizations to find other intellectual or financial resources that can be leveraged to help fund your services. Funders also often look for a specific plan or demonstrated efforts toward program sustainability after their funding ends. Diverse funding can be difficult to achieve but pays off in the long run.

CHAPTER 3 WORKSHEET
Personnel Cost Development

Staff Name	Position Title	Hourly Rate	# of Hours	Cost
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
		Total Salary		-
		Benefits		
Total Personnel Costs (salary plus benefits)				-

Other Than Personnel Costs

Consulting and Professional Fees				
Materials and Supplies (office supplies, photocopying, etc.)				
Facilities (office space/facilities, utilities.)				
Equipment				
Travel and Accommodations, Conferences, Conventions, Meetings				
Communication (Telephone, postage etc)				
Other Direct Costs				
Total OTPS Costs				-

Overhead/Indirect Costs

Total Budget   -

CHAPTER 3 WORKSHEET
Budget Template for Multi-Year Project

The following template is for a multi-year project and reflects personnel and other expenses needed as well as showing funding sources. Definitions associated with this template follow the chart.

	Year I 10/06-09/07	Year II 10/07-09/08	Year III 10/08-09/09	Year IV 10/09-09/10	Year V 10/10-09/11	Total Budget
PERSONNEL						
1 Staff salaries						$ -
2 Fringe Benefits						-
Total Personnel	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
OTHER THAN PERSONNEL SERVICES (OTPS):						
3 Consultants						$ -
4 Audit Expense						-
5 Curriculum training						-
6 Curriculum materials						-
7 Other training						
8 Child care/transportation/emergency assistance						
9 Participation support costs						
10 Furniture and Equipment						-
11 Travel						-
12 MIS						-
13 Telephone						-
14 Postage						-
15 Supplies						-
16 Reproduction Expense						
17 Facilities rental/ Occupancy Expense						
<mark>Insert additional line items as needed</mark>						-
18 Other Direct Costs						-
Total OTPS	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
TOTAL DIRECT COST	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
SUBCONTRACTOR COSTS						$ -
INDIRECT COSTS						$ -
GRAND TOTAL	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Funding						
Program Funds						
Other (please detail)						
Total Funding	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Surplus/ (deficit)	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -

Note: Please feel free to add any additional line items you feel appropriate or to provide additional spreadsheets as supporting documentation for the line items above.
A complete explanation of each element of cost, detailing the rationale used in developing the estimate, must be included

BUDGET INSTRUCTIONS

1. Staff salaries - include in the staff loading chart all proposed staff, listing the person's name, title, number of hours worked, hourly rate, the total cost per person per year and a total amount. Please provide justification for the hourly rate for all staff proposed (i.e., payroll records, letters of employment, etc.).
2. Fringe rate/costs - show rate, base and total amount. Provide justification for the rates used (approved federal rate, past history, etc.). Provide breakdown of Fringe rate.
3. Consultants - include the name, number of days or hours worked, daily/hourly rate and the total amount per consultant. Please provide justification for the rate proposed, (i.e., consultant letters or contracts).
4. Audit costs - costs associated with the financial reviews and audit of this program
5. Curriculum training - costs for training (on-site or off) with curriculum developers. Costs based on the curriculum used.
6. Curriculum materials - costs of purchasing curriculum materials for staff and the couples from curriculum developers
7. Other training - costs associated with upfront and ongoing staff training, including consultants the site expects to engage for this purpose
8. Child care/transportation/emergency assistance - cost for transportation, child care services, and emergency assistance offered to program participants to enable them to attend activities
9. Other participation supports - costs of incentives and other supportive services to encourage participation. Please note different types of supports as separate line items in your budget: for example, cash (only modest/small amounts allowable); raffles/drawings, gift certificates, small gifts, etc.
10. Furniture and equipment - provide detailed cost breakdown of the equipment and furniture being purchased including cost per unit and number of units. Include vendor quotes where possible
11. Travel - include number of trips, destination, airfare, per diem, ground transportation, etc. Include travel to off-site curriculum trainings, if applicable. Use appropriate funding travel guidelines when budgeting.
12. Management Information System (MIS) - sites should budget any costs related to adapting or creating an MIS
13. Telephone - justification for telephone costs
14. Postage - justification of all postage costs
15. Supplies - justification of all supplies
16. Reproduction - costs for printing materials such as flyers, brochures, other marketing material, forms, etc.
17. Occupancy costs - costs of facilities rental, utilities, etc.
18. Other Direct Costs (ODC) - include a listing of all other direct charges to the contract not itemized above

Subcontractor Costs - Lead agency may enter into a subcontract with each of its collaborative service provider partners.
Provide a budget (with the same level of detail as required by the prime) for each subcontractor.
Indirect Costs - show rate, base and total. Please provide justification for the rate used (i.e., federal approved rate, history, etc.).
Provide basis for allocation of costs between different funders/programs.
Note: all costs above need to abide by the appropriate funding and contractual regulations.

CHAPTER 4
Curriculum

Selecting an appropriate curriculum is one of the most important decisions you will make for your program. A variety of marriage education curricula exist and most curricula share common themes in their content. The implementation costs, training requirements, teaching style (didactic versus interactive), theory base and appropriateness for your target audience, however, can vary substantially. The following chapter offers assistance in assessing and selecting a curriculum for your particular program.

Section 1: Assessing and Selecting a Curriculum
Key Points:
- Consider how various formats work best with your service delivery strategy
- Effective curricula allow participants to gain knowledge and understanding through skill-building activities
- Identify a curriculum that is evidence-based
- Pilot the curriculum with a small group of your target population before investing in the curriculum
- Contact curriculum developers to learn about their product
- Monitor curriculum websites for product updates and enhancements

Section 2: Training Requirements
Key Points:
- Requirements to deliver MRE curricula vary widely – not all curricula require training
- Curriculum training is an ongoing activity
- Additional training can help marriage educators refine how curriculum is delivered (i.e., training on: presentation skills, dealing with difficult participants, utilizing ice-breakers and activities)

Section 3: Considering Costs
Key Points:
- Consider additional and ongoing costs when selecting a curriculum in addition to the initial investment. Other cost variables include: materials required, the number of people you plan to serve, the number of staff needing training, etc.
- Think about your program long-term when considering costs of curricula

Section 4: Curriculum Enhancement
Key Points:
- Curricula can be enhanced with videos, stories and additional activities
- Build positive group dynamics

Section 1
Assessing and Selecting a Curriculum

Although many MRE curricula may look similar on the surface, there are distinguishing characteristics to consider. Spend time reviewing and testing out the curricula. Learn about the curriculum developers and their background and beliefs. Different programs were created to fill various needs and they may have a unique perspective on what is most important in a healthy, intimate partner relationship. Identify what is important to you/your organization before you start to assess available curricula.

Delivery Format and Materials

The curriculum that you choose for your program will impact your service delivery strategy. Some curricula are best suited to be delivered in multiple sessions over a period of several weeks whereas others might be a better choice for a one-day event. Some curricula take on more of a lecture style while others are highly interactive with group activities or "coached" exercises requiring additional materials and/or staff to assist. Select a curriculum that fits well with your program design and the needs of your target audience. Formats may include:

- Weekly Sessions
- Bi-weekly Sessions
- Weekend Retreats
- Self-paced Modules
- Mentoring/Support Groups
- Relationship Inventories
- One-day Events
- Adaptable/Facilitator-determined formats

When assessing a curriculum, you should identify what materials are required, which instructional methods will be employed, and what participant activities are included.

When reviewing a particular curriculum or when talking with curriculum developers, use the checklist below to guide any questions you may have and to evaluate whether the curriculum fits your program design. The checklist below provides a guide to assist you in identifying the specific materials included and/or necessary to deliver the curriculum; how content is to be delivered and whether additional staff and/or equipment may be necessary; and what type of activities/interaction participants will engage in when learning concepts and skills. Thinking through these specific areas will help you make an informed decision about which curricula to select for your program.

Curriculum Review Checklist

Materials checklist [2]	Description
• Facilitator guide or workbook • Participant workbook • Take-home resources or homework • Additional document, book or text • Audio-visual (AV) aids (computer, DVD, CD, VCR, overhead or LCD projector, TV) • Internet or web-based resource(s) including podcast, webcast • Flipchart or posters • Other materials _____	These items clarify what the curriculum includes and what you need to acquire to deliver it. When considering your budget, also note whether or not you can copy curriculum materials.
Instructional Methods checklist	**Description**
• Lecture or similar presentation (by facilitator or co-facilitators) • Guided discussion (between partners, within group, whole group) • Guest speakers on special topics • Reading of text • Coaching or demonstration of skills by instructor, peer or mentor couple • Use of pictorials for low-literacy groups • Use of AV to present educational content (video, DVD, CD, audiotape) • Other instructional methods _____	Think through who will lead your workshops and their presentation/delivery style. Some curricula are designed with specific delivery strategies and messages for fidelity.
Learning Activities checklist	**Description**
• Communication or conflict resolution skills practice • Role play or other creative, musical or artistic activity • Written exercise (in session or for homework) • Journal entry • Survey, quiz or relationship assessment inventory • Situational analysis of case study, couple interaction, role play • Other individual exercise(s) _____ • Other couple or group interactive exercise(s) _____	Assess how interactive the curriculum is and how well that fits with the needs/skills of your target audience. Some curricula show videos or use stories, others require facilitators to enhance it with their own examples and role plays.

(See the end of this chapter for a **Curriculum Review Checklist** worksheet.)

Evaluating Learning/Teaching Strategies

The curriculum you select for your program must, at the very least, offer participants interested in marriage (currently married or considering marriage for the future), the skills to form and sustain a healthy relationship and marriage. The content of an effective curriculum will allow participants to enhance their knowledge and understanding of a given topic through skill-building exercises and activities. To change someone's behavior, he/she must practice the skills you are teaching. Activities that require participant interaction and participation will enhance knowledge, values, self-awareness and relationship skills. Examples of skill-based exercises include guided conversations, role-play, listening/speaking skills and conflict resolution practice, problem-solving strategies, group discussion, homework assignments, and/or couple-relationship assessments. The curriculum you choose may also present unique considerations, examples and exercises to address the needs of your identified target audience. The content should resonate well within your specific community.

Evidence-based and Research/Evidence Informed Curricula

As you consider which curricula are appropriate for your target population and which would fit with your program design, it is also important to determine if the curricula are evidence-based. The term evidence-based refers to a program or practice that is based in research and has undergone rigorous studies resulting in consistent evidence showing its effectiveness. Curricula that are considered "evidence-based" have gone through extensive studies, generally over long periods of time and have shown to have positive impacts on participants. Keep in mind the limitations surrounding research. While the term "evidence-based" suggests that an extensive study was conducted, not all research is of the same design and intensity. Other curricula may be "research/evidence informed." These curricula may include information, concepts and skills which are based on empirical research, but the curricula themselves have not undergone rigorous studies.

When reviewing curricula (both evidence-based and research informed), be mindful about whether the content is supported by current literature in the field of marriage and relationship education. The chart below outlines various themes essential to effective MRE curricula. Use this chart as a set of guidelines when assessing curricula for your program.

Research-supported themes and subcategories of marriage education content[3]		
Positivity *Protective Factors*	**Negativity** *Risk Factors*	**Cognitions** *Protective Factors*
• Positive emotions • Affectionate behaviors • Supportive behaviors • Time together • Relational identity • Expressivity and self-disclosure	• Negative emotions • Overt negative behaviors • Withdrawing, nonresponsive, or dismissive behaviors • Demand-withdraw pattern	• Realistic beliefs and perception of expectations met • Knowledge and understanding • Consensus • Perceived equity/fairness • Positive attributions and biases

Identify the Underlying Theory Behind the Curricula

MRE curricula are psycho-educational programs. This means they acknowledge life experiences and feelings (the psychology aspect) and they teach skills to affect current behavior change (the educational aspect). Different curricula may emphasize psychological or the educational features of managing relationships. Programs, for example, may have more introspective activities and focus less on skill building or vice versa. There is no right or wrong balance, but it is an important distinction. Workshop leaders with a background in psychology, therapy or counseling are likely to be more comfortable facilitating a workshop with a stronger emphasis on past behaviors and experiences compared to lay workshop leaders who may be equipped to more effectively share skill building strategies with participants.

3 Adler-Baeder, Higginbotham, and Lamke 2004

Finding the Right Curriculum for Your Target Audience

While there are many marriage education curricula to choose from, not all will be suitable for your target population. When reviewing curricula for your program, think about your target audience's literacy level and whether the information is presented in a way that will be engaging and appropriate for your participants. Also, evaluate whether the curricula will be conducive to your anticipated workshop/class size, how many hours of programming you plan to offer and what will keep your participants actively engaged for the duration. See **Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation** for more information on how to become familiar with adult learning styles and keep these in mind when reviewing curricula for your program.

Tailoring/Adapting Curricula

Your program may set out to reach a number of different populations, and you may be inclined to offer multiple curricula to meet the different needs of these various audiences. However, as you get started, you may want to consider selecting one curriculum and tailoring it for a specific group. For example, you may alter any scenarios or examples provided to make them more relevant to your audience. Keep in mind that the core lessons and concepts taught in a curriculum should remain intact but "tweaking" examples or scenarios may be all that is needed to make them more relevant to your audience. You may want to deliver a workshop to a small group of your target population in an effort to obtain feedback from these participants. Then, you can refine the curriculum as well as specific program components based on their experiences.

Creating an adaption of a curriculum generally involves significant changes to the content or format, and this is likely something that you will need permission from the curriculum developer to do. Seek guidance from the developer to determine what may/may not be altered. Many curriculum developers are therapists, counselors, psychologists, etc. They want this material to reach the public and are generally very helpful in talking about the underlying principles and concepts that make their curriculum unique.

Curricula are not static. Test it out and track what lessons resonate with your audience, and identify stories/videos that strengthen the lesson. You may find that making minor adjustments for your specific target populations is enough. You can always expand and adapt your program later for additional populations based on feedback and suggestions from initial participants. The research that informs curricula for marriage relationship skills is ongoing and therefore constantly evolving. When managing a marriage relationship education program, it is very crucial that curriculum being used is always monitored and up to date.

Section 2
Training Requirements

Training Requirements

Requirements for training facilitators vary greatly across curricula. Training requirements range from intense multi-day certification trainings with teach-back session or videotaping requirements, to teach-out-of-the-box (TOOB) programs utilizing DVDs that provide facilitators with all of the preparation and training materials required to deliver the program (i.e., no formal training required). A curriculum developer may indicate that while training is recommended, it is not required.

Curriculum training sessions are generally conducted by the curriculum developers who provide insight and important instructions to effectively deliver the curriculum. These trainings may provide certifications for those who successfully complete training. Some curricula allow a staff member to become a "master trainer" and train other program staff to deliver the curriculum.

Some curricula are designed to be delivered by professionals (those with counseling degrees or graduate work in specific fields) whereas others are structured to be taught by "anyone," although not "anyone" can facilitate (or teach) effectively. There are different attributes to consider when hiring professionals in the field of family/social services compared to lay people. (See *Chapter 7: Program Management* for more information.) Regardless of the required training, think about how best to prepare your staff to engage participants in the material.

Training Continues Beyond the Curriculum Content

Training related to curriculum content is important for marriage educators in order for them to feel confident in the information, skills and concepts they present. However, additional training, delivered on an ongoing basis, is also necessary to ensure that the material is delivered effectively. Keep in mind that even though they have completed curriculum training, not every potential marriage educator will be a good fit for your program. A good facilitator should have a sense of humor, charisma, and the ability to connect with a group. The following are a few examples of training you may want to provide to marriage educators in addition to training on curriculum content. (See *Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation* and *Chapter 7: Program Management* for more information on marriage educators and training.)

- *Presentation/Facilitation Skills:* To keep participants engaged throughout the program, curriculum content must be presented in a way that is appealing and interesting. Furthermore, in order for participants to stay actively involved and assimilate and utilize new skills, marriage educators must know how to both manage group dynamics and encourage participation (see *Section 4: Curriculum Enhancement* below). In addition to receiving training on curriculum content, presentation and facilitation skills trainings are imperative to successfully delivering MRE curricula.

- Dealing with Difficult Participants: Training designed to help marriage educators identify different styles of difficult people and utilize techniques to handle challenging situations will help them manage groups and more successfully deliver curriculum content.

- *Utilizing Icebreakers and Activities:* Fun, interactive activities are a great way to reinforce new concepts and skills. Providing training for marriage educators on how to utilize activities as a teaching tool can help enhance their curriculum delivery.

- *Red Flags:* MRE providers should know when to make a referral or identify a couple who may not be appropriate for MRE. Training should be provided in the identification of domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health or other issues that cannot be managed through skill-building. Consult with DV experts as appropriate.

Finally, ongoing curriculum training should be provided as materials are often updated.

Section 3
Considering Costs

Cost is a primary consideration in curriculum selection, but not the only one. The curriculum cost is more than the initial price you pay for the curriculum materials. The "actual" cost will vary based on the number of marriage educators you will employ (if you intend to put them through formal training), the cost of training, the number of people you intend to serve and the materials needed to deliver the curriculum effectively. While one educator may be sufficient on a day-to-day basis, you will need to have a back-up plan in the event that your facilitator cannot attend a session for any given reason (e.g., illness or family emergency). Even if you don't plan to facilitate a class yourself, you should be trained in the curriculum your program uses.

In addition to the retail price of the curriculum content, there may be other costs associated with delivering the curriculum that you must consider when deciding which curriculum to use. Other cost considerations are found below.

Materials/Equipment

Since materials and staff training can be costly, you must consider curriculum costs when creating a budget for your program including:

- *Costs per participant for participation* – including cost of workbooks and other handouts, and reprinting costs if applicable. Some curricula also have activities that may require other supplies such as modeling clay, crayons, balls, etc.

- *Costs of other equipment* – considering what is needed to implement the curriculum (e.g., overhead/LCD projector, screen, speakers, cords and cables). (See **Chapter 5: Workshop Logistics** for more information.)

(See **Chapter 3: Building a Budget and Funding Your Program** for more information.)

Training Costs

As previously mentioned, some curricula require educators to attend a formal training on the content. Furthermore, ongoing training, which may also have costs associated with it, is essential for marriage educators.

- *Costs of instructor training and/or certification* – including registration, materials, and travel related expenses for staff.

- *Ongoing training* – including presentation skills, managing challenging situations, and utilizing experiential learning activities may require you to pay an outside trainer and/ or may require additional materials not included in the curriculum you choose to use.

- *Other resources* – Some curricula use video segments or reference books in their lessons. Look for these additional resources when selecting/budgeting for your curriculum.

Think about your program long-term when considering the costs of various curricula. As your program earns recognition in the community, you may find that more people want to participate (resulting in the need for additional educators, training and materials). Over time, you may also lose educators (or a "master trainer") for various reasons requiring you to recruit and train new staff. (See **Chapter 7: Program Management** for information about preventing staff turnover.) Purchasing a curriculum will likely not be a one-time event. Be prepared to spend funds on curriculum, training and materials at various points in time throughout the life of your program.

Free curricula are available. Typically these are created by Extension programs (see **ACF's Guide to Low-Cost Curricula and Resources for Marriage and Relationship, Fatherhood and Parenting, and Financial Education**). Note that even curricula available for free-use require that you contact the author for permission to sell, reproduce or distribute the materials. Generally, the costs associated with using curricula requiring facilitator's training are greater than using teach-out-of-the-box (TOOB) curricula. For example, curricula training tuition may cost anywhere between $600 and $1,000 (plus expenses) whereas TOOB curricula may be a one-time expense starting at $35. Give careful consideration to your program's needs and budgetary constraints when reviewing curricula options.

Section 4
Curriculum Enhancement

Although there are a variety of curricula available, additional resources may be used to enhance these programs. For example, the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative created a series of modules to address acculturation and gender roles, specific to the needs of Hispanic couples. These are available at http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/educators/recursos-en-espaol/hispanic-healthy-marriage-initiative/index.aspx.

Other curriculum enhancements include experiential learning activities that can supplement any MRE program. Many curricula benefit from the creativity of facilitators who can enhance the materials through activities which illustrate the core curriculum messages. These activities allow learning to occur by feeling and experiencing. Experiential learning activities also create self awareness within group members.

Group dynamics are also important to MRE programs. Effective facilitators use "icebreakers" to create a fun atmosphere in which to learn new skills. These activities are also a prelude to building group cohesion and emotional safety. Simple icebreakers not only help people to learn names and basic personal information, they also allow the group to feel comfortable with each other. The NHMRC Facilitator Toolkit provides tools to enhance facilitation skills, build group cohesion, and illustrate ideas and concepts. Not all curricula address group dynamics; however, the facilitation of ice breakers to help participants get to know each other and group cohesion activities to build trust within the group can enhance the MRE curriculum. Descriptions for icebreakers, group cohesion and experiential learning activities are outlined below.

Icebreakers	Icebreakers are used at the beginning of a class series or a workshop so participants can learn basic information about each other and become comfortable with one another. These activities are a prelude to building group cohesion and can be important in setting the tone of a class. Facilitators may or may not want to use them for every class in the series being taught.
Group Cohesion Activities	Group cohesion is very important for both group and individual growth. Each participant should feel emotionally safe in his or her learning environment. These fun and engaging games and activities can be used to build trust and safety within a group.
Experiential Learning Activities	Experiential learning activities are designed to illustrate the concepts being taught. These activities allow learning to occur by feeling and experiencing. Experiential learning activities also create self awareness within group members.

Another enhancement for MRE curricula is a personality assessment or a couples' inventory. Marital or personality inventories such as ENRICH and FOCCUS or the widely-used Myers Briggs personality tool can be used to enhance any MRE curricula. Marital inventories identify strengths and growth areas in the marriage whereas personality tools identify personality traits which commonly affect one's relationships. These tools require individuals to do a self-assessment by independently completing a questionnaire. They are then scored and personality traits or relationship tendencies are characterized. Discussions should be led by

CHAPTER 4 WORKSHEET
Curriculum Review Checklist

Curriculum Title: _____

Materials checklist
• Facilitator guide or workbook • Participant workbook • Take-home resources or homework • Additional document, book or text • Audio-visual (AV) aids (computer, DVD, CD, VCR, overhead or LCD projector, TV) • Internet or web-based resource(s) including podcast, webcast • Flipchart or posters • Other materials: _____

Instructional Methods checklist
• Lecture or similar presentation (by facilitator or co-facilitators) • Guided discussion (between partners, within group, whole group) • Guest speakers on special topics • Reading of text • Coaching or demonstration of skills by instructor, peer or mentor couple • Use of pictorials for low-literacy groups • Use of AV to present educational content (video, DVD, CD, audiotape) • Other instructional methods: _____

Learning Activities checklist
• Communication or conflict resolution skills practice • Role play or other creative, musical or artistic activity • Written exercise (in session or for homework) • Journal entry • Survey, quiz or relationship assessment inventory • Situational analysis of case study, couple interaction, role play • Other individual exercise(s): _____ • Other couple or group interactive exercise(s) _____

CHAPTER 5
WORKSHOP LOGISTICS

This chapter discusses logistics related to selecting a workshop format that will optimize participation and retention, choosing a convenient location for your services, and scheduling services that meet the needs of your target audience. This chapter also addresses room set-up in terms of what is most comfortable and conducive to participation and determining the program materials and equipment needed to conduct a workshop. (Note: the terms "workshop", "session" and "class" are used interchangeably to describe your MRE service.)

Section 1: Scheduling Your Services
Key Points:
- Consider what workshop schedule (weekend, evenings, weekly or monthly sessions) will reach the most participants
- Be flexible - understand the needs of your participants including scheduling demands
- Be accommodating – consider make-up sessions or rescheduling, to encourage the most participation

Section 2: Choosing a Location to Deliver Services
Key Points:
- Select a space that is welcoming, neutral, private and appropriate for the target audience
- Keep transportation needs in mind – choose a location with sufficient parking and a nearby bus route
- Make sure the space is accessible to individuals with disabilities

Section 3: Determining Room Set-Up
Key Points:
- Make sure the room set-up can accommodate sufficient and comfortable seating with optimal viewing of other participants and of teaching materials
- The set-up should be conducive to participation
- The room should have mild temperatures and minimal background noise

Section 4: Considering What Materials You Need
Key Points:
- Provide signage to make it easy for participants to locate the workshop space
- Create a list of all equipment and program supplies you will need to successfully conduct your workshop each session
- Designate a staff member or volunteer to set out refreshments and materials for participants to ensure a welcoming and organized environment

Section 1
Scheduling Your Services

Workshop Structure

Now that you have selected your curriculum (see **Chapter 4: Curriculum** for more information), you will be able to identify the desired workshop structure that not only will allow your participants to best learn and retain information, but will also be convenient for their schedules. The frequency of sessions, group size, and the number of groups of couples you will serve also needs to be considered. Curriculum developers will likely provide guidance regarding choices for workshop formatting that will maintain the fidelity of the information presented and encourage the most participation.

Workshop Format Pros and Cons		
	Pros	**Cons**
Weekly Sessions	• Smaller, more frequent segments of curriculum can lead to better retention of information and participants can practice/use skills between workshops	• Participants must commit to multiple workshop sessions
Weekend Retreat	• Provides a "get-away" environment for the couple where they can focus on their relationship • Better chance to connect with other couples	• May be difficult for a couple that has children or weekend commitments
Day Long Session	• May be easier to commit to a one-time session	• Difficult to retain information throughout the day without activities to integrate the concepts

Participant Scheduling

Be conscious of typical time constraints for your participants, such as long work hours, personal commitments, children's activities, and childcare when scheduling services in order to maximize participation. Also consider potential scheduling conflicts such as holidays, religious celebrations, migrant and seasonal worker priorities, and children's school schedules. Most often, evening or weekend sessions are going to be the most convenient for your participants. Ask participants at the time of enrollment or intake to indicate days and times that work best for them. (See **Chapter 10: Participant Recruitment and Enrollment** for more information.) From this information, you may create a schedule that reflects time preferences for most people. Be willing to add make-up sessions for couples who cannot make it to the normally scheduled date and time, or consider rescheduling if it works best for the majority of participants. Keep appraised of your participants' needs and offer alternatives to encourage continual participation. The desires of program participants may not align with the schedule or availability of your staff. Designing a staffing model that accommodates evenings and weekends can be challenging, especially if current staff are being assigned to deliver MRE services as opposed to hiring new staff explicitly for this program.

Finally, keep in mind that participants may be coming to sessions from work or other prior commitments, so give them enough time to arrive to your program. Consider offering an optional food and social time at the beginning of each session so that late comers will not miss important content.

Section 2
Choosing a Location to Deliver Services

Appropriate Space

The look and feel of the room in which you will be conducting workshops is important for your participants. The space should feel welcoming and comfortable. If any aspect of the space feels intimidating or uncomfortable, it may deter people from coming back for the remainder of the sessions. For example, facilities that house substance abuse, mental health, faith-based or government assistance programs may have signs or posters that may not be particularly welcoming to your participants.

The space should be appropriate for your target audience in terms of culture, faith and gender. Be aware that privacy is also important for many participants, especially for those who may already be hesitant about attending a marriage education program. The location should appeal to both men and women. For example, if a room is decorated with flowers or other images associated with femininity, the men in your program may feel that the lessons will not apply to them or that the lessons will only be presented from a female perspective. This perception may discourage men from participating in the session.

Transportation and Location Considerations

Providing clarity about location and accessibility at intake is an important way of ensuring participants' timely arrival and ease of attending sessions. Depending on your participants, some may need to rely on public transportation to reach your workshop, so be sure to include a map and information about bus routes or train stops that are nearby in recruitment materials. Buildings that are difficult to find or navigate (e.g., college campuses) will deter participation. For the benefit of those who drive to sessions, choose a location with sufficient and lighted parking that is free.

Child Care

Child care is necessary if you are serving parents. Sites that are often equipped to offer child care include Head Start Centers and churches. Make sure you have qualified staff and the required insurance to provide child care. Alternatively, partner with another organization for that service or consider offering vouchers to parents to arrange their own child care. If you use a weekend retreat model, child care or respite care for families with disabled or chronically ill family members may be needed.

Handicap Accessibility

Your services should be all-inclusive and not discourage attendance because of accessibility issues. Make sure your location is wheelchair accessible and make special arrangements to assist those who may need help to attend or participate in sessions.

Locations to consider may include:

- Community Centers
- Public or Private School Spaces
- Libraries
- Book Stores
- Non-profit Community Spaces

If you are using a non-dedicated space, you will need to factor the time and space to setup/take down into your planning. Keep in mind that you will want to create a feeling of comfort and engagement each time you set up your workshop space. If you use a space that is donated or publically available, ensure that you can be there in time to set it up and that exterior doors remain unlocked when you are meeting.

Section 3
Determining Room Set-Up

Set-up for Optimal Viewing and Participation

The room in which you are conducting your workshop will need to be comfortable and provide optimal viewing for all participants. It should also have plenty of room for facilitators to move around while they are instructing or coaching participants in activities.

Room design will depend on the shape of the room you are using, the types of tables to which you have access, whether you will be utilizing a projector screen, and how many participants you are expecting. A thoughtfully organized room will be instrumental in encouraging engagement and participation. Various sample room layouts for small, medium, and large sized groups are presented in this section to accommodate different group and room sizes.
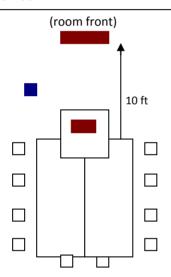
Noise and temperature are important. Because participants that are either too hot or too cold will have a difficult time staying focused and engaged in the lessons, make sure you have the ability to regulate the room temperature. Additionally, background noise can prove to be very distracting. Make sure the room has doors that may be closed if there is any noise coming from other spaces.
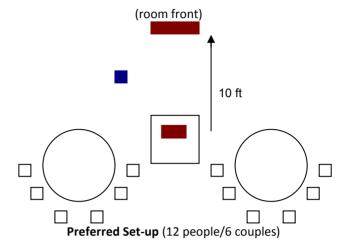
Sample Room Layout:

Small Size Group **(6-18 people)**

□ Three variations using two 6' rounds, two or one 4x8 rectangular tables.
□ Small table to hold projector, laptop and speakers to reinforce audio portion for DVD clips. Power strip and extension cord will be required.
□ Screen in front of the room at least 10 feet from projector
□ Single facilitator can be on either side of screen
□ Snacks and exit to either side of room or in the back of room.

(room front)

10 ft

Preferred Set-up (12 people/6 couples)

(room front)

10 ft

Variation 1 (10 people/5 couples)

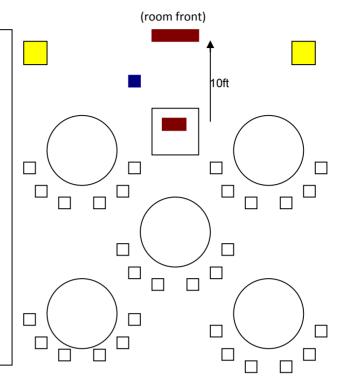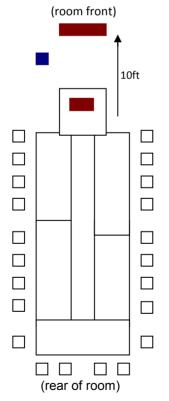**Variation 2** (6 people/3 couples)
Use of curriculum that does not require projection. No tables available. Chairs only and using clipboards.

(room front)

Medium Size Group (18-30 people)

□ Three variations using 6' rounds or a series of 4x8 rectangular tables depending on the size of the group.

□ Small table to hold projector and laptop. Power strip and extension cord will be required.

□ Will need amplified speakers on tripod stands to reinforce audio portion for DVD clips.

□ Screen at least 10 feet from projector in front of the room.

□ Single facilitator can be on either side of screen. A microphone may be necessary depending on how well the facilitator projects and the acoustics of the room itself.

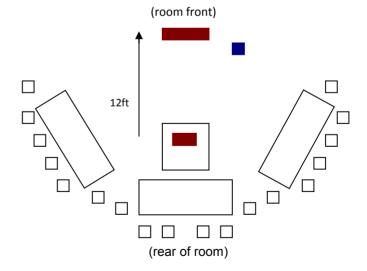□ Snacks and exit to either side of room or in the back of room.

10ft

(room front)

10ft

Preferred Set-up (30 people/15 couples)
Note: Additional rounds are recommended for gatherings of 30+ participants.

(room front)

12ft

(rear of room)

Variation 2 (18 people/9 couples)

For rooms that are more square in shape and when rounds are not available.

(rear of room)

Variation 1 (22 people/11 couples)

For rooms that are long and narrow

14 ft.

Raised platform (4'x8'x2')
w/podium

14 ft.

60 people

tech

102 people

Large Size Groups (60 - 100 people)

□ Use of 8 ft rounds with six chairs set in a semi-circle
□ Two facilitators using microphones (one male and one female)
□ One table for projector with large screen (8 ft) on one side positioned diagonally
□ Two amplified (perhaps four) speakers on tripod stands depending on room acoustics
□ Snacks and exit to either side of room or in the back of room.

Huge Size Groups (100+ people)

Recommend an on site A/V person for gatherings of 100+. Other suggestions:
□ Two facilitators with on 4'x8' raised platform
□ Four speakers on tripod stands
□ Two projectors positioned diagonally
□ Snacks and exit to either side of room or in the back of room.

Section 4
Considering What Materials You Need

Signage

You will need signs posted in parking lots, at building entrances and inside the building. Signs should be eye-catching, easy to find and provide clear directions.

Equipment

EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS YOU MAY NEED		
Basics for Every Workshop	**If you have an Audio/Visual Presentation**	**Miscellaneous**
• Flip chart paper with easel/dry-erase board	• Projector or audio player	• Clipboards/pens/paper for notes
• Dry-erase and regular markers and tape	• Screen	• Materials for icebreakers or experiential learning activities
• Curriculum materials	• Laptop computer	• Refreshments
• Sign-in sheet	• Cable to connect laptop to projector/audio player	• Candy for tables
• Pre- or post-workshop surveys	• Speakers (and cables)	
• Relevant handouts	• Extension cords	
• Community resource list	• Duct Tape or rug to cover cables	
	• Light bulbs	
	• Batteries	

Food and Refreshments

Food is welcoming. Programs should offer snacks or meals based on their ability to do so. A small gesture, like asking participants what they like to eat or drink can go a long way in supporting retention, which demonstrates that you are responsive to their needs and that you are listening. Designate a staff member or volunteer to deliver and set out refreshments for the participants. Where appropriate, consider providing a small meal or have participants bring pot-luck dinners on occasion. Be conscious of people's dietary needs. Provide enough variety so that vegetarians, diabetics, or those with food allergies will be able to enjoy a suitable snack.

CHAPTER 6
MARRIAGE EDUCATORS AND FACILITATION

Workshop facilitators and marriage educators are often not only the face, but also the heartbeat of each program. How well facilitators deliver a quality product in an effective and engaging manner directly influences program credibility, participation, retention and potential impact. While all program staff should be selected carefully, finding a great fit is the most important when considering facilitators. This chapter will help you think about the characteristics you need to consider when hiring, as well as help you with structuring the role of the facilitator.

Section 1: Effective Facilitation

Key Points:
- Facilitators understand group dynamics and recognize a variety of learning styles
- Facilitators are fully committed to the organizational mission and to the role
- Facilitators serve as a guide for participants to learn new skills

Section 2: Hiring Marriage and Relationship Educators: Know What and Who You Need

Key Points:
- Budget, timeline, community and curriculum are all relevant to the hiring process
- Paid staff, subcontractors and unpaid volunteers must all meet the same requirements
- Recruit workshop leaders through organizations that are well established in the community

Section 3: Establishing Boundaries for Marriage Educators

Key Points:
- Boundaries help maintain clarity, make good decisions, and ensure safety
- Confidentiality is the number one rule
- Marriage education is not the same as marriage therapy

Section 1
Effective Facilitation

Good facilitators are essential to any program's success. Although a strong curriculum is important, talented facilitators can make or break a healthy marriage or relationship program. Therefore, decisions about who to hire or ask to facilitate in your program should not be taken lightly. As long as participants are taking time out of their busy lives, and sometimes spending money to attend a class, the investment needs to be worthwhile for them. They will desire to leave the program with new information, new skills, and the motivation to make real changes in their relationships. Therefore, utilizing the most effective facilitators brings a program closer to achieving that goal.

Effective facilitation is not easy, especially with groups of people. In order to find a good match for your program, there are several characteristics of a good facilitator to be mindful of when hiring. Each of these characteristics is explained in detail below. For more information and tips on the actual hiring process for facilitators, see Section 2 of this chapter and review the NHMRC How-to Guide titled, "Hiring Marriage Educators for Your Healthy Marriage Program" at www.healthymarriageinfo.org. Many of the topics discussed in this section can be used as on-going facilitator training topics.

Understanding Teaching Styles and Learning Styles

Teaching Styles

One of the first things to understand when looking for a facilitator is that there are differences in methods of facilitating. While you will need to choose which style works best for your program, some styles work better than others when facilitating group dynamics around relationships. Understanding the differences between the "Instructor", "Colleague" and "Facilitator" styles of teaching can help you find the most effective facilitation style for your program.

The "Instructor"	This style is perhaps the most common and most recognizable style of teaching because it looks like the classic teacher role: someone with expertise imparting knowledge to students. In this style, it is up to the "instructor" to decide what participants need to know about a topic (hopefully following a curriculum) and to share the knowledge through lecture and visual aids. This style is mostly effective for subjects that are factual in nature as the information flows in one direction—from "instructor" to participant. Some programs will utilize facilitators with this style because it feels safe and familiar. However, this style may not be as effective in family life or relationship programs where human relationships are the primary target and this is not usually the most effective way to reach adult learners of this type of content. In addition, without interactive components in the curriculum, participants may have difficulty applying the skills learned, thus contributing to a significant cause of class drop outs.
The "Colleague"	This style of teaching is the opposite of the "Instructor" style. This style has a very relaxed way of interacting with a group, which results in a casual learning environment. There are a few clear expectations or boundaries set for the learning environment, and the facilitator is often seen as an equal, rather than as an expert. Due to these aspects, some classes may be too relaxed or unstructured for many participants. Even if the "colleague" has planned a class on a specific topic, there is often more freedom to explore topics outside of the curriculum content. Programs often end up with a facilitator with this style when the facilitator places a higher value on relationships and/or on being liked by group participants then on helping them learn and integrate the curriculum. This style may be very useful for less formal learning environments. The trade-off is often a lower fidelity to the curriculum.
The "Facilitator"	This style is an effective mixture of the other two styles. To 'facilitate' means, literally, 'to make easier.' To facilitate effectively means that not only is the learning process made easier for participants, but the acquisition of the knowledge is also made more effectively. To accomplish this, facilitators need to be good communicators, good teachers of the curriculum, relationally gifted, and understand how participants learn best. A major task in facilitation is to guide and pace the participants' learning of the curriculum, so they can understand the concepts and effectively practice the skills. The facilitator's genuine support and concern for each participant effectively creates a safe, non-judgmental environment in which to do this work. In addition, facilitators are responsible for encouraging and guiding discussion about the topics being covered. Caring facilitators know how to encourage participant self-disclosure and empower and motivate them to make difficult changes toward relational health.

See the end of this chapter for a **Teaching Styles Assessment/Quiz** worksheet. This tool should be completed by your facilitator to help you assess his/her teaching style.

Adult Learning Models

Successful workshop facilitators understand that because adults learn in different ways, multiple methods of presentation for the curriculum must be incorporated into the delivery of the relationship program. Based on the attitude and emotional state of workshop participants, timely, sensitive and effective strategies can be employed.

In general, the primary learning styles are visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

- Visual learners tend to learn best when concepts or ideas are conveyed graphically through pictures or are reinforced with images or video.
- Auditory learners tend to learn well when factual or detailed information is delivered orally, such as in a lecture or speech.
- Kinesthetic learners tend to learn by doing something actively, rather than by just listening or observing.

Facilitators also need to know that learning takes place in two dimensions: cognitively and affectively. When a person learns factual information, they are practicing *cognitive* learning. When a person makes an emotional connection or reaction to information being presented, they are experiencing *affective* learning. Having one learning style without the other is difficult in most cases. Participants need cognitive information to make choices about significant life changes, while affective or emotional learning motivates people to maintain these changes.

The **Learning Styles Assessment Quiz** at the end of this chapter is a fun and informative way for facilitators to learn about their own learning styles as well as the styles of the participants in their class. Should they choose to use it, participants can score the assessment for themselves. Then, the facilitator can lead a group discussion on the different types of learning styles and identify ways in which to shift the presentation of material to best meet the needs of the group. This is most valuable in a multi-workshop setting and not recommended for a one-day session.

Co-Facilitators

Co-facilitating is a skill and involves a well-matched team with a shared goal. In MRE workshops, it is common to have male/female co-facilitators. In some cases, people like to deliver workshops with their partner. This is a management challenge because married couples most often operate as a unit rather than two separate educators. When members of the couple are both effective facilitators, the program is strong, but when the members are unequal in their performance, it can create severe challenges. Providing feedback can be difficult if one member of the team is less strong than the other. If one becomes frustrated, the program risks losing two staff members, instead of just one. For some programs, this may be a reason to discourage the practice of hiring partners to teach together. However, many participants value the authenticity of hearing from educators who have life experiences together to share. As a program manager, you must determine what is most important to you and your program, and be prepared to manage the implementation of desired strategies.

Commitment to the Role of Facilitator

Supporting your Mission

Good facilitators don't need to be marriage experts, but strong facilitators must believe in the mission of your program and organization and have a pro-healthy relationship and/or pro-marriage attitude. The facilitator's own marital status is less important than how they handle their own issues, and how their personal views toward marriage and relationships are relayed to participants. They should "walk the talk," be able to speak to findings of healthy relationship/marriage research, and apply the skills they are teaching in their own lives. The facilitator must be dedicated to achieving the overall goals of your healthy marriage/relationship program in order for it to succeed.

Self-awareness

A successful marriage educator must be aware of his/her own issues and beliefs, be able to model emotional stability, and have a healthy attitude about marriage and relationships. Even talented facilitators become less effective and distracted if they are freshly wounded by failed relationships or not in the "right place" emotionally to effectively lead healthy marriage workshops. Facilitators also need to be aware of the impact of their personality and their relational and teaching style and how to adjust these as needed to most effectively connect with participants. Often getting feedback from teammates can be helpful in this process.

Importance of Nonverbal Communication

It is said that about 70% of all communication is nonverbal, so it is especially important that the facilitator understands his/her own nonverbal impact. The way a facilitator sits or stands, his/her tone of voice and facial expressions need to match the message being taught. Participants will only mirror back the level of enthusiasm for the topic they see expressed by the facilitator. Strong facilitators also pay close attention to the nonverbal communication of participants. Are participants engaged? Are they looking at the materials and listening? Or, are they confused, distracted, or uninterested? By learning to read the nonverbal communication of the group, facilitators can adjust the pace of the presentation, change the sequence of planned activities, take a break, or clarify some of the concepts being taught.

Commitment and Dependability

Marriage and relationship educators need to have a dedication to this kind of work. This is shown through punctuality and being well prepared to facilitate. Responsible facilitators prepare for workshops well in advance and come equipped with materials for the delivery of interactive workshops. Since most curricula are copyrighted and require some time to learn how to facilitate well, facilitators should be willing to be formally trained. They should also be willing to practice with your team and consider feedback from observers on how to improve their facilitation style and on how to maintain the integrity of the curriculum. Your facilitator should also have a backup plan for technology such as computers and projectors and feel comfortable teaching the curriculum without electronic aids if necessary. You should support their willingness to invest in the program by compensating them for time spent in training, preparations or observing their peers.

Knowledge of Community Resources

Since participants often come to trust their facilitators, they may approach their facilitators about challenges they are currently facing. Facilitators should not overstep their role and try to solve the issues their participants bring to them. In these cases, it is beneficial if facilitators are aware of local community resources for a variety of common needs (i.e., food, shelter, counseling, child care, job searches, etc.), and empower participants to follow through with referrals given.

Respecting Boundaries

Healthy boundaries are important to the success of relationships. In marriage and relationship education, there are several different boundaries to be addressed. First of all, facilitators must be comfortable setting ground rules for the class in order to provide clear expectations and emotional safety for participants. Participants often form strong bonds with one another over time, making it easier to enter into casual conversation during class. Therefore, a second boundary facilitators need to be effective at is keeping participants focused on the curriculum and on the important skill building tasks assigned. Third, facilitators should be prepared to deal with difficult people who might be disruptive or challenging during the course. Facilitators need to be comfortable re-directing these participants and be prepared to gently confront their behavior inside or outside of the class if necessary. See Section 4 of this chapter for more information on boundaries.

Intervening Skillfully and Energizing Others

Managing Group Dynamics

Effective group dynamics are a key to productive experiences for participants in healthy relationship or marriage programs. Facilitators need to be able to guide conversations about the curriculum content as well as interactions amongst participants. Good facilitators always encourage an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual respect for all group members. Participants learn best in an environment where they feel emotionally safe and are not afraid to ask questions and share their opinions. Therefore, facilitators should be encouraged to work with participants to establish "ground rules" that govern safe participation. In advance of a workshop, the facilitator can identify places in the curriculum where he/she can ask participants to discuss what they are learning. The educator can then effectively adapt and incorporate different activities or review exercises to meet the needs of the group. Facilitators must also be tactful in managing a participant/couple who tends to monopolize the workshop time or is disruptive due to a negative attitude. (See ***Chapter 11: Retention and Engagement*** for information on managing disruptive participants.)

Promoting Participant Engagement

Working with couples or individuals, especially over a multi-session series of workshops, is hard work. Good facilitators are able to keep their engagement level with participants high by having effective relationship skills and enthusiasm for their work. Sometimes having well-matched (or married) co-facilitators can raise this level of engagement even higher. Great facilitators believe in their participants' ability to grow. They use appropriate jokes and humor or examples and stories to personalize the information and build a relationship with the group. When communicating with participants, good facilitators model turn-taking, reflective

listening skills, and other skills being taught. The facilitator might also increase engagement by using specific experiential exercises to illustrate important ideas and concepts such as healthy communication, trust building or conflict management. They also know how to encourage appropriate disclosure by participants to build group cohesion and trust. At times, participants in the class may share experiences or stories that a facilitator may not feel is appropriate. When this happens, he/she needs to be prepared to respond in a non-judgmental manner and keep the group on track. An effective facilitator is culturally competent and will augment or adapt material if some parts of the curricula aren't culturally appropriate for the particular audience. Overall, without great facilitator and participant engagement, programs struggle.

Focus on Education and Empowerment

The facilitator's role is to impart information and teach skills, not to fix participants' problems. A good facilitator provides tools with practical examples that allow participants to create solutions for their own problems. He/she will also provide opportunities for participants to share what they learned and how they have used the skills. A ritual of sharing can encourage group cohesion and give people something to look forward to at each workshop. Similarly, by summarizing key learning concepts at the end of each class and by wrapping up the session with a homework assignment, the participants are offered opportunities to learn outside the classroom setting to reinforce their skills. Facilitators should be sure to thank each person for their participation and for making a commitment to improving the health of their relationship.

Section 2
Hiring Marriage and Relationship Educators:
Know What and Who You Need

Many factors influence how you hire facilitators. This section highlights some key issues for consideration and provides sample job descriptions, contract language and application forms to support recruitment of effective marriage educators. (See **Chapter 7: Program Management** for additional information on staffing/hiring for your program.)

It is difficult to discern personality characteristics from a resume alone. However, investing in training marriage educators who may not be the right fit for your program is not cost effective. Remember that there are some things you can teach (such as a curriculum, how to use a LCD projector, how to administer a pre/post test) and some things that are innate, such as a sense of humor, charisma, self-awareness and the ability to connect with a group.

Some questions to ponder about hiring include the following:

- Should we hire professional facilitators or lay facilitators?

- Will these facilitators need to be on staff or contract? Would volunteer facilitators work well with this program?

- What characteristics do we need in facilitators in order to connect with our target audience? Do we need to consider service delivery in another language? Do we need male and female facilitation teams?

Professionals vs. Lay People

Some curricula are designed to be delivered by professionals, while others are fitting for anyone trained or familiar with that curriculum. Professional facilitators may include social workers, licensed counselors, child and family therapists, or others with an advanced degree related to education or family life. In addition to a commitment to caring about people and families, professionals often provide a more formal approach to their instruction, combining theory and practice. They also have knowledge and expertise in family systems.

Lay people can represent any career and generally bring a high level of commitment to the program and a passion for helping couples strengthen their marriage. They may connect well with your target audience through life experiences and a down-to-earth presence. They may or may not have received formal training on facilitation and may be less familiar with boundaries.

Staff, Subcontractor or Volunteer

Once a decision has been made regarding delivery of your marriage curriculum– professionals or lay people– there are three options from which to pursue filling the workshop facilitator position: staff, subcontractor or volunteer. There are advantages and disadvantage to each model. All facilitators, regardless if they are full-time staff or unpaid volunteers, need to be

trained and supervised for quality control. Candidates should be informed during the hiring process of the standards and expectations for the position. They should be aware that ongoing training will be expected, and that participant feedback and evaluation will be conducted periodically. This quality control is necessary for program success. The following table will help you determine which strategy will work best given your budget, curriculum and overall strategic plan for reaching your target audience(s).

Staff, Subcontractor and Volunteer Characteristics

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages	Unique Benefits
Staff	• Overall knowledge of program requirements and can easily be made aware of new changes through staff meetings • Regular compensation and a consistent work schedule increase the likelihood of your facilitators arriving on time and prepared for all scheduled workshops	• Employed facilitators may face challenges in the flexibility of schedules as workshops generally occur during evenings and weekends • If staff are teaching frequently and have other job responsibilities, burnout may occur	• More likely to believe in overall program goals and organizational mission
Subcontractor	• Contractors are committed to specific tasks and responsibilities • Can be replaced if not meeting contract requirements • Have high level of expertise or specialized skill set	• May not stay involved in program • Limited knowledge of overall program requirements • May be a limited pool of individuals who meet the criteria for this position	• Knowledge and experience level that program could not afford with full-time employee • Can add instant credibility to a new program based on his or her reputation • Success and accountability of contractor will help to determine contract renewal
Volunteer	• Motivated by something other than monetary compensation • Organizations can train many volunteers in a cost-effective manner in order to account for inevitable drop-off or lack of productivity	• Reliability and dependability can become issues because of volunteer status • Requires staff oversight and policies just like traditional staff, but enforcement is a challenge	• Volunteer who is passionate about helping couples to strengthen their marriage is priceless

(See **Chapter 7: Program Management** for more information on managing volunteer facilitators.)

Where to Find Qualified Marriage Educators

Hire staff or recruit (paid) workshop leaders by placing free advertisements in church bulletins or community organization newsletters, or on job boards at local colleges with marriage/family therapy programs. You may also recruit workshop leaders through organizations that are well established in the community. This will bring greater credibility to your program. (This is ideal for volunteer or subcontracted workshop leaders, and is not recommended for recruiting full-time staff.) You can partner with organizations to build your network of facilitators. Consider searching the following areas:

- Faith-based organizations, including local churches, coalitions or ministries

- Private, non-profit, and government entities dedicated to strengthening families

- University professors involved in marriage and family therapy programs

Have them Audition

An MRE facilitator must be comfortable presenting to groups. He/she should not be shy or embarrassed when it comes to public speaking. Assemble a small panel as the audience and ask your educator candidate to come to the interview prepared to give a 10 minute presentation. If you/your staff are not engaged for 10 minutes or if the candidate gives a 5 or 20 minute presentation, this person is not a good fit for your program.

Additional Considerations When Hiring Facilitators

- What is the income level and education level of your target audience?
  - Have your facilitators had direct experience working with individuals and families within this socioeconomic bracket?
  - Do the facilitators have the necessary skills to connect with this audience?
- Are there segments of your target audience who require workshops to be delivered in another language?
  - Is there an existing translation of the curriculum in that language?
  - Do you have a pool of potential facilitators to conduct workshops in this preferred language?
  - How skilled are facilitators in relating culturally to this audience?
- How does the facilitator engage an audience?
  - Does he or she rely on statistics and data to tell a story?
  - Does he or she rely on all anecdotes to make a point?
  - Is he or she able to connect/relate and engage an audience?
  - Is he or she creative?
  - Is he or she funny?

- What "tools" is the facilitator comfortable using?
  - o Computer/PowerPoint
  - o Music
  - o Video clips (from television or movies)
  - o Cartoons
  - o Book excerpt
- What life experiences does the facilitator bring to the position?
  - o Can he or she maintain proper boundaries?
  - o How well does he or she tell relevant stories?
- Will your audience be better served by a male/female dyad?
  - o If so, how well would the potential team work together?
  - o How would they complement each other?
  - o Do you want to use a married couple as co-facilitators?

Having the right tools to recruit marriage educators and contract with or hire them is essential. Each community/program is unique, and additional things may need to be taken into consideration such as access to a vehicle, willingness to submit to a background check, or other hiring requirements as determined by your organization.

Listed below are some tools that will provide you with the language and structure you need to hire effective workshop leaders.

See the end of this chapter for a **Sample Marriage Educator Job Description and Essential Job Functions** worksheet and **Interview Questions for Marriage Educators** worksheet.

Facilitator Responsibilities

Programs will staff their own MRE services differently, but some core responsibilities of the marriage educator typically include:

- Complete specific curriculum training
- Understand and adhere to all regulations as outlined by organization, funder, and/or government entity
- Complete X number of workshops (may be a minimum or maximum you want them to commit to deliver)
- Make arrangements for a replacement in case of an emergency (and/or commit to a plan for contacting the program administrator)
- Read required supplemental materials (this may consist of organizational guidelines, references provided by curriculum developers, etc.)
- Participate in meetings with program manager or other facilitators as required
- Commit to availability outside of classroom to prepare for workshops (attend trainings, staff meetings, etc.)
- Understand co-facilitation or substitution expectations

Additional responsibilities may include:

- Record/report attendance data for each session/workshop
- Administer evaluation instrument
- Recruit participants (specify number needed as appropriate)

Responsibilities of the marriage education program may include:

- Supply facilitator training
- Provide necessary materials to conduct workshop (couple materials, food, participant supports, etc.)
- Supply registration and assessment forms
- Offer staff assistance/support to coordinate workshops
- Give referrals and follow-up services to participants, as desired
- Evaluate/give feedback on performance including presentation skills, co-facilitation skills, etc.
- Pay in a timely manner
- Provide other training as needed

Some programs work with facilitators already embedded in another organization. For example, a WIC program may offer MRE to its participants and have a designated space and support staff to offer a workshop. In this case, your MRE program may be providing funding, curriculum materials and general support while the educator will be responsible for recruitment, facilitation and follow-up. Multiple strategies can be designed for the role of facilitator.

Section 3
Establishing Boundaries for Marriage Educators

CHAPTER

SECTION 3

It only takes one visit to many marriage education classes to hear couples sing the praises of the program. Oftentimes, they're engaged by the ability of the marriage educators to teach a compelling and sometimes healing message. However, the boundary between the marriage educator and the participant has to remain clear in order for the program to be effective.

For facilitators teaching MRE, boundaries can be their best friend. Because a boundary by definition is a limit, it can help them maintain clarity, make good decisions, and keep them and everyone they serve safe. Here are some boundaries to consider for your facilitators.

Personal Boundaries

Personal Integrity

The best boundary a marriage educator can set for him/herself is to gain clarity about who he/she is and what he/she brings to the classroom. Marriage educators do not need to be licensed, nor do they need to be therapists, but they need to be professional. Educators should be role models about how to have healthy relationships. Programs can support this by setting standards and protocols for facilitators. For example, appropriate clothing expectations should be provided. Discourage facilitators from working with a participant of the opposite sex in a room alone; instead, ensure that a co-educator or other staff person is available. Touching between educators and participants should be limited to a handshake or a pat on the back. Facilitators need to be clear about their role with participants as well as being clear about their limits to act effectively as a marriage educator. Facilitators should not be alone with a member of the couple in a closed room, so ensure that common areas are available for meetings.

Professional Space

Facilitators should keep their work confined to the classroom as much as possible, depending on the protocol for the program. This keeps their role clearly defined and prevents gray areas. Therefore, most social engagements or visits to participants' homes would be considered boundary violations unless the program protocol specifies situations where this is safe to do. Check with colleagues periodically as boundary violations always set up invitations to work outside of the prescribed facilitator role.

Limit Personal Disclosure

Another sticky issue in marriage education is when and how to share personal information with participants. Facilitators may want to think carefully about this before entering a classroom, especially if they are married. They must decide what is appropriate to be shared based on the value it would add to the participants' experience, not the value it would add to their life or self-worth if it were told. Personal information is only valuable if it brings added benefit and positive role modeling to participants. For facilitators, the classroom isn't a place to shine,

share marital or relationship problems, or try to get participants to like or want to help them. They need to remember, this work is about the couples, not about them!

Maintain Relationship Integrity

Facilitators need to remember their role with each participant. If they already have a personal relationship, they will need to talk with the participant to see if they are comfortable with the facilitator teaching or if the participant would prefer to attend a different class. Some participants may see limited growth if they are concerned about disclosing relationship issues to a known facilitator in class. A facilitator's role in the classroom is marriage educator, not friend or counselor.

Professional Boundaries

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is probably the number one rule for any classroom and any MRE educator to follow. Since structure breeds safety in a healthy relationship, classroom rules should be introduced at the start of class in a way that establishes the tone and guidelines for participation. Participants must agree to maintain confidentiality and safety for their fellow participants. Do not forget that unless a participant gives the facilitator permission to discuss their issues in their absence, the facilitator is not at liberty to discuss anything specific with their peers or with other professionals. Avoid negative conversations with a participant about an absent spouse. Be sure to keep all documentation of class attendance and participation in a secure place such as a locked file cabinet.

The Couple as Your Client

Challenges can occur when a facilitator visits with one partner a time. A facilitator may have difficulty controlling this, but if you are approached by one partner, ask if he/she would like to include his/her significant other in the conversation. Another strategy for respecting the boundaries of the couple relationship is to set the following ground rule within the class: if a participant would like to share a personal story with the class, it is better to share it if the spouse is physically there in the class. (See **Chapter 8: Working with Couples** for more information on coaching couples.)

Curriculum Integrity

Most marriage education curricula have a copyright and are written specifically to communicate a message in a certain way. Being effectively trained to follow the curriculum closely helps keep your facilitators on task and maintains the integrity of the program. The breadth of the relationship issues we deal with today can be overwhelming. Typically, an MRE class is not a place where delving into 'hot topics' is necessary or recommended unless it is included in the curriculum. Staying clear of sensitive issues in classes can help keep the participants focused and help protect them from any uncomfortable discussion.

Education, Not Therapy

It is important to remember that marriage education is not therapy. Marriage education is about delivering a message, that when used well, can help transform a person's relationship. Facilitators can grow close with participants as they learn about their lives, their children, their pains, and their victories. However, while facilitators are showing compassion and empathy, they must remember where their job ends. Even if they are licensed professionals, in this capacity their job is to impart skills, not to do couple-specific problem solving. All programs should keep a list of respected professionals available for referrals when needed and make referrals in a timely manner to get participants the additional assistance they need.

Safety

To insure the safety of participants, it is very important to have an understanding of abuse issues and domestic violence and have a relationship with trained professionals in your community for referrals. Many programs have a domestic violence protocol in place that includes instructions on how a marriage educator should work with exposed domestic violence issues. Consider other protocols for addressing risk issues such as child abuse or substance abuse to ensure the safety of participants and their family members.

Disclosures

Educate all facilitators about mandatory disclosure rules in your state. These rules usually pertain to child abuse, domestic violence, and criminal activity.

Marriage educators must establish personal boundaries with the members of their class. An educator should always be aware of his or her role within and outside of the classroom. Confidentiality, maintaining curriculum integrity, and understanding the parameters of your program's curriculum and eligibility requirements can help set limits. Boundaries protect both the marriage educator and program participant.

CHAPTER 6 WORKSHEET
Sample Job Description and Essential Job Functions

Marriage and Relationship Educator/Facilitator Job Description:

These individuals will facilitate or co-facilitate MRE workshops. This is a part-time position to facilitate the curriculum on weekends and evenings. Each facilitator will be hired based on his/her ability to demonstrate excellent presentation and people skills and a willingness to lead dynamic workshops. Experience working with [couples, parents, youth, etc.] in a group setting preferred. Background in or passion for strengthening families is necessary. They report directly to the Program Manager.

Essential Job Functions:

- Attend [curriculum] training and 5 hours of additional program training.

- Lead dynamic workshops for [program name] couples/participants.

- Attend and participate in monthly Marriage and Relationship Education planning meetings and additional training sessions as needed.

- Maintain workshop data, including attendance rosters, program support distribution, evaluations and other reporting documents as needed.

- Co-facilitate [curriculum].

- Aid in program growth by providing feedback to Program Manager on participants' responses to the program.

- Perform other duties as assigned.

CHAPTER 6 WORKSHEET
Interview Questions for Marriage Educators

(Interview questions provided by Public Strategies, Family Expectations Program.)

General

1. Tell us about yourself.
2. What do you know about our organization?
3. How did you hear about this opening, and what encouraged you to apply?
4. What interests you about this position?

Curriculum

5. Have you ever taught from a set curriculum?
6. How would you describe your teaching style?
7. Have you ever worked with low-income and/or diverse populations?
8. Describe your public speaking skills or experience.
9. What was your most recent or favorite presentation?
10. How do make your presentations exciting?
11. What role do you normally take on a team?
12. Are you an advocate for marriage?

Personal Interests

13. What do you like to do during your free time?
14. What was the most recent book you read?
15. What is your favorite joke?
16. Where did you go on your last vacation?

Interactions with Participants

17. Attendance is important in our program. What ideas do you have to encourage couples to return each week?
18. You are facilitating a workshop and notice that one couple is sitting in the back of the classroom and not participating. What methods would you use to engage this couple?
19. One couple approaches you after class and says marriage is not an option for them. How would you respond to this couple?
20. One couple in your group discusses very personal issues during a session. How would you maintain appropriate group dynamics in this situation?
21. *This question should be used for candidates with a strong faith-based background:* I noticed that you have a strong faith-based background. Since this is a government-funded program, how would you separate your religious beliefs from the curriculum?

CHAPTER 6 WORKSHEET
Teaching Styles Assessment/Quiz

This brief quiz is a self-assessment tool to help you identify your facilitators' teaching styles. Have your facilitator read each statement and decide whether it is true or false.

_____ 1. It is imperative that class start and end exactly on time.

_____ 2. A teacher should keep a physical distance between him/herself and the students.

_____ 3. Teachers should always be prepared with all the facts before they enter the classroom.

_____ 4. Never waste students' time with other students' questions.

_____ 5. Participants love a detailed PowerPoint slide for every point a teacher makes.

_____ 6. Participants should know nothing about a teacher's personal life.

_____ 7. Before one can be a credible teacher of marriage or parenting education, one must have his or her own life completely figured out.

_____ 8. The curriculum must be followed exactly as it was written to be effective.

_____ 9. If students drop out it is because they are just not ready to learn.

_____10. After sitting through one group session, participants should be able to make dramatic changes to their lives.

_____11. It is important to become friends with students so they feel comfortable in class.

_____12. People have busy lives so it is no big deal if they are late to class.

_____13. Even if something else is planned, it is always best to go with the flow.

_____14. It is OK for participants to become leaders in the group.

_____15. A teacher should make the class meet each individual's needs.

_____16. Participants can often give their facilitators good ideas on how to manage a facilitator's own problems.

_____17. If a participant drops out, the facilitator should consider it a personal failure and wonder why he or she was not liked.

_____18. Classes can be like large group discussions and sometimes like many disconnected discussions.

_____19. It is okay to hang out with students after class.

_____20. Planning for classes takes too much time and just interferes with the natural process of the group.

_____21. One of the most important things a teacher does is to help participants feel safe and comfortable.

_____22. It is important to stick to the curriculum, but understand it is going to look different with each group.

_____23. Sharing some past struggles with participants gives a facilitator credibility.

_____24. Participants should understand that they are not friends with their facilitator, but should also know that their facilitator cares.

_____25. Classes should be regularly updated with well researched information that is relevant to the topic.

_____26. Although it is sometimes uncomfortable, it is best to not let the most talkative person take over the group.

_____27. Change is hard. After being active in a group, participants are more able to make the changes as they see fit.

_____28. A facilitator should share when he or she disagrees with a participant, but should never want him or her to feel judged.

_____29. Class boundaries like start and end times should be respected, but anyone can have a bad day. If someone is chronically tardy, it is best to talk with them individually.

_____30. Always take time for questions. Students can learn a great deal from each other.

Scoring: Count and record the number of statements where you answered "true" in the following categories:

Questions 1 – 10: number of "true" responses _____

Mostly "true" responses on questions 1 through 10 indicates that you have "instructor" type tendencies. You tend to be very organized and thorough in your teaching. Be sure you are approachable with your students and integrate engaging activities into your classes.

Questions 11 – 20: number of "true" responses _____

Mostly "true" responses on questions 11 through 20 indicates that you have "colleague" type teaching tendencies. Your students often find you approachable and fun. Do your best to assure a structured environment in your classroom.

Questions 21 – 30: number of "true" responses _____

Mostly "true" responses on questions 21 through 30 indicates that you have embraced a facilitator style of teaching. This means that while you understand your role as a leader in the group, you also believe your participants have a great deal to contribute.

CHAPTER
6

This assessment should be completed on your own. After reading each statement, put a check mark in the column that is most like you. The scores will be tallied at the end to determine your learning style.

Check either *often*, *sometimes* or *rarely* for each statement below.

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
1. I can remember more about a topic when I listen to a lecture with information, explanation and discussion.			
2. I prefer information written on a flip chart or board and assigned readings.			
3. I like to write things down and take notes for review.			
4. I prefer to use posters, models or actual practice when learning.			
5. I need explanations for diagrams, graphs and directions.			
6. I enjoy working with my hands and making things.			
7. I am skillful with and enjoy creating graphs and charts.			
8. I can identify patterns of sound.			
9. I remember best when I write things down several times.			
10. I can understand and follow directions on a map.			
11. I understand better when I listen to lectures and tapes.			
12. I play with coins or keys in my pocket.			
13. I learn to spell better by repeating words aloud than by writing them down.			
14. I understand a news item better when I read it in the paper than when I hear it on the radio.			
15. I chew gum, fidget or snack when I study.			
16. I feel the best way to remember something is to picture it in your mind.			
17. I learn spelling by "finger spelling" or "air writing" words.			
18. I would rather listen to a good lecture or a speech than read about the same material in a textbook or manual.			

19. I am good at solving jigsaw puzzles and mazes.			
20. I hold objects in my hand when I am learning something.			
21. I prefer listening to the news on the radio rather than reading about it in the paper or on the internet.			
22. I obtain information on interesting topics by reading pertinent materials.			
23. I feel very comfortable making contact with others by shaking hands and/or hugging.			
24. I follow oral directions better than written ones.			

Scoring

To score the Learning Styles Assessment, assign the number value that corresponds to your answers to the statements above. Then, add the numbers and enter the total on the line. The category with the highest score is your dominant learning style. This is the style of learning where you generally feel most comfortable and learn best.

Often = 5   *Sometimes=3*   *Rarely=1*

Visual

Question #	Points
2.	
3.	
7.	
10.	
14.	
16.	
19.	
22.	

Total: _____

Auditory

Question #	Points
1.	
5.	
8.	
11.	
13.	
18.	
21.	
24.	

Total: _____

Kinesthetic

Question #	Points
4.	
6.	
9.	
12.	
15.	
17.	
20.	
23.	

Total: _____

CHAPTER 7
PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

A strategic and well-managed program is critical to long-term success within the marriage and relationship education field. As a program manager, you will need to prioritize staff hiring and training, supervising and training educators, and establishing practices to prevent staff turnover. Additionally, you will need to establish program protocols for how to identify and handle special issues as well as develop ways to track program benchmarks and outcomes.

Section 1: Staffing Your MRE Program
    Key Points:
- Depending on the size of the program and numbers of participants to be served, consider hiring staff to fill a range of program functions

Section 2: Hiring/Managing MRE Staff
    Key Points:
- Identify specific attributes and skills preferred for each job function and screen accordingly
- Attract the right candidates
- Hire staff who believe in the program mission and have the skills to contribute to program success
- Engage in regular supervision with staff

Section 3: Training Staff
Key Points:
- Make both new hire and ongoing staff training a priority at all levels of your organization
- Develop a training plan that covers key aspects of your program
- Offer "booster sessions" for your facilitators to stay up-to-date on their skills
- Use a variety of training methods to address various backgrounds and levels of experience
- Distinguish between presentation skills and facilitation skills
- Evaluate performance by asking participants to give confidential feedback
- Communicate feedback to educators to promote growth

Section 4: Preventing Staff Turnover
Key Points:
- Keep staff inspired and feeling valued to improve performance and prevent turnover
- Provide clear job descriptions and measurable performance goals to ensure expectations are met and to increase staff satisfaction
- Cost of turnover rises depending on the level of the position
- To keep good volunteers performing well, they should be treated as staff

Section 5: Working with Volunteers

Key Points:

- Most volunteers are not actively searching, but must be presented with an opportunity
- Volunteers complete the same application/interview process as a paid facilitator
- Written policies support your volunteers and hold them accountable for success
- Recognize and show appreciation for your volunteer facilitators

Section 6: Developing Benchmarks

- Establish ongoing client recruitment benchmarks to manage workshop numbers
- Benchmarks can be quantitative or qualitative
- Benchmarks may have to be refined over time

Section 7: Developing Program Protocols

- Determine how you will identify and respond to issues such as domestic violence, child welfare, mental health and substance use, and other potential risks
- Identify where issues may arise within your program and identify experts at the local or state level with whom you can partner to define the types of guidance and support needed
- Train staff on protocols and resources available, with a specific focus on how to interface with both partners and clients

Section 1
Staffing Your MRE Program

While there is no standard way a program should be organized, in order to be successful, most programs will need to hire staff to fill a range of program functions such as program management, supervision, recruitment, workshop coordination and facilitation and administrative/data support. Depending on the size of the program and numbers of participants to be served, some programs will hire separate employees for each program function, and some will assign multiple functions to one staff member or hire full-time or part-time staff for various roles.

Section 2
Hiring/Training Staff

Attracting the Right Candidates

Hiring people is never easy. By being clear in who/what you are looking for, you are more likely to attract and select the right candidates. Many MRE programs are likely to appeal to women more than men. If you are serving couples or co-ed groups of young people or adults, you should strive for gender balance in your program. Review your job descriptions, pay structure, and qualification requirements to ensure they appeal to both sexes. Men may be more attracted to a job that builds skills, teaches concrete strategies and can improve parenting for mothers and fathers than one that is generally described as helping to strengthen families. Emphasize the opportunities to be part of a team or to lead to appeal to both genders. Be clear in your job description about expectations, such as non-traditional work hours and this job's role in the overall program. Potential candidates may not be familiar with MRE so provide a short description or a website where they can go to learn more. Set out any requirements your organization has for background checks, drug testing, criminal history, etc.

Qualities of a Strong Candidate for Your Program

While each role requires specific areas of expertise, there are certain universal qualities programs should look for in staff to create a well-functioning environment. First and foremost, candidates should strongly support the goals and mission of the program. Such candidates will be advocates for the program both in and out of the office and will have a better attitude about their work. They should have strong interpersonal and communication skills, so that you can ensure all interaction with participants and partners will be positive. Further, they should be willing to be trained in the curriculum used by the program, so they are not only well-versed in the skill sets being taught, but they also model the skills daily with staff and participants. Finally, they should be flexible to the changing needs of a growing program as course corrections need to be made along the way. Many people, especially those who have been in the workplace for many years, are not trained to easily adapt to new protocols and procedures, temporary shifts in responsibilities, and to non-traditional work hours when needed. Where applicable, these attributes and skills should be both clearly communicated upfront and assessed throughout the interview and training process.

Screening Candidates for Each Position

Program Managers will need to identify candidates for each role based on education level, previous experience, "fit" within the organization and mission, and eagerness to perform job functions. As with any hire, it is important to pre-determine the skill set and personality-type preferred for each role and assess these attributes in candidates through the interview process. In order to determine these attributes, some programs will administer a short personality assessment or rely on candidate interviews and on reference interviews to confirm what they have been told. For example, if you are hiring for a recruitment position and have determined

that being outgoing and having a willingness to strategically spend time out in the community is important to success in the role, a personal interview, a personality assessment and/or personal references can confirm this skill in a candidate or provide information that may help you see that the candidate may be better suited in another position or should not be hired at all.

Matching the right person to the job is half the battle; giving an aptitude test and/or a personality profile can help with this task. While this adds costs up-front, it can save the organization money later. When pairing facilitators, these tools can be very helpful so that the skills of facilitators are well balanced and represent a good mix of fun/engaging, passionate, compassionate, good facilitation skills, and loyalty to the curriculum.

Often the "passion" factor can make the hiring choice easier when deliberating about a potential staff member. Many interviewees will have their own life experiences from which to draw upon that makes this job not only important to them, but also may help them handle difficult issues that may come up when working in an MRE program. However, program managers need to be aware that passion alone does not, in most cases, make a successful staff member. Always look for a balance between motivation and skill.

Potential candidates must understand that most MRE programs require non-traditional work hours for many positions. If you are recruiting and delivering services to couples, staff will likely have to work weekends and/or evenings at times to meet the needs of the clients. The need for flexible scheduling should be explored when selecting staff.

Policies can be written so that internal searches within the organization will be done first in the hiring process before candidates from outside are considered. A lateral move or an upgrade in a job can be seen as a reward for outstanding performance, and a message that the organization values its workers.

Supervision

Program managers and supervisors should commit to regular supervision with all MRE staff as this time allows both parties to discuss concerns or areas for growth as well as celebrate areas of particular skill and success. Performance criteria should be established, communicated and monitored through these meetings. Weekly or regular meetings may consist of discussions on topics such as:

- Workload and/or barriers to job performance
- Productivity expectations vs. outcomes
- Reinforcement of program protocols
- Case file, event or task list review and discussion (as appropriate)
- Any disciplinary or personnel concerns

The use of performance-based work agreements or contracts can help make certain that expectations for performance and outcomes are clear to everyone (this is especially true if you use contracted employees). Having these in place helps both the staff person and supervisor identify strengths and weaknesses in order to succeed in reaching expected outcomes and allows for more effective supervision. For additional feedback on a worker's performance, remember to tap into one of the greatest sources of feedback – the MRE participants themselves.

Regular supervision must be a priority that is clearly supported from the top of the organization down. Often, the need for regularly scheduled supervision can be pushed to the side in honor of other events that unexpectedly occur. Letting this important relationship slide can have negative effects on a program as some issues can be addressed preventatively rather than in a crisis. Regularly scheduled supervision times will help with predictability, clear communication and planning, and can help keep staff turnover low.

Regular supervision also makes the yearly performance reviews easier and less threatening as these reviews are usually what triggers yearly merit increases (not to be confused with cost of living increases). The reliability of this review process can be improved by getting feedback from peers, community-based agency staff, and consumers of services, which creates a "360 degree" review. The annual review is another way to give rewards and strengthen positive attitudes.

Addressing Issues with Educators

Use supervision meetings as an opportunity to integrate your evaluation data into your program management strategy. Any questions, concerns or compliments raised by participants can be a tool for giving praise or discussing opportunities for improvement. Good supervision, observation of skills, and structured feedback are important for the growth of your facilitators. Regardless of how much training you provide, you may experience challenges with some MRE facilitators from time to time. Address facilitator behaviors that could impact the effectiveness of your program, such as sharing inappropriate personal details or deviating significantly from the curriculum. Be supportive, but remind them of program expectations and consequences that could be enforced if necessary.

Not everyone is cut out for a role as a facilitator, so it may be necessary to move a facilitator to a more appropriate role (i.e., hosting, coaching, and recruiting). If they are dedicated to the program, the facilitator might find his or her "fit" doing something else within the program.

One way to evaluate a facilitator is to have participants complete a confidential feedback form that rates the facilitator on his/her performance. Questions could ask about any number of things such as:

- Did the instructor give clear explanations of the material?
- Did the instructor relate the program to real-life situations?
- Did you enjoy this instructor's presentation style?
- Did the instructor answer questions clearly?

The respondents rate these statements on a five point scale that measures positive or negative responses to each statement (commonly known as a Likert Scale). This feedback can help you identify trends in a facilitator's performance which you can share with the facilitator to promote growth.

Some marriage educators might be "naturals." Others may need a bit more assistance. Either way, training is important for every aspect of a program in order to deliver top notch services. For the best outcomes, tailor your training to your educators' individual needs. (See **Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation** for more information.)

Section 3
Training Staff

Whether staff are full or part time, contractors or volunteers, proper training is vital for success. Each staff member and volunteer represents your marriage and relationship education program. These individuals must have the knowledge and skills to appropriately respond to questions about the curriculum, identify unhealthy (and potentially violent) relationships, set appropriate boundaries, speak to the goals of the program and connect on a personal level with participants. This is no small task, so quality training should be an on-going priority for successful MRE programs.

In order to perform their best and be set up for success, new staff should receive training on various topics, such as policies and procedures, relationship curriculum, domestic violence protocols as well as instruction specific to their role within the organization. Current staff, on the other hand, may need to receive annual refresher trainings on specific topics to encourage continuous improvement and to address gaps in services identified by managers and supervisors. In this line of work, which is so interactive and people oriented, it is not helpful to assume that giving an employee things to read for training is enough. Integrating what they are reading and learning with their team is most helpful. It is important to note, however, that training need not only be in the form of an all-day group presentation, but may consist of one-on-one instruction, a short policy overview at the end of a standard staff meeting, role-playing about potential issues, or an out-of-office professional development seminar offered in the community that is applicable to staff responsibilities.

Additionally, shadowing and observing staff or assigning a mentor staff may be an important instructional and training aid. This is a way for veteran staff to impart real-time knowledge to new trainees. Further, less skilled staff can glean additional and preferred strategies for handling issues with which they may have previously struggled.

A common pitfall for many programs is to train too few instructors. This decision, while seemly efficient and financially prudent, can lead to instructor burn-out, canceled classes, poor retention rates, incomplete evaluation data and lower outcome/impact results.

Develop a Training Plan

When you hire/recruit MRE staff, clarify the expectation that participation in training is on-going and required regardless of skill level or previous experience. For many, this work will be somewhat different from anything they've done before and will require initial and ongoing learning. Develop a training plan that covers key aspects of your program such as understanding policies/procedures, gaining competence in the curriculum, effective facilitation, and understanding learning styles. The following elements should be considered in the plan:

Policies/procedures	Cover the basics. Make sure your educators understand the general program procedures, their roles and responsibilities and any protocols that may be in place. Train your educators on the technical aspects, expectations such as attire, use of ancillary material, how to handle special circumstances such as on-site injury or disclosure of abuse, and/or how to troubleshoot when equipment is not functioning properly.
Connecting with your audience	Educators should understand the target audience your program serves well. This will help them connect with and adjust the presentation to fit the needs of their participants. Helping them understand how to personally relate while still maintaining professional boundaries can also increase the connection with and enjoyment of the participants.
Special issues	Special attention should be given to cultural values, beliefs, customs and the language used by the audience. Trainings on a specific topic or issues are best left to the experts, whether they are part of your organization or are a third party. For example, you may want to identify experts in the community to train your workshop leaders on topics like domestic violence, substance abuse and about special populations such as refugees and military families.

Facilitator Training

Just as a facilitator must tailor his or her curriculum to the audience, your training strategy should be tailored to the educators' specific needs and level of experience. To accomplish this, consider using a variety of approaches to train your educators. Facilitator trainings are typically delivered in a group setting. In addition to being more cost effective, group settings provide opportunities for participants to talk to and learn from one another. You may also consider incorporating individualized trainings to fine-tune the skills of your educators. Using tools such as practice sessions, videotaping presentations, reviewing audience evaluations, one-on-one feedback and coaching may be helpful as well.

Curriculum Trainings

All staff should be (at least partially) trained in the curriculum you use in your MRE programs. This ensures other staff can describe the MRE services and provides staff with a common language. You may be able to have your educators train other staff members on the curriculum or practice teaching various MRE skills to small groups of program staff. For programs that can afford it, there is a benefit to investing time and money in good curriculum training in that it helps improve curriculum fidelity and standardizes the program. (See **Chapter 4: Curriculum** for more information on curriculum training.)

Successful programs know that the training for facilitators never ends. It is a good idea to offer additional classes or "booster sessions" for your facilitators to stay up-to-date on their skills and curriculum updates. These classes also teach them new ideas to keep their presentations fresh and engaging. These should be provided on a monthly or quarterly basis. Topics for ongoing training sessions might include avoiding burn-out; using icebreakers and experiential activities to teach concepts and skills; and using technology to simplify or increase engagement in presentations. Curriculum updates or enhancement training should be offered on an as-needed basis.

Distinguish Between Presentation Skills and Facilitation Skills

Although these skills are not mutually exclusive, they are different. Presentation skills describe one's ability to effectively convey the content of the curriculum in a fun and engaging way that maintains the participants' attention. To increase presentation competence, train your educators on effective public speaking skills and on how to incorporate humor, stories and other engaging examples. Facilitation skills on the other hand, refer to one's ability to manage group dynamics and encourage participation and interaction among the participants

Another way to help is to pair a new educator with a stronger, seasoned presenter so that each educator can fully develop the skill areas needed to create more balanced presentation teams. Continue seeking and providing opportunities for new or less confident facilitators to gain experience and apply their skills (i.e., a public speaking club such as Toastmasters). Practice is the key to successful facilitation and presentation. And, successful facilitation and presentation is crucial to the delivery of successful MRE programs.

Section 4
Preventing Staff Turnover

Staff turnover is one of the leading concerns among employers because losing experienced staff can affect the ability to meet program and organizational goals and cost a lot of money. The cost of turnover rises depending on the level of the position with the organization. These costs can range from 30 to 50% of yearly salaries for entry level jobs, up to 150% for mid-level, and as much as 400% for senior jobs. Especially in MRE programs where up front training costs are high, it is important to retain good staff to achieve good program success.

Keeping Staff

Effective hiring habits, high worker satisfaction, and ongoing performance feedback are essential to keeping staff (this is true for full time staff, contractors and volunteers). Sending the message that the organization cares about staff should be a priority. This is especially important within marriage and relationship education where services are often voluntary and recruitment can be a challenge. Keeping staff inspired and feeling valued can help improve their performance as well keep them positively engaged as employees.

Job performance goals and results, when applied and reviewed consistently, can help with team building for those teams that have clear expectations for producing certain amounts of service on a weekly or monthly basis (i.e. recruiters, case managers, etc.). Because these teams are accountable for achieving these expectations, rewards for performance are often used for motivation. While verbal praise and certificates can often work as rewards, cash bonuses for outstanding performance given to units or departments within an organization can aid team cohesiveness and support, and raise performance levels.

Another form of reward for staff is the opportunity to participate in professional staff development workshops. Not only is this a way for an organization to show how staff are valued, but it also provides a vehicle for a staff person's (or volunteer's) skills to be improved. This, in turn, strengthens the organization.

How staff and volunteers feel about their work environment will have a tremendous impact on their job performance as well as on their desire to work for the organization. Positive and caring attitudes between coworkers at all levels of the organization create a trusting and supportive environment. Make sure staff members are "practicing what they preach" by using the relationship skills your MRE program teaches in order to create that environment.

Turnover of educators or case managers negatively affects the couple/family and can result in poorer outcomes. Efforts should be made to receive advance notice of turnovers so as to offer the staff member/volunteer and the couple/family an opportunity to shift workers in a smooth transition. Shared training responsibilities and cross training across jobs may help ease transitional burdens as well.

Section 5
Working with Volunteers

Recruiting the right people as volunteers to facilitate or staff your workshops can increase your program's ability to reach more couples and families without the added expenses of hiring additional staff. The following volunteer management techniques will help to assist your organization in more effectively managing volunteers for the benefit of your organization, your volunteers, and the couples and families you serve.

Volunteers are essentially unpaid staff. To manage them, you need to apply the same basic human resource concepts as you do for paid staff. Volunteers need clear roles, accountability and structure. Since volunteers do not receive a paycheck, program staff needs to identify and respond to each volunteer's individual motivation. They cannot be taken for granted; they must feel the work they do is of value.

Volunteer Recruitment

According to Independent Sector, a leadership forum for foundations, charities, and corporate giving programs, 44 percent of those who volunteered in 2007 did so not because they were looking for the opportunity, but because they were asked. When looking for volunteers, don't overlook the people in your church, neighborhood or professional networks.

Consider the following recruiting strategies when seeking volunteers for your MRE program:

- Reach out to participants who have completed your program. Those who were very active in participating may want to give back to the program.

- Post volunteer openings on the bulletin boards of organizations with which you already have relationships (e.g., churches, neighborhood community centers, etc.).

- Contact local faith leaders for recommendations.

- Recruit through local colleges and universities. Students often need community service hours. Post requests for volunteers on dormitory or student cafeteria bulletin boards. Career services or student life offices may also be able to help.

- Contact social service degree program chairs and ask if they have any student recommendations. Many Masters degree programs in child and family studies require students to do internships or volunteer.

- Contact neighborhood associations, churches, civic groups and other organizations that issue newsletters to their network of contacts. Ask if you could post your request for volunteers in their newsletters or listservs.

- If your program targets a specific community, recruit from that community when possible.

Selecting Volunteers

A clear selection process shows that your organization values this position. Requiring volunteers to complete an application and participate in a panel interview allows you to review written and verbal communication skills. An interview panel should include at least one person in a leadership or supervisory position and at least one staff member who will work directly with the volunteer. This will allow for different perspectives and increase the likelihood of selecting a volunteer who will fit well with your organization's mission and values as well as with your current staff. If volunteers will be leading an MRE group, the interview should include an opportunity for them to demonstrate their facilitation skills. Use the interview time to assess their availability and motivation to teach in the long-term, especially since you will be investing in their training.

Volunteer Support and Infrastructure

Volunteers, especially those who teach your classes, are often a main contact for your program participants, so you want to work with people who will represent your program well. They have the power to make or break your organization's reputation. A solid system for volunteers that is both supportive and holds the volunteer accountable is needed for success. The following elements are highly encouraged for developing a successful and supportive infrastructure:

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	A written MOU provides clear expectations, responsibilities and shows the system for accountability. It also serves as a reference point if there are questions. It should be detailed but user friendly. A written MOU should define the organization's expectations of the volunteer, as well as what the volunteer can expect from the organization. Involving the volunteer in the development of the document leads to greater buy-in.
Written Policies and Procedures	Like new employees, new volunteers need to know what the rules are and how the organization is run. Provide copies of written policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs). If your organization doesn't have them in writing, consider writing them to provide consistency. Written SOPs allow your organization to run smoothly even when key staff members are gone. SOPs need to be clear, but they do not have to be long.
Open Communication	Regular meetings, emails and "touching base" phone calls can help keep communication lines open and prevent any problems. Open communication also helps volunteers feel that what they think is valuable. Listen to their feedback and look for ways to use their ideas.
Ongoing Training	In addition to any necessary certification or curriculum training, ongoing training supports workshop expectations. Training may be offered on organizational policies such as handling domestic violence or child abuse, working with faith-based providers or even CPR or emergency procedures. Look for other free professional development opportunities for your volunteers.
Single Point of Contact	If possible, one person in your organization should be responsible for volunteer support and guidance as this provides greater consistency and helps to manage their work. Your volunteer will also feel more connected to your program if they know who to call if they cannot make it to an event, or if they have questions.
Performance Review	Even though volunteers are unpaid staff, they should still have performance targets. As with your paid staff, build in a performance review process for your volunteers. This will show volunteers the importance you place on their positions and give them feedback on how they are performing for your program.

Keeping your Volunteers

Thanking your volunteers is important. Since they don't receive a paycheck, volunteers deserve other means of recognition or credit for their work and commitment to your program. Yearly appreciation events are helpful but not enough. Recognition doesn't have to be expensive, just sincere. Look for small ways to recognize your volunteers throughout the year. Consider the following ideas:

- Highlight them in your newsletter or on your website.
- Offer token appreciation gifts like coffee mugs or tote bags.
- Provide service pins for volunteer hours.
- Create a "Wall of Fame" bulletin board in your lobby.

Volunteers want to make a difference. Creating a setting with the right balance of management and appreciation can increase their ability to help your organization meet its goals.

Many MRE programs use a volunteer model where "staff" may be paid a stipend or receive free training. To keep good volunteers performing well, they treat them as staff equivalents. Volunteers play a critical role in complementing the work of full time employees. This is especially true in the marriage and relationship education field. Good volunteers will often express a passion for the work they are being asked to do. To have a volunteer feel like he/she is a key part of the organization is important.

Section 6
Developing Program Protocols

Programs should establish protocols or policies describing each program component and how that component operates. Protocols can answer questions about who does what and how they should do it. They also describe what the protocol is for, special circumstances as well as for how new processes are identified, submitted and approved.

Specifically, however, protocols will describe how program staff are to address potential risks or issues which may arise during the course of program activities. In working with couples and families, the most likely risk related issues will be around domestic violence, child welfare and mental health/substance abuse.

Identify Local Experts to Inform Development

The first step to developing effective protocols for your program is to identify experts at the local or state level with whom you can partner. If you do not have a pre-existing relationship with local domestic violence, child welfare and mental health/substance abuse programs, contact state agencies for information about local programs in your area or check community resource directories. For a listing of state domestic violence coalitions, see: http://www.ncadv.org/resources/StateCoalitionList.php.

To begin working on these protocols, spend time with partners sharing information about your program, the specific healthy relationship activities you plan to provide, and ways in which your program can meet their needs and vice versa. Take time to answer questions about your plans and to respond to questions and concerns partners might have. Remember that this work may be new and concerning to them given their experience, and you will need to plan to both understand their point of view and communicate the ways in which your program may be prepared to address potential issues and/or implement screening strategies.

Define the types of guidance and support you hope to receive from the partners with whom you are working. For example, experts can assist you by:

- Consulting on your current responses to risks within your agency (e.g. policies, procedures, written materials designed to identify and respond to the needs of domestic violence victims).
- Reviewing marriage/relationship education activities to ensure that safety and confidentiality issues are addressed.
- In the case of domestic violence, identifying appropriate responses when past or current domestic violence is disclosed during recruitment or intake, or by program participants at any time during program participation.
- Providing training for program staff on red flags and how to identify risks.
- Educate your staff on mandatory reporting requirements, and other legal safeguards for working with various populations.

Make sure your program budgets for the financial or other resources needed to support the involvement of experts in your program design and implementation.

Laying the Groundwork for DV Protocol Development

Information for this section provided by Anne Menard, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence for the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center.

In addition to general protocols about potential risks, MRE programs will need to have a detailed domestic violence protocol. Domestic violence is present in some unhealthy relationships and all staff need to be educated about DV and prepared to respond appropriately. In order to have an effective DV protocol, review the information about how your program recruits, accepts and works with individuals or couples. By doing this, you can begin to identify where domestic violence issues may be more likely to be disclosed. The following questions will help get these discussions started:

- How will potential participants for your program be identified and hear about the program you are offering? Are these families you already know a lot about (because you are already working with them) or are they new to you? Are you relying on referrals from other community agencies?

- How and by whom will the MRE program be introduced to individual clients?

- How do individuals and couples "get into" the program? Can they just show up, or is there a formal intake process? If intake into the MRE program will be conducted by partner agencies, what is their current experience identifying and addressing domestic violence issues among clients?

- What happens when disclosures of domestic violence occur? How are you defining "domestic violence"?

- What happens when a disclosure of domestic violence is accompanied by interest in participating in the healthy marriage and relationship activities you are providing? When might it be appropriate, if ever, for a domestic violence victim to participate in an MRE program, with or without the partner who has been abusive? When might healthy co-parenting be a more appropriate goal than healthy marriage for couples who have experienced violence?

- What types of domestic violence training will staff need to respond to disclosures whenever they occur?

- How will domestic violence disclosure information be shared among the project partners? How will the confidentiality and privacy of domestic violence victims be maintained?

- How do the curricula and other program materials to be used in the program address domestic violence issues? Is domestic violence addressed directly in course material? Is there any content that might increase risks for someone in an abusive relationship (such as scenes/scenarios involving emotionally or physically abusive couples)?

Developing and Implementing Your DV Protocol

Clarify the role(s) that domestic violence experts will play in the design and implementation of marriage and relationship education activities, as well as in any evaluation activities. Working with your partners, and using the DV Protocol "Blueprint" as a guide, describe in detail how you will identify and respond to domestic violence issues within your program. The domestic violence protocol developed by each MRE program should be site-specific and tailored to reflect the particular characteristics of the community and program. Develop a draft for review and comment by all project partners.

Critique Your Protocol

- How will your marriage and relationship education program ensure that there are safe, confidential opportunities to disclose domestic violence and that the decision to participate in your program is voluntary and informed?

- What steps will be taken to ensure that domestic violence issues are safely and routinely identified and appropriately addressed by well-trained personnel?

Finalize all protocols and distribute to program partners and staff. Ensure that all staff and volunteers (including those at partner agencies) who have a role in implementing the protocols receive adequate training. Use staff or project meetings to support implementation of the protocol and identify implementation issues.

Review the protocols at 6 months (and annually thereafter) to identify modifications or enhancements that might be needed. Key partners should be included in this review. The protocols should also be reviewed and modified as necessary if new program components are added or the program is significantly changed. (See **Chapter 2: Developing and Engaging Service Delivery Partnerships** for more information on partnerships.)

The guidelines can apply to the development of other protocols. Specific protocols may need to be developed based on funding requirements, or the setting in which you operate, especially if your MRE program is in corrections or participants are mandated to attend by a judge.

Section 7
Developing Benchmarks

Information for this section was informed by the Supporting Healthy Marriage Toolkit.

Benchmarks can be quantitative (measuring the number of couples who received information about the program, who scheduled an intake or completed an intake) or qualitative (measured by observation or gathering input from couples). Benchmarks are a project management tool that helps programs monitor progress toward goals. An easily accessible and user-friendly data management system can serve as a valuable tool for assisting staff with quantitative benchmark measurement and tracking.

Setting challenging yet realistic program goals is important; too many or unrealistically high benchmarks can make it difficult for staff to focus on key objectives and follow through. However, goals that don't challenge workers can lead to a status quo approach to performance. To achieve a good balance, benchmarks should be determined in consultation with staff members and based on numerous factors, including community influences and target population characteristics. Additionally, goals may have to be refined over time to maximize staff performance or reflect improvements in your services.

You may want to establish event or activity goals, and then divide them into weekly goals in order to manage smaller numbers and make them seem more attainable to staff. For example, your program may want to start two MRE workshops per month with 10 couples in each class. If you start recruiting 8 weeks before the workshop begins and expect 50 percent of those who sign up to show up you need to recruit 20 couples or 2-3 couples per week. Well established programs report a standard show rate anywhere from 50-65% for a typical free-of-charge service.

Benchmarks can be set for the number of referrals, recruitment efforts, enrolled participants, and participants who complete the program. They allow you to measure progress and determine effort compared to output. The number of referrals or registrations obtained will always be much higher than the participant enrollment numbers. Establish the conversion rate you can expect and then apply these calculations to all future recruitment efforts. This can help staff determine about how many recruitment efforts are necessary to enroll enough participants to begin a workshop. Knowing this can motivate staff to work smarter, have accurate expectations for the outcome, and prevent disappointments.

Finally, establishing benchmarks for referrals, outreach efforts and intakes can help managers assess recruitment efforts and incorporate incentives for successes and repercussions for missed goals. (See **Chapter 10: Participant Recruitment and Enrollment** for more information.)

CHAPTER 8
WORKING WITH COUPLES

Working with couples involves a different set of dynamics not usually experienced by programs that serve individuals. This chapter focuses on some of the unique factors programs should consider when working with couples such as navigating couple dynamics, addressing domestic violence and handling couple stressors.

Section 1: Couple Participation in MRE
Key Points:
- There are different personality and communication styles among couples
- *B*oundaries should be set for safe and confident participation
- Individual motivations to attend services may vary

Section 2: Relationship Dynamics
Key Points:
- Relationships change over time. Understand the various stages of relationships, and the stressors at play in each stage
- All stages of a relationship contribute a unique set of stressors
- Allow time for couples to explore the stressors they experience in their own relationship

Section 3: Common Couple Stressors
Key Points:
- Recognizing stress and understanding coping styles can improve relationship quality
- Consider common needs couples may have and be prepared to address them

Section 4: Unhealthy Relationships: Domestic and Family Violence
Key Points:
- MRE is not a Domestic Violence (DV) program
- The appropriateness of DV screening depends on the length and depth of your program
- Develop a plan to respond to disclosures of domestic violence
- Train all staff about DV and how to handle disclosures
- Coordinate with local DV service providers and work collaboratively to keep couples safe

Section 5: Relationship Coaching
- Coaching is strengths-based, action-oriented, and encourages the use of new skills
- Coaching is distinct from counseling and therapy
- MRE can provoke intense emotions

Section 6: When to Refer Couples to Counseling/Therapy
Key Points:
- Therapy is appropriate for seriously distressed couples
- Practitioners should identify circumstances when couples require assistance beyond MRE

Section 1
Couple Dynamics

Participant motivation for participation

Logically, marriage and relationship education programs serving couples have a greater impact if both partners are active participants. The concepts and skills introduced are designed to engage two people in an intimate and healthy manner. The reality is that both partners may not be equally motivated to attend the program for various reasons. Programs should expect to experience hesitation and/or resistance from some participants and prepare facilitators to skillfully engage all participants. (See **Chapter 7: Program Management** for more information about training facilitators.)

Although marriage and relationship education services give individuals skills to enhance their relationships, some participants may not believe that they personally are contributing to any problems the couple may have. They may lack insight into their role in the relationship and about relationship dynamics. Some participants in MRE believe it will "fix" their partner. Be clear that the only person you can change is yourself. Be sure that your program's message and tone focuses on the effort that both partners must make to strengthen their relationship.

Couples may also express that they are attending a marriage and relationship education program as a last effort to improve the relationship, or because of an ultimatum that one partner has given. These couples are likely experiencing high levels of distress. Program administrators and facilitators must be very clear about what marriage and relationship education services are and what they are not. Participants should understand that MRE is prevention; MRE is not marriage counseling or therapy. While the information and skills presented may be valuable to these couples, they will likely have serious issues to work through. (Note: there are some curricula designed for highly distressed couples or those on the brink of divorce.) Program staff and facilitators should take caution to avoid triangulation where they find themselves in the middle of a couple's problem. Remember that marriage and relationship education services are designed to teach couples the skills they need to work through difficult situations together. If this becomes difficult for couples who are experiencing high levels of distress, additional assistance from couples' counseling may be appropriate.

Since it is hard to know about these types of dynamics up front, programs may want to consider having couples take a relationship assessment or inventory prior to beginning classes. Inventories can help couples assess the status of their relationship, recognize their motivations for participating in services, and identify areas of their relationship that they would like to focus on during their time with the program. An inventory can also provide program staff and facilitators with valuable insight about the participants that can help them tailor the services

and make appropriate referrals. Frequently used couple assessment tools include PREPARE/ENRICH and FOCCUS/REFOCCUS. Programs can utilize a separate, in-depth tool or include specific questions in their general intake/enrollment process. Examples of areas to assess include:

- Levels of overall happiness/satisfaction in their relationship
- Level of commitment to the welfare of the relationship
- How often conflicts arise and how they are typically handled
- Topics the couple argues about most
- How well the couple communicates
- Incidents of violence that have occurred within the relationship

Programs that use an inventory need to have time to review results with couples privately.

Couples may exhibit different personality, learning and communication styles

No two individuals are alike, even if they have been married for 40 years. In order to have a successful program, you will want to design the program in a way that is engaging for all personality types, learning, and communication styles. This is particularly important when couples are tasked with learning and practicing a new skill. To assist couples with learning more about themselves and about similarities and differences with each other, you may choose to use personality assessment tools like the "Myers Briggs Type Indicator," "True Colors," or the "Keirsey Temperament Sorter." Assessments like "The 5 Love Languages" can help couples understand their individual communication styles and how to connect at a deeper level. Finally, assessments such as "Kolb's Learning Style Inventory" helps couples understand each other's natural learning preferences and how they think through problems. All of these assessments serve to deepen a couple's understanding of each partner and to connect more intimately and successfully.

The content and exercises/activities in the curriculum should be introduced and facilitated in a way that:

- Appeals to both introverted and extroverted personalities
- Engages the three general learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic)
- Takes into consideration how each partner of a couple communicates most meaningfully

Within a relationship, it is not unusual that one partner may be more outspoken than the other and that he/she could dominate activities and/or practice time. Be sure that both members of the couple are able to be actively engaged, respond to questions, express their opinions about information presented and participate in activities in such a way that they are gaining maximum benefit from the program. (See **Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation** for more information on adult learning styles.)

Set boundaries for participating in a group setting

Very few people are perfectly comfortable sharing personal relationship information within a group. However, there are strategies that can help build their confidence and safety in doing so. Just as it is important for programs to limit the personal information shared by staff and facilitators, it is important to set boundaries for couples participating in services in a group setting. (See **Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation** for more information.) All couples experience difficult times but some may feel sensitive about sharing these experiences with others. Therefore, MRE programs need to create a safe environment for couples to share and ask questions.

Establishing ground rules for participation and sharing within the group is one way to set boundaries to ensure that all participants are comfortable. Some individuals may worry that what is talked about will be shared with people outside of the program. This may be of particular concern in small, tight-knit communities. Make sure that couples agree that what is shared within the group remains within the group and that what is shared with program staff will be held in confidence. However, in the event that child abuse or other dangers are shared, couples must be aware that program staff will have to respond and act accordingly to ensure safety needs are met.

Due to the personal nature of the content in marriage and relationship education programs, both partners should feel comfortable sharing about their own experience. Establishing a ground rule that couples should consult with one another prior to sharing a personal experience in order to avoid the risk of embarrassment or surprise is a boundary that builds trust.

Section 2
Relationship Dynamics

Stages of Relationships

Your healthy marriage program will likely be working with couples at varying stages of their relationship. Some may be in committed relationships, engaged or newly married, others may be married with children, and some may be empty-nesters. All stages of relationships contribute a unique set of stressors that challenge couples. For example:

- Engaged and newly married couples may find it challenging to blend routines, finances and traditions, as well as defining their relationship in terms of "we" rather than "you" and "me."

- Couples with children may be experiencing feelings of stress and disconnectedness that often results from the time and energy required to care for children.

- Empty-nesters may be learning about themselves and making efforts to reconnect as a couple after having spent most of their married life raising children.

Your program can help by acknowledging the various stages of relationships and by addressing the common stressors that occur at each stage. Allow time for couples to talk about their experiences, and provide opportunities for them to practice new skills in the context of these challenges. Couples can benefit by realizing that change is normal and that expectations must be revisited.

Cultural Awareness

Since marriage and culture are intimately related, MRE administrators and staff need to be aware of and sensitive to cultural issues. MRE staff should know how to relate to the beliefs, common practices, values, language, roles, and expectations that a couple brings with them to the relationship. While MRE staff may not know or understand how these dynamics relate to each participant or couple, it is important to be sensitive to a different mentality. For example, in a Latino family, a couple may honor their role as parents over a desire for marital satisfaction, so a program's focus on marital happiness over the importance of family, may not be well received. In some cultures, the decision-making ability of extended family for the couple is highly honored, whereas Western culture may not view that level of involvement as healthy.

For some families, acculturation – the process of modifying currently held beliefs and values as a result of adapting to a new culture – is an issue. There may be tremendous conflict between generations related to how much of the family's original culture is honored. For example, a program's focus on American values and attitudes regarding marriage and relationships may be at odds with the values of some of your participants. Couples often bring in differing sets of beliefs, values, and expectations that not only create internal relationship stress, but may play themselves out in a workshop. Ultimately, MRE programs and program staff should be

well trained with a basic understanding of these issues and how to respectfully meet the needs of participants in a culturally sensitive way, especially when the participant's cultural needs are different from the staff's cultural background.

Expectations

Couples walk into relationships with differences because of their own backgrounds and experiences. In fact, all couples enter relationships with expectations, whether spoken or not, regarding issues such as fidelity, traditions, spiritual practices, parenting, etc. Many couples do not realize the implications these expectations can have when it comes to communication, trust, and commitment, and ultimately the future of their relationship. For example, one partner may enter a relationship with traditional gender role expectations and become distressed when their partner doesn't behave as expected. Other couples enter relationships and marriage with unrealistic expectations that lead to early challenges. Beliefs such as "love is all we need," "my partner will make me happy," and "my partner has the exact expectations that I do for our relationship" may leave couples feeling misled or betrayed when they do not come true.

While exposing differences in couple's expectations may create conflict and discomfort in a workshop setting, MRE educators are in a unique position to create a safe place for couples to explore their differences and to find common ground upon which to reconcile them. Educators should encourage participants to accept and understand each other's differences in order to relate in a healthier way.

Empathy and Emotions

Many couples come to MRE workshops not truly realizing the extent of their relationship difficulties. Participants may feel uncomfortable when asked to explore untapped differences or frequent hot-button issues. In either case, MRE staff need to appreciate that establishing and maintaining a healthy, long-lasting relationship is hard work for most couples. Given the opportunity to learn about healthy relationships or to practice new skills, participants may experience moments of clarity, sadness, or even anger. Creating space to allow couples to experience each other in a new way is important to healing and growth. Prepare your MRE staff by providing training on group and couple dynamics and how to encourage that participants explore these dynamics. Empathic listening, strong personal boundaries, and a tolerance for emotions and conflict are three effective skills to help create that space.

Section 3
Managing Stressors

One purpose of most marriage and relationship programs is to equip couples with the skills to discuss and manage the stress in their lives. Helping them recognize how stress presents itself and affects their relationship as well as honoring the differences in each other's coping style can greatly improve relationship quality. Similarly, talking with other couples and hearing about how they deal with the stressful events in their lives can be valuable.

Due to life and/or career circumstances, some couples may be experiencing higher levels of stress than usual. Some examples of these circumstances are listed below.

- First responders (i.e. EMT, firefighters, police officers, etc.)
- Partners serving in the military
- Couples who have adopted children from the state
- Couples caring for children with special needs
- Couples where one or both partners are experiencing a chronic illness
- Couples in blended or step families
- Couples struggling with unemployment, difficult financial issues, or at risk for homelessness
- Couples struggling with mental health, trauma, or alcohol/substance abuse issues

These couples could greatly benefit from a program tailored to their needs and one that acknowledges the nature of the specific challenges they face. They may require even more help with learning how to manage emotions and how to communicate effectively when stress is high. Research suggests that these couples are at a higher risk for divorce; therefore, they may need more support and referrals in order to experience success. Some service providers have found that having an expert/specialist or "one of their own" facilitate these groups can be very effective in "norming" some of their experiences and ensuring that curriculum examples resonate with the stressors in these couple's lives. Providers should be aware of other community resources that may be helpful to these couples and help them access additional services when needed. (See **Chapter 2: Developing and Engaging Service Delivery Partnerships** for more information.) Think about how your marriage and relationship education program could partner with other community programs to meet the special needs of couples. Two examples of partnerships that you may want to create include:

Workforce Development / Employment Services:

Employment Services are intended by statute to provide a variety of employment related services including but not limited to:

- Job search assistance

- Job referrals

- Placement assistance for job seekers

- Re-employment services to unemployment insurance claimants

- Recruitment services to employers with job openings

Developing a partnership of reciprocal referral with your community's workforce development programs is a win-win as participants receive services to address issues of under- and unemployment and "soft skills" (i.e. communication techniques, problem solving methods, practice in conflict resolution and managing one's emotions), which lead to increased productivity in a work setting.

Financial Counseling Services:

Disagreements over money are often a major source of conflict for couples at every income level. However, when money is really tight or financial circumstances suddenly change (i.e. unemployment, etc.), the stress may lead to the breakup of their relationship or other negative effects on the couple and their children. On the other hand, when couples learn to manage their money wisely, cope with adversity, and make joint decisions about earning, spending, saving and investing, the families can attain a level of economic stability and even prosper. Marriage and relationship education teaches that disagreements over money are a major source of couple conflict and distress. Few, however, provide concrete information to couples about how to manage their money and about what institutions and resources are available in their communities to help them. Developing partnerships with agencies providing financial education/literacy services can be of great assistance, particularly for low-income couples.

Section 4
Unhealthy Relationships: Domestic and Family Violence

Serious couple/family issues may come up in the context of MRE services. The issue of domestic and family violence poses a unique challenge for programs working with couples. For the purposes of this section, the terms 'domestic violence' (DV), 'intimate partner violence' (IPV), and couple violence all refer to similar events. The term 'family violence' can include violence between adults and children in the family (i.e. abusive parenting practices, child abuse, etc.).

Understanding the limitations of marriage and relationship education programs

Although MRE programs teach couples to resolve conflict effectively and create more healthy interactions, they are not couple or family violence interventions. MRE programs are not designed to address the use of violence, abuse, coercion, and other controlling behaviors. MRE programs are designed specifically to help couples stop pushing, shoving, and/or name-calling between themselves or with their children. It is certainly *not* the case that MRE programs are never helpful for some couples struggling with these issues. However, the issues behind violence are often deeper than poor communication or lack of anger management skills. For couples' skill-building activities to be successful and meaningful, both parties must able to speak freely and honestly about relationship dynamics. The nature of violence in families can interfere with this. Despite this, couples experiencing interpersonal and family violence may seek out marriage and relationship education services, so program staff should be educated on how to handle these issues appropriately. MRE programs must create a safe environment for all participants, handle disclosures of violence in an appropriate way and educate couples about the importance of safety in relationships.

Marriage and relationship education programs should work collaboratively with domestic, sexual, and family violence experts. In doing so, programs can ensure that: 1) all program participants are provided with accurate information about domestic and family violence, including where to go for needed protection or services; 2) all program participants are provided with appropriate and safe opportunities to disclose if they are or have been victims of these types of violence; and 3) program staff and volunteers have received adequate training to respond effectively and with confidence whenever these issues arise. (See **Chapter 7: Program Management** for guidance on developing a DV protocol.)

Responding to Disclosures of Domestic Violence

Within the context of healthy marriage and relationship programs, staff and volunteers need to be prepared to respond to at least three types of disclosure situations:

- When the victim says that they are in immediate danger from a violent and abusive partner;

- When someone discloses past or current abuse that she/he does not identify as posing an urgent and immediate threat; and

- When the individual disclosing abuse also expresses interest in participating in marriage education or related activities.

When disclosures of domestic violence occur as a result of screening or at any point during participation in a healthy marriage or relationship program or activity, an effective response needs to follow from the staff member hearing the disclosure. By identifying the community resources available to you for referral and by having a **domestic violence protocol** in place, you can ensure that appropriate steps will be taken when a disclosure is made. Local domestic violence experts should be involved in the development of your protocol as well as in the training provided to program staff related to responding to disclosures of domestic violence. Below are some other considerations when developing your domestic violence protocol.

Working with your partners, describe in detail how you will identify and respond to domestic violence within your project. The domestic violence protocol developed by your program should be tailored to reflect the particular characteristics of your community and project. If possible, develop a draft collaboratively with all project partners – especially your local domestic violence service provider.
Clarify the role(s) that domestic violence experts will play in the design and implementation of marriage education activities, as well as in any evaluation activities.
Critique your protocol for how well it answers these two questions: How will your MRE program ensure that there are safe, confidential opportunities to disclose domestic violence and that the decision to participate in a marriage and relationship education program is voluntary and well-informed? What steps will be taken to ensure that domestic violence issues are safely and routinely identified and appropriately addressed by well-trained personnel?
Finalize the protocol and distribute it to program partners and staff.
Ensure that all staff and volunteers (including those at partner agencies) who have a role in implementing the protocol receive adequate training on domestic violence and the domestic violence protocol itself.
Use staff or project meetings to support implementation of the protocol and identify implementation issues. To improve effectiveness, have staff role play with each other about different scenarios of domestic violence disclosures.
Review the protocol at 6 months (and annually thereafter) to identify areas in which the protocol might need to be modified or enhanced. Key partners should be included. The protocol should also be reviewed and modified as necessary if new program components are added or the program is significantly changed.

For more assistance on developing an effective domestic violence protocol, see the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center's document titled: Developing Domestic Violence Protocols at http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2199.

Family Violence Disclosures

Most programs do not formally screen participants for other acts of family violence. Therefore, if disclosures of risk are made, they generally are made some time during the conversation between the participants and/or the family support worker or a facilitator. Appropriate training of what to do following disclosure of family violence is necessary in order to keep participants and other family members safe. Knowing the appropriate resources in advance helps with making critical and timely referrals. In addition, always make sure a supervisor is aware of any reports of domestic violence in your program to ensure that protocols were followed well.

Section 5
Relationship Coaching

MRE programs rely on strengths-based "coaching" to offer participants the support and guidance they need in order to achieve healthier relationships. Coaching offers solutions that are strengths-based, action-oriented, and encourages the use of new skills to solve problems and enrich intimate relationships. Coaching is distinct from counseling and therapy in that it is focused on skill building, not resolving a specific relationship problem. (See **Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation** for more information.)

Managing Emotions

Couples participating in healthy marriage services come with a variety of past experiences, many of which may be still sensitive. Many curricula include discussion topics and activities related to relationship expectations, communicating about deeper issues, trust, forgiveness, etc. These topics may stir up sensitive emotions and memories, especially if either member of a couple has had experiences with issues such as infidelity, divorce/remarriage, depression/mental illness, severe financial stress, infertility, violence or alcohol/substance abuse.

You will want to anticipate that some program content will result in an emotional response from participants and prepare for this. See **Chapter 7: Program Management** for more information on training staff and marriage educators and ensuring that staff members feel prepared to deal with participants' emotions and reactions to program materials. The goal is to create a safe environment for participants to express emotions if/when they arise while encouraging them to practice new skills in managing themselves and in experiencing their partner in a more connecting way.

Section 6
When to Refer Couples to Counseling/Therapy

MRE programs vary considerably in format and content; however, the goals of most MRE programs are to teach couples communication and problem-solving skills and how to effectively manage conflict and negative emotions. Most MRE programs choose to use, and may adapt, one or more of a handful of highly-structured and well researched curricula. These are usually offered in a group (classroom/workshop) format. MRE is not defined as a clinical practice involving treatment and places an important emphasis on the prevention of relationship problems. On the other hand, relationship and/or marriage therapy is generally a customized service couples may seek when they are seriously distressed, unsatisfied with their relationship, have a high degree of conflict, and/or at least one partner is questioning his or her commitment to the other. Practitioners must be able to identify circumstances, such as those listed below, for which a couple may require referrals for counseling or therapy to address and heal deeper relationship issues.

Counseling/Mental Health Services:

There are circumstances when couples may require more in-depth assistance beyond the scope of marriage and relationship education. Marriage counseling is provided by a trained, licensed professional who can give couples personal advice and help with serious issues that are potentially destructive to a couple's relationship. Professional counseling and/or mental health services may be required if a couple in your program is or has experienced any of the following:

- Addictions or substance abuse
- Emotional or physical abuse
- Sexual problems
- Severe child behavior issues
- Significant financial problems
- Difficulty with blending families
- A partner has been unfaithful in the marriage
- Constant fighting and anger
- Mental health issues (such as depression or eating disorders)
- When one spouse considers leaving the relationship
- If one or both partners are staying in the relationship only because of the children

MRE and marriage therapy are not the same thing and have different purposes. Each field has its own professional education/training programs and national membership associations, operates in somewhat different practice settings, and is reimbursed differently. Marriage therapy is guided by national standards, licensing exams and state regulations whereas MRE does not have this infrastructure in place.

CHAPTER 9
BUILDING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Building public awareness about healthy marriage and relationships and MRE is essential to program success. Few people know what MRE programs are or that they can learn skills to help them succeed in their relationships. This is why public awareness is critical for your program. Having a strong public awareness and marketing strategy can help your community think about their relationship and marriage and encourage them to attend your MRE program.

MRE programs are unfamiliar to many people and they often think that marriage education is only for those in distressed relationships or bad marriages. Based on that assumption, people may be afraid that others will think they have marital problems if they participate. There can also be the assumption that MRE is only for married people. Having a strong public awareness and marketing strategy can help assure potential participants understand MRE and its value. This chapter discusses general marketing strategies and how to increase awareness of your MRE program.

Section 1: Talking about Marriage and MRE
Key Points:
- "Marriage" means different things to different people and your messages need to be sensitive to that
- The term "marriage" itself can trigger the audience
- Your public awareness and marketing efforts have to break down any misconceptions about MRE

Section 2: Public Awareness vs. Marketing and Recruiting
Key Points:
- The aim of your public awareness activities is to inform people
- Marketing includes specific actions to communicate the benefits of your service and generate "buzz" in the community
- Recruitment is the act of getting people to the services

Section 3: Branding Your MRE Program
Key Points:
- Your brand establishes the personality of your program and the tone for how you communicate with the public
- Your brand should be clearly defined
- Choose branding that will allow your program to be perceived as having the ability to serve multiple populations

Section 4: Marketing for a Specific Audience
Key Points:
- Convince potential participants of your program's value
- Targeted marketing is often most effective
- Use language that is friendly, appealing, and easy to understand
- Different marketing methods and messages will appeal more to different cultures
- People need to see information multiple times before they retain it
- Market your program consistently in multiple places over time

Section 5: Developing Media Relations
Key Points:
- Relationships with media personalities can be mutually beneficial
- Get to know your media personalities and educate them about your program
- Ask radio personalities to host a "live show" from your community event
- Build relationships by highlighting how your respective missions align

Section 6: Writing Press Releases and Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
Key Points:
- Press Releases are brief with basic information: who, what, where, when and why
- PSAs get the word out regarding upcoming events and services
- The demographics of a radio station's listeners should match your target audience

Section 7: Getting Free/Low Cost Media
Key Points:
- The Federal Communications Commission requires radio and television broadcasters to donate a limited amount of free airtime for Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Radio traffic reports offer an opportunity for low cost media buys
- Invest time with local media personalities to gain access to local programming
- Print media is a way to promote awareness and recruit participants

Section 8: Marketing Your Program on the Web
Key Points:
- Structure your web content in a way that attracts your audience
- Use appropriate search words and phrases in the content of your site
- Have similar organizations link to your site and reciprocate
- Consider using social networking sites to promote your website
- Provide your website link on all marketing materials

Section 1
Talking About Marriage and MRE

Creating awareness of your MRE program may need to start with a more general public awareness strategy that gets people thinking about marriage and healthy relationships. Talking about healthy marriage and healthy relationships is not easy. The term "marriage" itself can trigger the audience. Everyone has an experience with marriage – they may not know anyone who is in a marriage, they may not know anyone who is in a happy marriage, they may have marriage on a pedestal as unattainable for themselves and/or they may be afraid of it (because they are afraid of divorce) – and many people associate the institution of marriage with a specific set of values or religion. These assumptions and feelings about marriage may be accurate or inaccurate; however, they exist and you cannot dismiss them. Do not avoid the term "marriage," but understand that it means different things to different people and your messages need to be sensitive to that.

Another challenge in talking about MRE is that there are many misconceptions about what MRE is. Remember that this is a relatively new service to people. Their parents likely didn't attend an MRE program, and their neighbors may have never heard of MRE. Therefore, your public awareness activities have to normalize the term. Just like child birth preparation classes were not common for expectant mothers and fathers to attend 40 years ago, it has become a normal part of pregnancy for couples to attend a class together and learn what to expect during labor, delivery and life with a newborn. MRE is similar. Program operators must help people understand what it is, that it is for everyone, and that it is beneficial.

For people who first hear the term "marriage and relationship education," they often think that it is only for those in distressed relationships or bad marriages. Based on that assumption, people may be afraid that others will think they have marital problems if they participate. There can also be the assumption that MRE is only for married people. Your public awareness and marketing efforts have to break down these misconceptions.

Section 2
Public Awareness v. Marketing and Recruiting

"Public awareness" is a term from the communication industry which means: to make a target audience "aware of" a product, service or issue (e.g., that marriage matters or that people can learn the skills to have a good relationship). The aim of your public awareness activities is to simply inform people.

Marketing, on the other hand, includes the specific actions that a program does to communicate the benefits of your service and generate "buzz" in the community. According to the American Marketing Association, "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large." Marketing efforts may include utilizing media (i.e., television, radio, print, social media, etc.) as well as conducting promotions and organizing events to get the word out about your services.

While marketing is getting the word out that your services exist, *recruitment* is the act of actually getting people to the services. For example, a program may market itself year round, but only recruit before a new MRE workshop begins.

Although these three concepts are different, they work hand-in-hand in creating awareness in your community about your MRE program. In general, building public awareness informs people of MRE, marketing builds excitement about the service you offer, and recruitment efforts are designed to get people to attend a specific MRE service.

Section 3
Branding Your MRE Program

Branding is the strategy *behind* your program's marketing or recruitment activities. Branding establishes the standard upon which marketing messages and images are produced and how recruitment is conducted. (See **Chapter 10: Participant Recruitment and Enrollment** for more information.) Your brand establishes the personality of your program and the tone for how you communicate with the public. The brand should also be simple enough for the public to recognize and remember.

Branding is the process of determining who you are as a program, what you stand for and how you want to be perceived in the community—it essentially reflects the "personality" of your program. Your brand should be clearly defined or else others will define it for you. Your brand involves all of the elements that the public will see:

- Logo
- Color scheme
- Design layout
- Typeface
- Image/photo style
- Subtle messages about the program's philosophy

Branding assists in separating one program from another by creating something that is recognizable. A brand represents the promise that you make about your services, your program and your organization; a brand is the assurance of quality and consistency. People must be aware of a product in order to consider it for use (called "brand awareness"). A brand should have the following qualities:

1. Representative of the program's benefits and quality
2. Simple to pronounce
3. Easy to remember; shorter names are best
4. Unique and distinctive

You may not want to limit yourself with your branding by focusing on one specific target population. Choose branding that will allow your program to be perceived as having the ability to serve multiple populations. You can target your marketing efforts with the words and pictures that accompany your brand. Your brand will gain recognition as part of your public awareness, marketing and recruitment efforts. The brand should be on everything from staff business cards to program brochures to billboards talking about healthy relationships placed in the community.

Section 4
Marketing for a Specific Audience

Marketing is more than just a brochure; it is how you talk about your program, the language you use, and where and how you advertise. People are part of your marketing campaign as well the materials you distribute. Some aspects of marketing are free—such as press releases, word of mouth referrals, and educating community leaders on what your program has to offer—whereas others can be costly such as multi-color printing of large posters and banners, or hiring a graphic designer or marketing specialist to create a portfolio of materials for your program.

Your marketing strategy will include multiple activities, but it will build on common core messages about your program and use pictures or symbols that resonate with your target audience. Marketing is not a one-time effort; it is an on-going sustained campaign to get potential participants excited about what your program has to offer.

Identify Your Population

The experiences of many successful programs indicate that targeted marketing is often most effective because different populations respond to different messages. Whether your target population is new parents, Hispanic couples, couples with children, etc., being clear about who you are serving will help you decide what marketing methods and messages will be most effective. For instance, if you are trying to reach new parents with your healthy marriage message, use pictures of pregnant moms and dads holding newborns on your marketing materials.

Some program operators feel that they are limiting their potential impact by narrowing their focus to a specific population or two. Keep in mind that most programs have limited funding and cannot meet the needs of everyone. Knowing your audience helps focus your limited marketing resources. You may want to create different marketing messages to target your different groups; however, your logo and key language should always be the same to build brand recognition.

Crafting Your Message

Once you have narrowed down the population(s) you want to reach, you will be better able to craft your message to appeal to the audience. Given your population(s), think about what messages will resonate most. People generally respond better to the benefits of a program than the logistical or practical details. For example, your population is more likely to respond to a message that they can learn how to resolve the recent argument they had, than to a message that the program uses the XYZ Curriculum or that participants must attend six two-hour sessions.

Four examples of benefits of a healthy marriage program are:
1. Improved communication
2. Quality time with your spouse
3. Making friends with other couples
4. Having fun

One way to learn what kinds of messages will be most effective with your population is to inquire with the couples themselves. Ask people who have already been through your program questions about what they liked most about the program, what first interested them in it, or where they heard about it. If the couple is really enthusiastic about their experience, you can request permission to incorporate their quotes as testimonials in your marketing materials. If you haven't started your program yet, reach out to potential participants in the community for their reactions to draft marketing materials.

Cultural Sensitivity

Every population's culture is unique. Therefore, take some time to think about your target population's culture and the implications this may have on your marketing strategies. Recognize that different marketing methods and messages will resonate with different cultures. Several simple things you can do to market your program effectively to your community include:

- Use diverse pictures reflecting a range of ages, parenting status and ethnic backgrounds on any printed materials or posters.

- Put culturally appropriate words and print marketing materials in the language of your target population when possible.

- Have a variety of people who represent the audiences you are trying to reach review the marketing materials. You can incorporate their best feedback before going to press.

Sustaining Interest

Generally, people need to see messages about your program several times to remember it, so advertising your program in one place or doing one round of a marketing campaign will not be enough. You should plan to market your program consistently in multiple places over time as your budget allows. Also, keep track of where participants hear about your program and what caught their attention so that you can identify which parts of your strategy are more successful and adjust accordingly. Lastly, remember that word-of-mouth advertising is one of the best marketing strategies you can employ. Married couples may not be the easiest population to target, but if people have a great experience in your program, they will recommend it to their friends.

Section 5
Developing Media Relations

The success of every healthy marriage initiative depends on getting the word out about the program. One strategy for building awareness is to develop relationships with local media personalities. A few recognizable and reputable faces or voices promoting your program in the community can be a tremendous asset to your marketing and recruitment strategies.

Relationships with Media

A first step is to get to know about members of the media in your area who might have an interest in your work. Ask your staff, board members and friends if they have any connections with media personalities and if they can help you get an appointment to meet with a member of the media about your program. A little research and legwork will help you develop media relationships that can be mutually beneficial. For example, a local television personality who was recently married or engaged can become a perfect ambassador for your program. Encourage him/her to attend your program, so they can talk honestly about their experience. Invite him/her to serve as the master or mistress of ceremonies at your next community event or to serve on your board. He/she may also be networked with other members of the media and leaders in the community with whom it could be beneficial to connect. Since these connections are so important, be sure to educate your media connections about the benefits of your program to participants and to the community, so they can help "sell" it to their audiences.

Press releases are a great way to help educate the media. Including a boilerplate statement at the bottom of every press release reinforces your brand and mission. (See **Section 3** for more information on writing press releases). Making sure your mission/purpose is clearly stated in your website and social media channels is also important as the media may first visit these resources.

Another creative way to connect with the media is to ask radio personalities to host a "live show" from your community event or resource fair. If they agree, they will usually mention your event on the air and on their website. Give them as much lead time as possible and offer to promote their presence on your flyers, website and other promotional materials. It is good public relations (PR) for the media personalities to be seen in the community, and it is good for your program.

Most importantly, build relationships with the media by highlighting your aligning missions. Media representatives are approached every day by organizations asking for free airtime or promotions. Communicate how promoting your program can benefit them as well. How does your work support their mission and philosophy? What positive community exposure can you offer them? Look for the win-win angle in every opportunity.

Section 6

Writing Press Releases and Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Press releases and public service announcements are two marketing tools that help get the word out about your program, can increase awareness of MRE and can be a tool to promote a specific event you are hosting.

Press Releases

Whenever your organization executes a significant event, such as hosting a volunteer celebration, kicking-off a new program, receiving a large grant or community recognition, etc., send a press release to all of your media contacts. These are especially important tools for publicly funded healthy relationship and marriage programs that may not have a large marketing budget, but that want to raise community awareness of the services they offer. The following step-by-step instruction chart as well as the Sample Press Release offered at the end of this chapter will help you get started.

Writing a Press Release Step-by-Step		
Step 1	Plan Phase	Establish a "hook" that is relevant to your local community.
Step 2	Plan Phase	Identify a spokesperson for the event to answer questions from reporters and other media inquiries. Provide this individual with key message points as well as any information not to give.
Step 3	Plan Phase	Before sending the press releases, call your media contacts (having previously established a relationship with them) and let them know the press release is coming.
Step 4	Intro	Using electronic letterhead, include your organization's logo, program logo and any appropriate partner logos.
Step 5	Intro	Write "**PRESS RELEASE**" in bold, upper case letters at the top of the page just under your organization's logo. Use an expanded character type and a 16-20 point and upper case font size to set it apart from the remainder of the text.
Step 6	Intro	Place the words "Release Date" on the left-hand corner of the page; this is the date that tells the media when to release the information to the public.
Step 7	Intro	On the same line, on the right-hand side, include the contact person's name, direct phone number (not just the main office phone number) and email address.
Step 8	Headline	Create an attention-getting headline that encompasses the meaning of the event, along with the date. The headline is very important because it is likely to become the headline for any public campaign.

Step 9	Body	Indent the opening sentence and start with the city and state where the event will take place. The details of your event will follow and should cover who, what, when, and where. Include the most important information about the event. Language should be simple and concise (lengthy or unclear pitches may be discarded), and be sure to define what "marriage and relationship education" means.
Step 10	Body	Next is the "why" portion of the press release. Include national statistics on the scope of the issue (i.e., divorce rates, effects on children, etc.). Elaborate on the effect of the issues closer to home (your local city if possible).
Step 11	Body	Clearly share how both your organization and the upcoming event deal with the issue. Include the organization's vision or mission and explain what couples will learn.
Step 12	Body	Finish the paragraph with a quote from an expert regarding the importance of marriage and relationship education on couples and families. The expert may be the organization's director or another well-known person who can speak with authority about marriage and relationship education.
Step 13	Boilerplate	To close your press release, write a separate paragraph that includes contact information and a brief summary of your organization. If the letterhead does not include the organization's website, include it here. This "boilerplate" should be used consistently in each and every press release to reinforce brand identity and mission.
Step 14	Formatting	Limit the length of your press release to one page if possible.
Step 15	Formatting	Use 1.5 line spacing.
Step 16	Formatting	Center the symbol "###" at the bottom of your last paragraph to show the document has ended.
Step 17	Sending	Make sure your press release gets to the right person. Avoid sending it to the general editor as there is often too much competition for his/her time. Find out who the appropriate reporter is for a specific content category and then build that relationship.

Distributing Your Press Release

If you are trying to get your event placed on local community calendars (i.e., magazines, websites, and cable channels), distribute a release to these outlets four to six weeks prior to the event date. Some media outlets may need the information sooner because of publication deadlines. As the event date gets closer, it's always a good idea to follow up with reminder calls to your media contacts and/or send a follow-up release. For regular media coverage, a press release does not need to be distributed any sooner than one week prior to the date of the event.

Television (TV) Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

TV PSAs or on-air TV spots are a great way to get the word out regarding your MRE program. You can visually show examples of a workshop and what marriage education "looks like." This is a great resource for building awareness of MRE and can help encourage people to attend your MRE program.

Audiences seeing or hearing your spot may not run to the phone and sign up immediately. Research shows that people need to hear a message multiple times and through multiple means before they are likely to act. Therefore, having realistic expectations regarding the impact of your television campaign is important. A TV campaign creates general awareness of your initiative over time, but it may not be the most effective recruitment strategy for your marriage workshops. If you desire immediate action, TV may not be the best medium unless you are advertising a special event.

When you have to pay for television advertising, it can be expensive. There are costs to produce an advertising campaign and to purchase air time. Depending on your resources and the size of your local media market, television can be the least cost-effective medium for promoting your initiative and/or event. (Note: Free (donated) TV air time may be made available to your program, however, you will likely not get a "prime time" slot.)

TV spots reach a broad and general audience, but you can often target gender and age as a main demographic by airing your PSAs at the right time. For example, if your target is stay-at-home moms, airing during daytime television shows should be your approach. If your goal is to communicate to men, airing your PSA on the weekend during or around sporting events would be a smart strategy. Reaching both men and women requires a mutually attractive, creative message. The most logical, yet expensive, time to advertise is weeknights during prime time.

Radio Public Service Announcements

On-air radio spots can be an effective way to get the word out regarding upcoming events and services. When writing your program's PSA, keep in mind that radio stations rarely run spots longer than 30 seconds. You may want to create 15 second spots to use as fillers on the air as well. This means you'll have to be very precise and effective about your message.

Just like with TV, you'll want to be specific about the market segment you are targeting with a radio PSA campaign. Audience demographics can be identified by age range, gender, race and ethnicity, marital status, interests, career choices and music preferences. Knowing as much as possible about your target audience will help you choose which radio station(s) can deliver your message most effectively. The account representative for the station will have this information, so it is important that you ask them to provide it to you. (Note: Also like TV PSAs, free airtime is likely to be donated based on open slots, not those of your choosing.)

CHAPTER

9

SECTION 6

Sample Radio PSA

Voice-Over (VO) Parts	Script	Sound Effects/Music Cues	Run Time
		Baby crying	:00-:03
VO1: WIFE	Manuel, can you get the baby?	Baby still crying	:04-:06
VO2: HUSBAND	I can't! I told the guys I was going out tonight!	Baby continues to cry	:07-:09
VO1: WIFE	What? Again? This is the second time this week!	Baby crying less obvious	:10-:12
VO2: HUSBAND	You didn't come to my soccer game last night!	Baby crying minimal	:13-:15
VO1: WIFE	I'm sorry, but it's hard to take the baby everywhere!		:16-17
VO3: NARRATOR	Sound familiar? Come reconnect with your partner Saturday, July 29th from noon to 4:30 at the Tivoli on the Auraria Campus. The Showcase for Latino Couples will teach you how to listen and be heard, understand your partner better, and strengthen your commitment to each other. The event is FREE and child care and parking is also FREE. Call 303-830-0400 to register. That's 303-830-0400. Call now!	Music starts; continues in background to the end	:18-:30

Section 7
Getting Free/Low Cost Media

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires radio and television broadcasters to donate a limited amount of free airtime for PSAs. As noted above, while PSAs are helpful in promoting your program, this approach alone is not likely to obtain the level of awareness your program needs for sustainability. If you plan to use and have a budget for PSAs, one approach might be to offer to buy a 30 second spot for each free spot the station runs. (See **Chapter 3: Building a Budget and Funding Your Program** for more information.) Radio and television broadcasters are often willing to discount their less desirable timeslots as well (the majority of donated PSAs on major broadcast networks run between midnight and 6:00 AM). Although not primetime, these slots can increase exposure with minimal expense.

Traffic Reports

Consider traffic reports as an opportunity for low cost media buys. Radio stations typically sell 15-second sponsorships for traffic reports in large blocks, often 20 or more slots at a time. One advantage to traffic reports is that you may save the cost of producing (recording) a radio spot because most often traffic reports are a live read.

These are desirable slots as they are usually during standard "drive time" while people are traveling to and from work. Unsold slots can often be purchased for a discounted price on the Friday prior to the week they air. Talk to the radio station and arrange to have first choice on unsold slots.

Local Programming

Local programming offers the most options for free media. You will need to invest time developing relationships with local media personalities to effectively use this strategy.

Local news shows on network television stations are often looking for interesting topics. Contact the morning show producer and describe how your program might be of interest and benefit to morning show viewers. Mention any success stories or any upcoming events. Even if you speak by phone, send a follow-up email asking that they keep you in mind should last-minute guest cancellations occur. Be sure to include your contact information and website link.

Local cable television stations often air talk shows that are hosted and paid for by local government or community organizations such as churches and other area non-profits. Contact the local cable station for a list of programs. These shows offer free exposure and an opportunity to network with community leaders which can lead to other opportunities.

Benefits of local programming (radio and television) as compared to PSAs include:

- Reaching more of your target audience with longer air time
- Sharing more information about your program
- Responding to questions about the program
- Building relationships with the interviewer and broadcast organization

Smaller local stations, usually on the AM dial, tend to be receptive to having community organizations as guests on their talk shows. Faith-based radio programs are another option for interviews especially since many local faith leaders have loyal audiences who might be interested in your message about healthy relationships.

Print Media

Print media is another way to make the community aware of the services offered and to recruit participants. With a skilled writer on staff (or a volunteer or intern) and someone in touch with local resources, you can take advantage of the following ideas to get the word out.

Newspapers	Newspapers reflect the community, its events and its issues. As you read articles about community issues, note how your program either impacts—or is impacted by—the issues discussed. If there is a connection, compose a well-written, brief, and on-point letter to the editor responding to the article.
Community Calendars	Most local magazines/publications, newspapers, and local TV stations will include events and marriage and relationship education classes on their Community Calendars for free. Information requested and submission deadlines vary by publication. For example, some may allow space for a description of your workshop; others may only allow space for date, time and location. Create a contact list that includes all of these publications and keep it updated.
Community Sections	Editors for community sections are often looking for human interest stories that highlight organizations or individuals within their targeted community. Talk to the community editor about your organization and how it strengthens that community. Offer to write an article about a family who has been through your program. Invite the editor to attend a workshop or event.
Community Circulars	Community circulars are papers or magazines that have a different focus than mainstream media. They may highlight cultural events, health, business, women's issues, etc., and are usually distributed free throughout the community at local stores and restaurants. Contact them and tell them about your work. Ask them to donate advertising space for an upcoming event. Offer to write an article for their publication illustrating the relevance of your program to their audience.
Neighborhood and Community Newsletters	Neighborhood associations, churches, civic groups and other organizations have newsletters that are distributed to their network of contacts. If you partner with community organizations to offer marriage and relationship education, ask them to include a general article on marriage and relationship education along with information about the upcoming class; be sure to include a couple/family success story.
Employer Newsletters	Educate employers on the importance of marriage and family wellness. Offer data about the potential benefits of MRE services such as employee productivity, improved health, etc. Ask if they will host a marriage and relationship education class or at least include information about MRE opportunities in their employee newsletters. Offer to write short articles on relational wellness that could be used in their newsletters. These articles could stress the importance of peer and supervisory relationship health as well as personal relationship health.

NATIONAL HEALTHY MARRIAGE RESOURCE CENTER

Section 8
Marketing Your Program on the Web

Websites are an invaluable component to the marketing and public awareness strategy of any healthy marriage and relationship education program. You not only need to know how to develop your website, but also how to promote it in online and off-line settings. In addition to a website, you can also utilize other online resources such as social networking sites to bring about awareness of your program and the services you provide. Creating a website that is easily accessible through search engines as well as through social networking sites, will reach the public in a way that may be impossible otherwise.

Developing Your Website

Select a registrar and a host. Some registrars offer hosting in the same location. There are numerous hosts to choose from to support your web page(s). Make sure the host you select is well suited for what you hope to accomplish with your website. You should be able to search the host's website for site names by entering your preferred site name (domain name) into the field to check for availability.

When selecting a website name, use a few search engines (such as Google.com) to see what other services, programs, and books have the same (or similar) name. You want to be sure that another organization or program doesn't have a similar name, especially a cause or program that is incongruent with yours. You will also want to consider including keywords you want to rank for (e.g., marriageeducation.com) when choosing a name. Try to keep your site name simple and concise so that people will easily remember it. Once you have selected a site name you will have to purchase it and the hosting service. This cost varies by host site.

Building Your Website

In order to begin building your website content, you will need to select web editing software. If you are new to the selection process, consider software with relatively low-tech options (e.g. Dreamweaver, Coffee Cup, WordPress, or Microsoft Expression Web). Most have built-in templates that allow you to easily add the information you want displayed; no HTML knowledge is necessary. You can manipulate and view your layout and content in a way that is similar to the end product.

When writing content for your site, remember to structure it in a way that attracts your audience. Be concise; eliminate clichés and jargon. Since most internet users scan multiple sites for the information they're looking for, make phrases simple and to-the-point. Embed links to direct the audience to more specific information. When deciding which words to link, keep in mind which words are likely used in searches and that clearly direct your audience to what they are seeking. Grab the audience's attention by incorporating charts, videos, and graphics.

Use your brand and the same targeted marketing messages on your site. This will create recognition and standardize your marketing and public awareness activities. Remember to use diverse pictures that will appeal to your target audience(s). This may include age, gender and racial diversity. Watch for details like if people in the photographs are wearing wedding rings and that you are not just highlighting people in traditional wedding attire as that limits who people think you are targeting.

Uploading Your Website

The host of your website should have a file transfer protocol (FTP) site or software that enables you to upload the pages you have created to your website. Some hosts call this process "publishing." Once your site has been uploaded, you are now ready to promote it. Be sure to make regular updates to keep your pages looking fresh and up-to-date with the latest information about your program.

Marketing Your Website

Use appropriate search words and phrases in the content of your site. When developing your site, keep in mind that the content of your pages should include words that your target audience is likely to use in search engines (e.g., marriage, relationship, classes, education). With those appropriate search words and phrases in the content of your site, it will more likely be found by potential users searching the web.

One strategic idea is to have partner organizations or those who have a similar or complementary mission link to your site. This can be beneficial to your local credibility, especially if your program is new. You may want to reciprocate through a link exchange, but be scrupulous about which sites you link to. While there are other factors that determine search engine rating (e.g. Google), the more sites that provide a link to yours, the higher "ranking" your site is likely to have. Your site's ranking will directly impact its visibility and how quickly it is found in web searches. You may also consider installing free analytics tools (e.g., Google Analytics) to help determine where your site traffic is coming from and what types of content users seem to be most interested in.

Other strategies for publicizing your website include: list it in all email communications (perhaps in an email signature) and having all staff members do this as well. Add your website address (URL) to all organization letterheads, business cards, newsletters, etc. Marketing materials available to the public such as t-shirts, posters, and pens should also include the URL in visible print. Make sure staff are aware of what information can be found on the site and where to locate it. This way they can confidently share any necessary information with the public when answering phone calls or discussing the program with friends, family and colleagues.

Social Networking Sites

To advertise or increase interest in your website, consider using online services, like Facebook or Twitter. This is especially important if you are targeting young adults or youth who are actively communicating via social networking sites.

Social Networking Step-by-Step	
Step 1	Create a Facebook page for your organization that can be accessed by anyone who searches Facebook by name or a related topic (such as relationships, marriage, communication skills, etc.). Visit www.Facebook.com for detailed instructions on creating your own page.
Step 2	Encourage viewers to "like" your page to raise awareness and interest in your page. Your network of "friends" will grow as more people access your page through either the search function or friends' pages.
Step 3	Include the link to your website on your page – make it noticeable.
Step 4	Provide regular updates on new website content, events, fun facts, polls, etc. to maintain interest in your organization and encourage people to view your site. Engage your viewers by asking questions and responding to comments and questions posted on your page.

CHAPTER

9

RELEASE DATE: May 1, 2009

CONTACT:

(Contact name)

(Contact's direct phone #)

(Contact's email address)

Relationship Tune-up: *FREE Workshop*
For Couples – Saturday, May 31

Rochester, NY. The Greater Rochester Healthy Marriage Initiative (GRHMI) *[who]* is offering a FREE marriage workshop for couples *[what: addresses cost]* from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 31, 2008 *[when]*. This hands-on workshop for engaged and married couples *[who: target groups]* will provide useful tools to help couples communicate better, settle conflict and bring more excitement into their relationship *[what and why: shows benefits]*. This event takes place at Maritime Event Center located at 1221 Essex Boulevard in Downtown Rochester *[shows format and where]*. Free parking and on site childcare will be provided *[what: deals with hurdles]* as well as free lunches for all couples and children who register in advance *[what: motivation for attendance; encourages pre-registering]*. You may register online at www.GreaterRochesterHMI.org or by calling 212-534-5353 *[call to action]*.

Nationally, one in two marriages ends in divorce; Rochester residents are no exception. The Office of Family Assistance for the state of New York reports that one in two marriages in Rochester also ends in divorce with no change in this statistic in sight. The mission of the Greater Rochester Healthy Marriage Initiative is for all married couples to have the skills and tools needed for a healthy marriage. Couples will learn ways to create a peaceful home by discovering how to communicate better, solve problems together and offer each other understanding and support. "A happy marriage is great for individual health and society as a whole," said Executive Director John Johnson, PhD.

The Greater Rochester Healthy Marriage Initiative is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the improvement of healthy relationships and marriage. For more information, or to register online for upcoming workshops, visit us at www.GreaterRochesterHMI.org or call 212-534-5353.

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CHAPTER 10
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

The marketing messages discussed in *Chapter 9: Building Public Awareness* can alert your community to the services that you provide. The purpose of your recruitment strategy is to get participants in the door. This chapter discusses some of the considerations programs should take when recruiting couples.

Section 1: Tailoring the Message
Key Points:
- Target your marketing messages to speak to the needs of the participants you want to attract
- Recruit through social media outlets
- Make special efforts to appeal to men
- Address misconceptions about MRE
- Specify the benefits and emphasize the preventive nature of your program
- Offer participant testimonials

Section 2: Recruitment Strategies
Key Points:
- Everyone is responsible for recruiting participants
- Diversify the outlets you use to recruit participants
- Define specific roles and activities for recruitment partners
- Incorporate recruitment incentives for partners and for potential participants
- Anticipate that not all potential participants will attend and plan to "over recruit"
- Use social media to recruit younger participants
- Track recruitment efforts

Section 3: Enrollment
Key Points:
- Determine what information is needed to enroll participants in your program
- Create a client-friendly enrollment process
- Consider whether there are certain types of couples whom your program may not serve well and whether you should develop a screening process for enrollment

Section 1
Tailoring the Message

The nature and purpose of MRE programming is not universally understood, which poses a thorny recruitment challenge. It is difficult to convince people to invest time in a service the benefits of which they know little about. The strategies below may help to overcome these common objections raised by potential program participants.

To attract participants to your MRE program you need to explain *why* they should come. The reasons may vary depending on couples' circumstances. For instance, messages that convey having fun together, making time for their relationship and valuing a lifelong commitment are messages that are likely to resonate with married couples. Couples who are living together but not married, may want to learn how to better communicate with each other and resolve problems together. Couples who are expecting a child together may want to learn how a baby will change their relationship. Tailoring your message to the interests of your target audience is critical.

Appealing to Men

Given that MRE programs are often intended for couples and are most effective when both members of the couple participate, it is crucial that you make a concerted effort to market your program to men as well as women. This can be a challenge. Because most social services have been designed to serve women and children, men are often not used to being included in programming and may feel apprehensive about participating in your program. And issues such as "counseling" and "communication,"– often used in MRE advertising – tend to attract women more than men.

There are several strategies to consider about choosing your words when marketing your program to men. They may not want to "attend group," as that may sound like counseling or, even worse, men may fear sitting in a circle "sharing their feelings" or "talking about their problems." Recruitment materials could highlight a man's inherent desire to fix things by emphasizing that the workshop will teach strategies for problem-solving and conflict resolution. Offer solution-based insights and teach the positive elements of marriage that emphasize successful outcomes. When recruiting men who are fathers, emphasize that there is a link between being a great dad and being a great husband. Sometimes men will be drawn to a service that emphasizes their important role in their child's life, and this can be a great motivator to successfully engage and retain men.

Injecting humor and sports references into messages and recruitment activities can also work to engage men. Your marketing materials could use metaphors that compare a marriage education program to an automotive "tune-up," or going to the gym for a workout, stressing the preventive nature of the program. Also, materials could underscore that more effective communication, conflict resolution, and anger management are all skills that will give them an edge in the workplace.

Examples of Messages for Various Audiences

Married Couples	Couples Living Together
A stronger marriage means a stronger family	Check up on your relationship
Have fun with other married couples	Learn how to make your relationship last
Find out why couples in a healthy marriage are physically healthier, happier and more financially stable	Test drive your relationship by attending a relationship education class
Men	**Expectant Couples**
There is a link between being a great dad and a great husband	Be the best team possible for your baby
Learn how to solve problems and create solutions.	Learn what to expect when you bring home baby and tips for effective parenting
"Don't fumble the ball!" Learn the skills you need to keep your relationship strong.	What's best for your baby is the two of you
Engaged Couples	**Singles**
Prepare for a marriage of a lifetime	Finding Mr. or Mrs. Right
Build a foundation for a great marriage before you say "I Do"	Learn how to navigate the dating game

Marriage and relationship education programs are unfamiliar to many people; those that are familiar with them often have misconceptions as discussed in **Chapter 9: Building Public Awareness**. MRE services are frequently equated with couples counseling and can be a touchy issue for some. By anticipating this, you can be clear to differentiate MRE from counseling in your recruitment messages. This will dispel misconceptions that MRE is only for people in distressed relationships and alleviate concerns that people will think couples who participate have relationship problems.

Be familiar with the major differences between MRE and marriage counseling, and learn how to communicate these differences when reaching out to potential participants.

Marriage and Relationship Education is for couples who want to:	Marriage and Couples Counseling is appropriate for couples with any of the following issues:
• Improve communication	• Addictions or substance abuse
• Resolve conflict productively	• Emotional or physical abuse
• Handle differences in expectations	• Sexual problems
• Deal with anger and emotions constructively	• Severe child behavior issues
• Learn how to forgive and make healthy sacrifices to benefit the relationship	• Significant financial problems
• Work together as a team	• Difficulty with blending families
• Have fun and great sex in the relationship	• A partner has been unfaithful in the relationship
• Strengthen trust in and commitment to the relationship	• Constant fighting and anger
	• Mental health issues (such as depression or eating disorders)
	• When one spouse considers leaving the relationship
	• If the couple is staying together only for their children

Focus on the benefits

Instead of telling people what they will do in MRE (learn skills, problem solve, etc.), communicate potential benefits in a way that will leave them feeling that you have something to offer that can be hopeful, fun, and build positive connections with their partner (and children). Be sure to use language that is friendly, engaging, and easy to understand (keeping reading level in mind). For example, you might say, "have fun with other married couples" instead of "develop a broader social support network." Emphasize the preventive nature of MRE programs so that individuals don't feel like there is something wrong with their relationship if they attend. You could compare couples' participation to getting a marriage check-up much like they would get a physical at the doctor. You can also encourage couples to build an even stronger relationship or marriage than they already have. If you are working with couples who have children, you might use phrases like, "to be the best parents, you need a strong relationship" or "a stronger marriage means a stronger family" to convey that couples will be helping their children by coming to your program.

Ask Participants to Share Their Experience

Word of mouth is an effective recruitment strategy. Ask the couples who have been through your program to share their experiences – why they decided to attend, what they enjoyed about the program, and how they feel their relationship benefited from MRE. In addition to asking past participants to share what they liked about the program, be sure to ask them about any reservations they may have had prior to attending. Ask past participants to talk about their initial fears and aspects of the program that put them at ease. Sometimes hearing others concerns or hesitations about attending can be comforting to a potential participant who is "on the fence."

Good programs employ multiple recruitment strategies. Having strong marketing materials, a memorable program name or tag line, and credibility in the community help; but people make the difference. All staff members involved in your MRE program should be trained to pitch your program and answer questions about it. You are demonstrating effective relationship skills every time your staff engages potential participants in a discussion about your MRE program. They need to listen to people's needs and concerns.

CHAPTER
10
SECTION 2

Where to Recruit?

Unfortunately MRE is not a "build it and they will come" program model. You will need to actively recruit participants. The table below lists possible locations for various recruitment efforts.

Location	Recruitment Strategy			
	Give presentation and have sign-up sheet	Workshop sign-up sheet	Approach people in-person	Place brochures or hang posters
WIC Clinic	X	X		X
Head Start Program		X		X
Local Department of Human Services Office (waiting area)		X	X	X
Library, YMCA or other community gathering place				X
Stores (Walmart, grocery, baby, or hardware stores)			X	X
Schools	X			
Churches	X	X		
Workforce Training Office	X			X

In some communities door-to-door recruitment may be effective. Some organizations may have opportunities to present to their clients. Look for any opportunity to get in front of potential participants. If your program is seeking a specific audience such as engaged couples, expectant couples, or parents of teens you can look for community fairs or services aimed at these populations (i.e. bridal fairs, childbirth preparation classes, high school PTAs, etc.). To recruit men it is best to identify man-friendly venues such as local sporting events, home redesign workshops, or barber shops. You can also work with a local Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or employment program to obtain referrals.

Working with Partners to Recruit Participants

Your MRE program staff alone cannot reach all of the potential participants in your community. Work with community partners to train them on MRE and agree on the specific role they can play in the recruitment process. If possible, clarify specific recruitment goals (i.e. number of participants they can recruit for your program each month, etc.) and activities in your memoranda of understanding (MOU) and/or contracts.

For example, you may agree that your partner organizations will:

- **Allow your staff to recruit during new client orientation meetings.** While partner organizations can help you recruit, you know and can sell your program best. If your partners host new client orientations on a regular basis, see if you can become a regular presenter and connect with their clientele to explain the benefits of your program.

- **Distribute flyers and/or a one-page overview of your program to all their clients.** Receiving your program information from a trusted source (i.e. your partner organization) may make potential participants more comfortable about enrolling. Provide outreach resources and make it easy for your partners to help spread the word.

- **Include a referral to your MRE program as part of their standard intake/ enrollment process.** Work with your partners to develop a referral form that can be easily included in their enrollment process. Forms can be collected and sent to you on a regular basis.

- **Designate a staff person to communicate with you on a regular basis.** Identifying a lead person within the partner organization to spearhead recruitment activities streamlines the process and provides you with a direct point of contact for recruitment updates/challenges.

Partnerships are crucial to your recruitment efforts. Each partnership will be unique, however agreeing upon specific recruitment activities can create structure for your partners and ensure that you are reaching the community you intend to serve.

Even though partner organizations may understand the benefits your program offers to their clients, asking staff to take on additional responsibilities to recruit for your program can be challenging. Respect the time and energy it may take partner organization staff to assist with recruitment activities and make it worth their time. You may want to incorporate an incentive program to help motivate recruitment and referral activities. Work with the leadership at your partner organizations to identify the types of things that would be most motivating to their staff and would also be supported internally. Incentives to consider include:

- Creating organization-wide rewards for meeting recruitment goals (i.e. catered lunch, special celebrations, etc.).

- Tracking how many participants are recruited/referred by specific staff members. Instill friendly competition by offering monthly incentives for the most participants referred (i.e. "Recruiter of the Month" recognition, etc.).

- Offering additional personal time off and/or other special organizational compensation for high performing staff.

Social Media

The Internet and social media can be especially productive recruitment tools. Because these resources offer a broad outreach, the more specific your messaging is, the better your recruitment effort. Keep in mind that recruiting through the internet and other social media outlets may be more likely to reach younger couples, many of whom may be living together. Include language such as living together, committed, or seriously dating depending on the types of couples you wish to reach. Use social networking websites and "fan pages" for your program to get the word out, provide public updates, recommend articles or links, and allow sharing of success stories and praise for your program. Many of your colleagues and partners will be happy to send an electronic announcement to their email lists about your program. (See **Chapter 9: Building Public Awareness** for additional marketing ideas.)

Plan to over recruit

Be mindful that not every participant who expresses interest in your program will attend. Job schedules change, families move, children get sick, and other situations arise that can keep them from attending. Be sure that you account for these life circumstances when agreeing upon recruitment goals with your partners with the knowledge that a moderate percentage of the potential participants recruited or referred will not complete the program. Therefore, in order for you to meet your overall program goals, you will need their help recruiting a greater number of potential participants.

Track Recruitment Efforts

Since effective recruitment strategies involve reaching out to potential participants in multiple places, develop a system to track your efforts. Have staff track how many fliers they deliver and how many people they talk to about your MRE program. Ask participants where they heard about the program. This information can inform future recruitment efforts to maximize your impact.

Section 3
Enrollment

The goal of recruitment is to enroll participants in your MRE program. Enrollment may be as simple as a name on a sign-in sheet or it may involve intake and assessment. The key is to think about the types of information you desire to collect from each potential participant in order to provide appropriate services, ensure safety, and connect him/her to additional resources if necessary. In addition, you may want to gather some baseline information for evaluation purposes. (See **Chapter 12: Evaluation** for more information.)

The enrollment process for participants in marriage and relationship education services will vary based on the program model. For example, some programs target specific populations which may require very intensive services including case management and/or other wrap-around services. For these programs, the intake process may involve a more comprehensive assessment of current stressors and needs for additional services. Other programs may offer shorter, less intensive services geared toward the community at-large. These programs may not have the capacity to provide services outside of marriage and relationship education, and therefore may only need to collect basic participant information (i.e. name, contact information, relationship status, etc.). Your intake/enrollment process may or may not contain the items listed below, depending on your program model and the range of services you plan to provide.

Examples of intake items:

- Name(s)
- Contact information (email, phone, address, etc.)
- Relationship status (single, engaged, married, blended family)
- Number/ages of children (to inform child care needs)
- Primary language spoken at home
- History of substance abuse/mental health/domestic violence issues*
- General feelings/attitudes about the quality of their relationship
- General feelings/attitudes about their ability to communicate or resolve conflicts

*Some programs may screen participants.

To Screen or Not to Screen

Above all, physical and emotional safety is paramount for a healthy relationship to develop and thrive. Because some people interested in enrolling in your program may be involved in domestic violence, the nature of which is beyond your program's ability to address, the issue of whether or not to screen for violence should be considered in developing your program's enrollment process.

The appropriateness of a screening process depends on how participants are recruited as well as if you can offer appropriate support services when necessary. Many programs do not conduct formal intakes, and thus do not have an opportunity for one-on-one conversations with couples around relationship safety. Formal intake and screening is generally not used in one-time community events; weekend retreats for married and engaged couples; church settings; or in services within public schools, youth service agencies or prisons. These "open admission" programs can find other ways to provide information that will encourage participants to seek help if they recognize they are in an abusive relationship. One commonly used tool is an informational flyer about domestic violence, family violence and abuse, and other community resources. Programs also often post appropriate information in the women's rest rooms in lieu of a formal screening process.

Regardless of whether formal screening exists within your program, program administrators and educators, including those with "open admissions" or no contact with their audience, need to integrate sound information about domestic and family violence, available services, and safety strategies in their curricula, marketing materials, and public information messages.

If you decide to screen potential participants you should make sure that they walk away with something, whether it is enrollment in your program or an appropriate referral. This honors the time they spent with you and can improve your reputation as a valuable community resource. You should have a one-page resource sheet with information about particular community services that you offer to participants. You could include information for services related to:

- Counseling
- Employment/Job training
- Substance abuse
- Safety/Domestic violence
- Housing
- Child care
- Food banks

Develop a streamlined enrollment process and train staff

Whether your program requires an in-depth assessment or simple demographic information, you will need to develop a process for collecting this information that is easy and comfortable for the participant. If the intake process is overly complicated and/or time consuming, potential participants may be overwhelmed or lose interest in the program before they begin. Think through the process from the moment you make contact with a potential participant (i.e. face-to-face, over the phone, online, etc.) to the time they begin attending services. The goal is to collect the required information in the most unobtrusive way possible. Consider, for example, whether information can be collected at the first meeting, or whether you will need to schedule another, longer meeting.

Also consider the staff involved with the process. Will participants interact with multiple staff members throughout the process, or will one staff member be tasked with conducting intakes? Once you determine your enrollment process it will be important to train staff tasked with this responsibility. Creating a seamless enrollment process will help ensure that participants maintain their enthusiasm and interest in attending.

CHAPTER 11
RETENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Program retention – engaging people in your program until they complete it – can be a challenge. This is especially true for a voluntary prevention program like MRE. This chapter focuses on understanding why some participants may not continue attending services and presents strategies to keep them engaged over time.

Section 1: Understanding Attrition
Key Points:
- Anticipate that over time some participants will stop attending services
- Eliminate barriers that prevent participants from attending
- Offer incentives to reinforce curriculum concepts and to keep participants interested
- Provide meals to foster relationship building/networking among participants

Section 2: Encouraging People to Come Back
Key Points:
- Incentives can get more people in the door or help them to finish the program but should not be used in place of program quality
- The value of the incentive should be equal to the amount of time a couple is putting into the program
- Incentives are most valuable when they encourage behaviors taught in the curriculum
- Consider offering meals and/or refreshments during programming

Section 3: Enhancing Participant Engagement
Key Points:
- Utilize the knowledge and experience of your participants
- Refrain from lecture-style presentations
- Incorporate media and interactive activities in your presentation
- Incorporate specific strategies to engage men

Section 4: Managing Disruptive Participants
Key Points:
- Managing group dynamics is critical to retaining participants
- There are various profiles of disruptive participants and strategies to manage them

Section 1
Understanding Attrition

In an ideal world, once someone attended your MRE program, he/she would complete it. Attrition is less of an issue at a one-day MRE event or weekend retreat, although some participants may leave during breaks. Retention challenges are most common in multi-week sessions.

Anticipate Attrition and Help Eliminate Barriers

Maintaining participant engagement in a marriage or relationship program can be influenced by things outside the program's control such as a sick child, work schedule, lack of motivation, or things you can address such as a dynamic facilitator, useful skill building and positive group dynamics. Programs offering services over several weeks should anticipate that some participants will drop out over time. This phenomenon is referred to as "attrition." There will be circumstances that are out of your control preventing you from retaining participants, but there are strategies your program can implement to increase the likelihood that the participants who enroll in services complete them.

Set goals for the percent of participants that you want to complete your program. Assuming 100 percent is not realistic, what is? 75 percent? 90 percent? Determine your goal and offer support services to help you achieve it. Some strategies for encouraging attendance are presented in the table below.

Challenge	Strategies
Child Care	• Consider partnering with agencies in your community that already offer children's programs and that already have any required background checks and insurance to cover your liability concerns. A few options are the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, faith-based groups and non-profit childcare providers. These partners may allow you to use their facility to host your workshop, or if they are nearby, can offer drop-off childcare services. • Think about what ages you will provide care for and make sure that your programming is appropriate for that group. For example, programs for older children and teens require very different staffing needs and resources than those serving infants and young children. • Help participants by doing some of the legwork. Identify childcare providers in your community that offer quality services, extended hours or reduced rates and provide that information to participants during registration.
Time	• Be conscious of the time commitment you are expecting from them and schedule program activities at times that are convenient. Often this means providing services on evenings or weekends. Ask potential participants to indicate their schedule preferences during workshop sign up. • Be aware of potential scheduling conflicts like holidays, religious celebrations and other big local events such as festivals, football games, etc. • Schedule the start time of your program and structure your activities so that participants are able to arrive on time or do not miss critical curriculum content if they arrive a few minutes late. For example, starting a weekday evening workshop at 6:00 or 6:30pm may be better than 5:00 or 5:30pm in order to accommodate travel and dinner needs.

Although you cannot prevent attrition altogether, eliminating common barriers to attendance can help retain participants.

Section 2
Encouraging People to Come Back

People, in general, will attend your MRE program because they like the material, presenter, other participants or they have something to gain from attending. Simply offering a free marriage education program is not always an incentive for participants. As a practitioner, you may be well aware of all the benefits and logical reasons why participants should attend your workshop, but that list of benefits and reasons does not immediately translate into meeting an immediate desire for participants. You may find that incentives given throughout the program can get more people in the door or help them to finish the program. However, they should not be used in exchange for program quality.

Often participants need an immediate reason to attend. Depending on your target audience and funding streams, gift cards from a grocery store, major department store, restaurant or movie can work. Gift cards in the amount of $25-50 help get a couple's interest and attendance. The value of the card should be generally equivalent to the amount of time a couple is putting into the program in order to be viewed as an incentive. By giving a gift card or other incentive up front, you are sending a clear message about how much you care about their attendance and about the benefits of your services. The number of classes and the length of time they last will determine if incentives are needed periodically, midway through the program or just at the end. If your program occurs over multiple sessions/weeks, ask yourself the following questions when deciding on incentives:

- What are the main lessons I want participants to learn? Tie incentives in with these lessons to keep people coming during these points in the program. For example, if the lesson is on stress management, a gift certificate for a massage or for a comedy club might be fitting as an incentive.

- What have I noticed in attendance? If you are offering a 10-week program and usually see a drop in attendance during weeks 7-9, first make sure the sessions are of high quality and then add incentives to sessions 6 and 8 to keep couples returning.

- What appeals to my target population? For busy, working parents, a "date night package" with a babysitter, movie pass and restaurant gift certificate might be popular. For couples who are concerned about money, gift cards for food/gas or a drawing to pay someone's utility bill that month may be appealing.

Incentives are most valuable when they encourage behaviors taught in the curriculum. Many curricula encourage couples to develop a hobby together, spend time together (either as a couple or with the family), put fun and friendship first, learn to relax/find healthy ways to deal with stress, and/or manage a budget. Use incentives to support these ideas creatively, and keep men in mind when selecting them. You don't have to give away a lawn mower at the end of the workshop series, but a fuzzy blanket and romantic movie may not encourage guys to attend (or continue attending) your program. Examples of incentives that support curriculum content may include:

A one-night getaway at a local bed and breakfast: Give the couple a chance to escape and focus on each other.	A tool set or a gift certificate to a hardware store: Reinforces that couples are learning tools to enhance their relationship.
Books on couple relationships: Encourage further study to find healthy ways to connect as a couple.	A "his and hers" massage or other pampering service: Promotes stress relief and relaxation.
Puzzles to practice problem solving: Working together one piece at a time can create something beautiful!	Free passes to a sporting event, museum, zoo, theme park, or other fun venue: Fun family activity that might otherwise be cost prohibitive.
Dancing or cooking lessons for couples to work on teamwork/communication skills: On the dance floor or in the kitchen – being together can be lots of fun!	Fun stationery for writing love notes: Encouraging intimate conversation can inspire participants to try new ways to connect.
Free passes to theatre or stage performances: Admission is often a barrier for couples – what a great date night!	A horse and carriage ride: Some good, old-fashion romance goes a long way.
A calculator or coupon for tax services/ financial planning services for couples: Offer this with some gourmet snacks to make this bookkeeping event more fun.	

You may also want to offer meals and/or refreshments during programming. If programs are scheduled to begin in the evening around meal time, offering dinner helps eliminate an obstacle that participants may have to attend. Furthermore, it provides a time for them to socialize and form friendships which may increase their motivation for coming back (this may be particularly true for men). Offering healthy refreshments during breaks is another great way to demonstrate that you appreciate the time participants are investing in your program.

Section 3
Enhancing Participant Engagement

Keeping participants excited about the content and skills they are learning is the best way to keep them coming back to your program. When you employ various strategies to engage participants and offer opportunities to share what they know or have experienced related to the content of the class, they feel valued. For example, participants have a wealth of life experiences and knowledge that have shaped and established their values, beliefs and opinions. Marriage and relationship educators should recognize their participants' expertise and life experiences and:

- Ask about their needs, expectations and interests.
- Acknowledge their accomplishments.
- Recognize the diversity of the group members and respect their views.
- Facilitate meaningful and interactive discussion instead of lecturing to participants.

The role of the facilitator in demonstrating respect for program participants and their willingness to attend can go a long way in supporting your retention goals.

Incorporate Media and Interactive Activities

Engaging in long lectures is a sure way to lose your participants' interest in your program. Limit the lecture/teaching portion of your program and keep participants engaged with activities and discussions, which are often the best paths to learning for most people. Brief them on the benefits of the lesson and how it applies to real life before the lesson begins and incorporate some of the following to keep presentations fresh and engaging:

- Use a mixture of different media (workbooks, pictures, videos, handouts, etc).
- Provide structured and unstructured activities.
- Allow opportunities for individual reflection, class discussion and small group interaction.
- Give detailed, clear and factual explanations.
- Supply fill-in-the-blank handouts and self-assessments.
- Allow for individual physical movement.

The **NHMRC Facilitator Toolkit** includes a variety of activities that can be used to enhance any MRE program (http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/educators/marriage-relationship-resources/facilitator-toolkit/index.aspx#).

Engaging Men

Barriers that may prohibit men from participating in your MRE classes include not feeling safe to talk within a group, fear of being misunderstood, fear of embarrassing himself or his spouse/girlfriend, lack of trust for the group, or feelings of inferiority or insignificance. When you can create an MRE setting that removes these barriers for men, you may find them more willing to engage.

Some marriage educators say that engaging and retaining men in your program starts with the first contact. Many times men only show up at your program because their girlfriend/wife has asked them to come, not because of a strong desire to participate. Having male staff that can approach men and connect with them about the ways your program may benefit them and what they can expect if they attend helps engage men. Once they are "in the door," continue involving male staff in developing rapport and delivering services. Male staff can relate to the stressors and challenges of a relationship from the male perspective.

Just as developing rapport with men is necessary, establishing credibility is extremely important. Men, even more so than women, tend to ask, "Why? Why are you qualified to give me advice on my marriage? Why will this workshop help us? Why do I have to come?" Understand that they may have these questions, start things off by directly describing the facilitators' credentials, the purpose of the class, and the key takeaway goals for each participant.

As previously mentioned, certain incentives (i.e., fuzzy blankets and romantic movies) may not be appealing to men. Similarly, successful programs engage men, in part, by creating a male-friendly environment. Consider having couches or recliners (without floral upholstery). If there are posters on the walls, they should depict men as well as women. Some social service organizations host workshops and display posters with negative images of men as delinquent on child support, or show families that don't include men. Be aware that everything you post or advertise on the walls gives men a message about how you think of them and how you think about relationships. Male-friendly magazines and other reading materials should also be readily available in waiting rooms or common areas. Other ideas to make your workshop space more inviting for men include:

- Position chairs/tables so that the participants can see one another.
- Avoid "classroom" style set up with rows of people with their backs to each other.
- Rectangular or circular settings make men feel more comfortable, ultimately encouraging participation.

Let the men talk! Be intentional about engaging men in couple sessions and including break-out sessions specifically for men. Set the tone early by telling participants that everyone in the group will be encouraged to contribute to group conversations, as everyone has important life experiences that may be helpful to share with others. That way, men don't feel pressured to "share their feelings" but feel that they are a valuable part of the learning process. You may also want to establish ground rules to help men feel more comfortable about sharing. Ground rules might include:

- Every person's opinion is important.
- No one should monopolize the group.
- Others have a right to express their opinion.
- No one will use threatening language.
- No one will use foul language (although this may be difficult for some people).

Work to keep things light and funny. Humor is an effective way to engage both men and women. Explore video clips, cartoons, and quotes that drive home key classroom insights. Similarly, your curriculum should be interactive. Men typically feel a real sense of accomplishment when they are given a tool and an opportunity to use it successfully in the moment.

Other ways to actively engage men include:

- Divide the men and women into groups and create a competition…over anything!
- Develop gender-specific subgroups for sensitive discussions.
- Ask a man to report back to the class after break-out sessions.
- Involve men in role-playing.
- Call out quiet men by name and ask them to weigh in on the topic.
- Offer a "dads group" as a supplement to the MRE workshop.
- Have a man make the first contact to discuss his attendance. This action greatly increases the probability of him showing up again.
- Men with a certain education level and profession need to be recruited by someone he can relate to and who shares a similar background. This will enhance the relationship by building trust and familiarity.
- Men, as a rule, do not desire to be the only man in the classroom. Having other men present shows him that you want him there, too.
- Men need strengths-based interaction with MRE facilitators.
- Establish trusting relationships.
- The facilitator needs to be very sensitive when dealing with issues of who is the "head of the house." Challenging topics like this should be brought up to the group once the facilitators have established a relationship and built up trust.
- Having male staff and male constituents in close proximity are essential to creating a comfortable environment for men.
- Due to strong religious and cultural values, the facilitator needs to be extremely sensitive to different opinions and perspectives. It is necessary to be open-minded to the group's thoughts.

These tips were drawn from programs working with diverse groups of men; some strategies may work better in one community than another.

Section 4
Managing Disruptive Participants

The other participants in your MRE workshop can either help or hinder retention efforts. Even the most well designed program can be undermined if disruptive participants are not managed. When facilitators are not able to manage group dynamics, some participants may become frustrated, lose trust in the safety of the group, and decide not to continue participating. Programs should understand potential challenges working with groups and train facilitators to engage all participants in order to retain them for the duration of the program. Programs should equip facilitators with tools to address a variety of disengaged group members or those who desire attention. The following are strategies for facilitators to employ to manage disruptive participants.

Overly Talkative Participants
- Intentionally call on other group members in order to convey that you want everyone involved in the conversation.
- Wait for a pause or the end of the first thought, and gently interrupt and invite someone else to speak.
- Deliberately look away from the dominating person and make eye contact with others.

Tangents and Ramblings
- Direct the group back to the topic or find something in what they say that you can link back to it.
- Ask if there is a question or how they think this connects to the topic.
- Take the question back and give it to the rest of the group.

Jokes and Side Conversations
- If the joke is close to the topic, or helps to illustrate the point, let it go.
- Ask the person an easy, but serious, question to get them focused on the topic.
- Politely interrupt and ask if their thoughts could be shared with the whole group.
- Move toward side talkers and make eye contact with them.
- If necessary, talk to the participant outside of the group or during a break.

Participants Wanting to Monopolize the Group with Specific, Personal Issues
- Don't feel you have to solve the person's problem, but be empathic.
- Don't react to hostility, redirect questions back to the person.
- If there is time, and the topic is appropriate to the group, ask group members for input.
- Offer to talk to the person during the break.
- If you don't know the answer, say so; then promise to help them get an answer.

Heckling

- If the comment is hostile, ask for a healthier, more effective way the person could state what they are saying. Use positive peer pressure.
- Identify hostile behavior when you see it, and gently make it clear that the purpose of the class is to find better ways to manage conflict and hard feelings.
- If necessary, and for the good of the group, overtly hostile people can be asked not to come back. Offer alternative services or resources.

Disrespectful Participants

- Remind the group of whatever ground rules you have about the physical and emotional safety of the relationships of all participants.
- Ask the person to reframe or restate what they said in a more positive way.
- Point out the pattern, and if it persists, talk with the couple during a break.
- If appropriate, ask the couples to use the skills or techniques they are currently learning.

Highly Emotional Reactions to Program Content

- Acknowledge the emotional response verbally or nonverbally. Sometimes the person can "recover" if the group simply moves on.
- Avoid drawing the whole group's attention to the person, although sometimes their partner or someone next to them will offer them comfort.
- Normalize feelings and remind the group of any skills for dealing with strong feelings that might be part of your curriculum.
- Assure the person that it is okay if they need to take a moment away from the group, but ask them if they would like some support. Often their partner will provide this.
- If you have another instructor in the room, one can accompany the person out of the room briefly to help them.

Additional information about training facilitators on these tough issues can be found in *Chapter 6: Marriage Educators and Facilitation*.

CHAPTER 12
EVALUATION

Evaluation for the purpose of discovering the effectiveness or impact of your program should be a practical endeavor rooted in sound theory and practice. This type of work is meant to inform program managers, staff, participants, and stakeholders of outcomes and to allow you to adjust your methods, if necessary, while maintaining focus on the outcomes you hope to obtain. Program evaluation may directly impact the way your MRE program is conducted. This chapter presents different types of evaluation and the phases of evaluation.

Section 1: Developing a Logic Model
Key Points:
- Be explicit and specific about program goals, activities, and desired outcomes
- Clearly articulate the evaluation questions that could lead to improved practices

Section 2: Working With an Evaluator
Key Points:
- Identify an experienced evaluator if you are unfamiliar with evaluation processes
- Clearly articulate roles, responsibilities, and expectations with the evaluator

Section 3: Planning and Conducting an Evaluation Study
Key Points:
- Know your evaluation options and choose the type of evaluation that best fits your outcomes
- Create a consistent procedure for collecting, storing, and analyzing data
- Be sure data collectors and evaluators follow confidentiality policies

Section 4: Analyzing Results
Key Points:
- Descriptive analysis will give you insight into programmatic operations
- Explanatory analysis tells you what is happening and why

Section 5: Reporting Findings
Key Points:
- Data is best expressed through stories
- Evaluation findings can be reported during program implementation to improve practices
- Share findings with the external community to promote practices, gain funding, and build partnerships

Section 1
Developing a Logic Model

The best place to start when planning a program evaluation is to develop a logic model, or a road map, that explicitly lays out your program goals, how your program will achieve these goals, and the results expected if program goals are met. While an evaluator can assist you, you and your staff have the primary responsibility for developing your program logic model as you know your program intimately. The clearer your logic model, the better you will be able to articulate the evaluation questions that you want answered about your program. In fact, a program logic model is critical for every stage of evaluation.

There are many ways to draw a logic model, but all models generally contain the following eight elements:

1. **Context** in which the program operates

2. **Underlying Assumptions** as to why the program should work and the nature of the problem

3. **Inputs** (resources) that are required to operate the program

4. **Interventions and Activities** which list what the program does with or for participants

5. **Outputs** that describe what is produced by the program interventions and activities

6. **Immediate Outcomes** that state expectations about what participants will learn, their reactions to the program, and any short-term behavior change

7. **Subsequent Outcomes** which list participant learning that will occur over time, expected new or sustained behavior change, and "behavior spillover" to other positive behaviors occurred

8. **Societal Goals** which state the desired impact your program will have on the population of interest which is very likely closely connected to the mission of your program

(See **Chapter 1: Laying the Foundation** for more information about the role of logic models in developing your program.)

Evaluation Questions

A key activity during the evaluation planning stage is clearly articulating questions that you would like the evaluation to answer. The logic model is a helpful way to think through different categories of questions you may have. To help get you started, each element of the logic model is listed below with accompanying sample evaluation questions.

Elements	Questions to Answer in Each Section
Context	• What are the political, economic, and social characteristics of the community in which the program operates? • How (well) does the program align with the sponsoring organization's mission and priorities?
Assumptions	• When thinking about the problem your MRE program is addressing, in what ways is the problem amenable to intervention? How do you think your program will help? • What is your underlying "program theory" regarding how your program will address or prevent the problem in the target population? • How do you know that your targeted population needs and wants your program? What evidence do you have (statistics, anecdotes, personal experience) to suggest this? • In what ways do you think your theory may be limited? What factors may prevent immediate and subsequent outcomes from occurring?
Inputs	• What resources (money, staff, facilities, technology, curriculum materials, etc.) are being used to run the program? Are these sufficient to meet your goals? • Who is staffing the program, and are they appropriately qualified?
Activities	• What are the major interventions, or components of the program provided to participants (e.g., educational classes, support groups, mentoring, etc.)? What are the primary activities? What is the program's service delivery model?
Outputs	• To what extent is the program recruiting and enrolling the intended target population? If not meeting expectations, why not? • What are the characteristics of those enrolling in program services? How does this compare to those that are recruited but do not enroll in the program? • What are the intended numbers of participants to be served, number of classes to be conducted, and/or number of contact hours to be delivered in the program? What other numbers or products do you intend to deliver?
Immediate Outcomes	• Before the intervention, how do participants rate on immediate outcomes (i.e., their knowledge, skills, attitudes towards marriage, intentions and behaviors explicitly addressed in program content)? On which outcomes do participants appear to be faring well prior to intervention? Which outcome levels are of concern? • What are participants and instructors saying about their experiences with the program? What do they like? What don't they like? What suggestions do they have to improve the program? Would participants recommend the program to others?
Subsequent Outcomes	• Both before and after the intervention, how do participants rate on key subsequent outcomes (e.g., relationship satisfaction, couple communication)? Subsequent outcomes will usually be measured 6-12 months later.
Societal Goals	• At a larger level, what do you hope to accomplish from your efforts? What kinds of policy changes, attitude changes, and trend changes do you hope to see?

Stakeholders are those who have a stake in your program's success. Typical stakeholders include program funders such as governmental agencies or private foundations; program sponsors such as a community-based organization or city agency; program staff members, program managers and evaluation staff; and/or program participants. Stakeholders need to understand your program in order to identify what they want to learn from the evaluation. For this reason, it is useful to schedule periodic meetings with them. Bring your evaluator to this meeting and your program's logic model for review. Get stakeholders' input on the questions they want the evaluation to address in order to increase the chances that the evaluation will produce useful information. Stakeholders also tend to be an invaluable resource when disseminating evaluation findings and securing support for your program.

Section 2
Working With an External Evaluator

If you don't know a lot about evaluation, it is probably in the best interest of your program to obtain the assistance of an evaluator. This may be someone within your organization or an external evaluator. Assistance might be obtained to help discuss the design, assist with the measures being used, and gain advice on the analysis of data. Be an informed consumer. Knowing what role you play in an evaluation and what to expect from your evaluator will make the process less intimidating and ensure that you get the information you need to make program improvements and share program successes with staff, participants, funders and stakeholders.

A successful collaboration between you and your evaluator requires a clear articulation of roles, responsibilities, and expectations, which are best discussed during the planning stage of your program. Including your evaluator in these initial discussions saves you the time of having to brief him/her on the issues being considered and program decisions made, and gives you the benefit of the evaluator's experience and insights during these planning meetings.

Evaluator Roles and Responsibilities

In order to have an effective evaluation, you will want to partner closely with your evaluator. Describe your marriage and relationship education program to your evaluator. You will want to discuss any activities, the target population, why you expect your program to work, and your definition of program success. Further, you will need to communicate what you want to learn from the evaluation. Some questions may include:

- How are the participants experiencing the program?
- Is the curriculum appropriate?
- Does participation in the program lead to changes in participant knowledge and/or attitudes?
- Can an intervention that is successful in another community be successfully adapted to fit your community/program?
- How effective are our facilitators?

Finally, you will need to describe how you want the evaluation findings to be used. Examples include documenting program activities and positive outcomes for current and/or new funders and to make program improvements and adjustments (i.e., facilitator training, curriculum changes, service delivery strategies, etc.).

One key component of the evaluator role is that he or she should determine whether the evaluation will need approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB). If so, the project should be submitted as soon as possible as the review process can take some time. IRBs have been established by the federal government to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects participating in research. The IRB oversees the evaluation plan to ensure that physical, psychological, and social risks to research subjects are minimized. Therefore, IRBs are concerned with the kinds of questions you will ask participants, how you will protect participant confidentiality (including any data gathered about participants), whether participants are from a vulnerable population that needs special protection, and how data will be stored. Note: If you choose to bring on an external evaluator, be sure to see if they have an IRB connection through a local university or other research institution.

Choosing an External Evaluator

You can hire an evaluator from a professional research institute or collaborate with staff members at a university program who are skilled in social service program evaluations. University partnerships may offer invaluable access to evidence-based practices in programmatic approaches as well as research and evaluation. Another possibility would be to hire a social sciences graduate student as an evaluation intern. Not only will he/she gain firsthand experience within your agency, exposing them to the participant pool and implementation components, but they will also give your organization a fresh pair of eyes to tie practices back to the literature in the field of marriage and relationship education.

In order to provide clarity on expectations for the role, be sure to prepare a contract with your chosen evaluator. Whether you hire a professional, a graduate student or an intern, the evaluator will likely ask a lot of questions to ensure he or she fully understands the nature of the program, its goals, and the underlying logic for the program. Furthermore, the evaluator needs to understand what your organization wants to learn from the evaluation, and how the findings will be used.

Items to Include in a Contract

During the initial stages of hiring external assistance, you will want to address certain items in a contract. Set a timeline to begin and end the evaluation process, and when any intermediate or final reports are expected to be completed. Decide when and how often the evaluator will share findings that could have implications for program improvements. Be explicit about to whom, when, how, where, and if study findings will be shared with the public. It is important to cover who retains possession and control of evaluation data upon study completion, and if or when data will be destroyed. Given the fact that evaluators may very well like to share the content with the academic community, it is important to decide whether evaluation data can be used for a dissertation and/or publication.

Section 3
Planning and Conducting an Evaluation Study

When designing an evaluation study, determine the best way to obtain the information needed to answer your evaluation questions. An evaluation design involves developing a plan that specifies what information will be collected, from what sources the information will be obtained, and how and when data will be collected.

There are three "types" of evaluation studies, which will be applied depending on the evaluation question(s) that should be answered. These evaluation types can be combined to provide more information. For example, it can be very helpful to couple an outcome evaluation with an implementation or process evaluation, to better understand the connection between the how your program was implemented and the observed outcomes. Through a combination of both approaches you can get information on *why* the program or parts of the program worked or didn't work.

1. Implementation or Process Evaluation

With this evaluation the following questions can be answered:

- What is actually being implemented?
- What is the way in which it is being implemented?
- What are staff and client reactions to the program?

An implementation evaluation can serve different purposes:

- To document what you did (to facilitate replication and, if coupled with an impact evaluation, to help interpret impacts)
- To provide information for on-going program improvements
- To report progress to stakeholders (including funders)
- To provide a context for interpreting impact findings (if coupled with an impact evaluation)

Note: An implementation evaluation is important if your program is still in the pilot phase. A strong implementation evaluation examining major start-up activities (often called a "formative" evaluation) can help to improve the program.

2. Outcomes Evaluation

This approach can help you provide information about:

- Participant outcomes directly related to program content—that is, changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior
- Participant reactions to and satisfaction with the program

The purpose of this approach is to:

- Assess whether participants appear to be learning (and retaining) program content
- Decide based on the results whether adjustments or improvements are needed in program content, dosage, or service delivery
- Directly reflect what the program provided or taught

Note: Pair outcome monitoring with an implementation evaluation to better understand the connection between the program implementation and the outcomes.

3. Impact Evaluation

An impact evaluation examines the program effectiveness in comparison to outcomes for others that would have occurred without program intervention. The outcomes might be:

- Behavioral changes
- Knowledge acquirement
- Change in attitudes

Impact evaluations essentially ask not only what difference the program made, but how much difference it made when compared to participants who did not participate in the program. In some cases, for example, people change even without intervention, so an impact comparison is intended to show the 'true' impact of the program.

Impact evaluations will use either an experimental or quasi-experimental design. To be able to link program participation to the changes in the targeted outcomes, an impact evaluation has to be based on an experimental design, which involves a comparison group that did not receive the treatment. That way, when comparing the groups on the outcome variables, differences can be attributed to the program participation. There are two approaches to constructing a comparison group:

Experimental Design	Is based on randomly assigning participants to a treatment or a *control group*. This assures that the two groups are identical, on average, in every way prior to beginning the intervention with the program group. In theory, the only difference between the two groups will be that one group participated in the program.
Quasi-Experimental Design	In a quasi-experimental design, a *comparison group* is identified or constructed from a sample of people who are "similar" to the program group. However, you have to be cautious interpreting the differences in outcomes you think are from program participation, as they could also be due to differences in the two groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, scores on immediate outcomes at baseline). In this case there is the possibility of statistically controlling for these differences. If you are working with an evaluator make sure that this is addressed carefully.

If you do not have access or the means for a control or comparison group there are possibilities for evaluating the effects of your program by:

- Using Pre-Post measurement of the outcomes in the participants
- Asking participants to rate changes on different outcomes

However, these means are not powerful measures of program success compared to the experimental or quasi-experimental designs. When selecting an evaluation strategy, your budget and ability to follow people over time will be major considerations. Very few programs have the resources to conduct an experimental evaluation design.

Data Collection and Management

Once you have decided on your evaluation design, you will then need to decide on which methods of data collection and what kind of data you want to collect.

There are many different methods of collecting data. The best method is one that will answer your evaluation question(s). Be sure to standardize your data collection methods. For example, all interviewers should ask the same questions of participants and all data should be gathered in the same way. If you hired an evaluator, he or she can guide you about how your targeted outcomes can best be measured accurately.

There are different methods of collecting information:

1. Intake forms
2. Surveys
3. Interviews
4. Focus Groups
5. Observations
6. Program Records and Administrative Data
7. Attendance

Informed Consent

Prior to collecting any information from evaluation subjects, you must obtain their informed consent. This means that you inform them about the purpose and procedure of the study, about the confidentiality of their data, and the risk level for participation. It is helpful to not only have participants read a form containing this information, but to also review it verbally with them to make sure all of their questions have been answered prior to participating. Consent has been given when participants sign the form. If IRB approval of the study is required, pre-approval of consent form is needed prior to use.

Handling Confidential Data

Work with your evaluator to decide how best to share information and preserve confidentiality. For survey and attendance data, the evaluation team should receive completed surveys and attendance records with unique identifiers (if applicable) purged of any other information that could identify respondents, such as names. Decide on how you will transmit data to the evaluator. Never fax data, and never send data via email unless it is encrypted.

Section 4
Analyzing Results

During the analysis stage of an evaluation, evaluators use statistical programs to make sense of the data that have been collected. The goal of the analyses is to answer the evaluation questions you developed at the beginning of the evaluation process. There are different types of analyses that are applied depending on the nature of the question. Generally speaking there are two types of analyses:

Descriptive Analyses

Descriptive analyses describe the program's context and history, evolution, and current operations regarding program inputs, program activities, program outputs, and participants' immediate outcomes. You will likely conduct some descriptive analyses for every evaluation question. Descriptive analyses can be drawn from:

- Narrative data: *qualitative* program records, focus groups, and open-ended questions from surveys and interviews to develop a narrative of the program, what it is, and how it operates.
- Quantitative program records (e.g., attendance logs), and closed-ended questions from surveys and interviews. Such analyses can yield attendance and completion rates (outputs), average dosage per participant (an output), and average scores on measures of knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior, and client reactions to the program (immediate outcomes). If any of your evaluation questions pertain to program impact, then your evaluator will also use descriptive statistics to verify the similarity between your program and control/comparison group members, which is a necessary condition for isolating the program impacts.

Explanatory Analyses

Explanatory analyses examine associations between and among variables, seeking to address the "why" and "how" behind the descriptive outcomes of the program. Explanatory analyses can:

- Identify patterns in the *qualitative* data to generate hypotheses or develop theories for issues such as why the program may be struggling, why certain program adaptations or improvements were made, and the perceived effects of these changes on program operations, program participation, and participant outcomes.
- Identify patterns in the *quantitative* data to assess whether program participation is related to the quality of instruction, whether participant outcomes appear related to program dosage, and whether program participants have more positive outcomes than a similar comparison or control group.

Interpreting Findings

What conclusions can be drawn from the results of the analyses? Taking the findings from the statistical analyses you can now try to answer your questions concerning your program. If you are working with an external evaluator it is important to combine your knowledge about and experience with the program with the analytical findings from the data.

The statistical significance of analytical results is an important concept when comparing quantitative outcomes—such as participants' communication skills using a pre- and post-intervention assessment. Statistically significant findings on the outcome variables are not likely to have occurred by chance; they are "real" and worth understanding. Be sure to also pay attention to the non-significant results so you will know what desired outcomes were not achieved.

Effect size is a quantitative measure of the magnitude of the difference between two groups or the strength of the relationship between two variables. The significance of findings is highly influenced by sample size. Therefore, under certain conditions you might have significant findings that are of questionable practical significance. Discuss with your evaluator the practical significance of your findings and compare the results of your study with results from similar evaluation projects. Make sure that effect sizes are reported when you communicate your findings to indicate whether they are of practical significance.

Threats to the Validity of Findings

In an evaluation study there are several things that can interfere with making correct interpretations of the causal impacts of an intervention. Check with your evaluator to ensure the criteria for pertinent kinds of validity are met.

Statistical Validity	Are causal inferences from statistical analyses correct? For example, is your sample big enough to have achieved the outcomes?
Internal Validity	Can outcomes really be attributed to your MRE program or are there other explanations for the change on the outcome variables?
Construct Validity	Have the program and the outcome measures been operationalized in the right way?
External Validity	Can findings be generalized to other contexts, persons, or circumstances?
Descriptive Validity	Have the details of the study and the implementation of the MRE program been documented in a comprehensible way so that the validity of the findings can be judged or replicated?

Attrition

The validity of your findings can also be threatened by sample attrition, which occurs when members of your MRE program or control/comparison group drop out over time. Attrition typically is not completely random: "Higher-risk" participants are typically more likely to drop out, leaving an overrepresentation of lower-risk participants in follow-up data. For example, assume that findings from pre-/post-surveys show statistically significant increases in ability to communicate effectively between partners. Does this mean the program worked? It may have. But the findings could also reflect attrition of participants who may have had high conflict relationships and less ability to communicate effectively, and thus are no longer being studied. (See **Chapter 11: Retention and Engagement** for more information on strategies to minimize attrition).

Section 5
Reporting Findings

It's time to put all the pieces together to tell a coherent story about the results regarding your MRE program. You need to tell stakeholders and future funding partners about how it is operated, program participation, participant outcomes, and program impacts. Here are some of the questions to be addressed:

- How and why did these findings come about?
- How do findings on program operations help explain findings relating to program participation, participant outcomes, and program impact?
- How do patterns of participation help explain findings on participant outcomes and program impact?
- To what extent can participant outcomes be attributed to the program?

Reporting your findings

After evaluation data has been collected, analyzed and interpreted in alignment with your logic model and evaluation questions, you and your evaluator should be prepared to discuss what the findings mean and begin formulating reports. Evaluation reports are usually thought of as final reports, written at the conclusion of a study. However, interim findings are also valuable to identify what is and what is not working well as the program is proceeding. Stakeholders may be interested in an interim report describing program implementation and early findings on participant outcomes. Funders may want a brief, but sufficiently detailed summary of findings, perhaps in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, to make the case for ongoing or additional funding. More broadly, evaluation reports can contribute to the field of knowledge about effective MRE approaches.

Purposes

Reporting on evaluation findings serves many purposes including: increasing understanding of how your MRE program is being implemented on the ground; helping you make management decisions by identifying areas for program improvement; providing information on program effectiveness to support advocacy and attract potential funders; and contributing to the field of MRE.

There are a variety of ways to report evaluation information. With your input, your evaluator will write reports to your funder. You may choose to write other materials to reach a variety of audiences and stakeholders. Regardless of the audience, you should report findings that include positive, negative and unexpected results. As a provider, it is easy, but unnecessary, to fear negative or unexpected outcomes. The results of one evaluation can inform program improvement in subsequent rounds of implementation and evaluation, which will bring you closer to your ultimate goals.

Audiences

The most common evaluation audiences include program staff, funders, other program administrators, and the academic community. Program staff should receive information on program implementation, participation, and participant outcomes in an understandable format and on a regular basis. If program staff doesn't have a sense of the effectiveness of their efforts until the end of the evaluation, they cannot make the necessary changes to help your program meet its goals. Work with your program staff to decide what kind of information is most relevant to capture and how this information should be delivered and discussed.

Reports to funders are important because they indicate whether privately and publicly-funded programs are achieving their objectives. They are also often used to make future funding decisions. Ask your evaluator to include an executive summary that captures the highlights of the report in a couple of pages. Your evaluator will also need to prepare a longer readable, informative, and formalized report. The report should include a program narrative to describe the program design and purpose and how it was implemented. Quantitative results pair well with qualitative stories to paint a picture of the program along with descriptions of participant experiences in the program. The report should also have clear and informative tables and graphs. It should include a technical appendix to help funders with different levels of understanding about evaluations and of the statistical analyses used in the evaluation.

You can gain considerable traction and press for your program by reaching out to the general public with your results. Options include press releases, editorials, soliciting media interviews, writing an evaluation article for the program sponsor's newsletter, and buying print, air, internet or TV advertising space. When crafting a message for the public, strike a balance between providing enough background information about MRE and evaluation that they can understand your results, and not overwhelming the message with jargon and unnecessary detail. Personal stories and quotes from qualitative methods help to "put a face" on your program.

Finally, your evaluator may also want to publish findings in a peer-reviewed academic journal to inform the scientific community. Discuss expectations regarding use of the data, authorship, and necessary IRB approvals with your evaluator, preferably during the Planning Stage, if he or she intends to publish the evaluation findings.

GLOSSARY

Affective Learning – when a participant makes an emotional connection or reaction to information being presented

Allowable Activities – defined by Congress in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), which reauthorized Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and provided federal funding for healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grants. In the legislation, Congress prescribed eight "allowable" activities for which these funds could be used under the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative.

Analytics Tools – tools and reports used by a program showing sources of website traffic, the types of content that most interests users, etc.

Attrition – a reduction in numbers of program participants recruited or enrolled because some do not complete the program

Auditory Adult Learning Style – a preference for learning factual or detailed information through oral delivered, such as in a lecture or speech

Benchmarks – intermediate project management standards against which programs measure progress toward goals; may be quantitative (measured by the number of couples who received information about the program, who scheduled an intake or completed an intake) or qualitative (measured by observation or by gathering input from couples)

Booster Session – any refresher training; may be for facilitators to stay up-to-date on teaching skills or curriculum content, or may be a follow-up workshop for couples to reinforce key curriculum lessons

Co-facilitation – the act of two or more trained workshop leaders working together to deliver MRE. They may each be responsible for delivering pieces of the curriculum or they may co-teach and interact throughout the workshop.

Cognitive Learning Style – a preference for learning information that is presented as fact

Community Needs Assessment – a tool used by a program to assess the needs of the community it intends to serve. This tool can inform an MRE intervention to strategically address the needs of the community and demand for MRE services.

Continuum of Services – a set of services in a program's community designed to reach couples in every relationship stage. Services in the continuum may include relationship education for youth, dating skills for teens, premarital programs for people in their twenties or thirties, newlywed services, expectant/new parent MRE education, and marital enrichment programs for established couples.

Didactic Teaching Style – a style of teaching that is more instructive and lecture-like, where participation among participants is limited

Dissemination – distribution of resources and/or services

Domestic Violence (DV) – a pattern of abusive behavior such as physical, sexual, or psychological attacks, or economic control, that an individual inflicts upon an intimate partner. Also referred to as "domestic violence", "intimate partner violence (IPV)", and "couple violence."

Evidence-based – being based in theory and having undergone scientific evaluation. Used here in reference to approaches to prevention or treatment. "Evidence-based" stands in contrast to approaches that are based in tradition, convention, belief, or anecdotal evidence.

Experiential Learning Style – a preference for learning concepts and skills through an activity. This is learning by doing, which may goes beyond just hearing about or reading about the skill or concept by involving reflection.

For-profit Organization – an organization providing services with the objective of creating profit

Fringe Costs – costs incurred in providing benefits for employed staff

Grassroots Organization – an organization that originated and operates at a basic or fundamental level; one that has never implemented a marriage and relationship education program before

Group Cohesion Activity – an activity designed to build trust within an MRE group/workshop participants

Group Dynamics – the interactive forces within a group including the extent to which participants feel comfortable and engaged in a group environment; may be accentuated by activities designed to help participants get to know each other and build trust within the group

Icebreaker Activity – an activity designed to help people to learn names and basic personal information of others in the group and allow them to feel comfortable with each other

Implementation – the use of a prevention or treatment intervention in a specific community-based or clinical practice setting with a particular target audience

Implementation Costs – expenses related to operating a program, such as staff salaries, participant materials, supplies, rent, etc.

Implementation Evaluation (Process Evaluation) – a tool used to better understand how a program was executed

Incentives – earned items or credits provided to program participants to keep them actively engaged for the duration of the MRE program (e.g. prize drawing, earned credits that could be redeemed for fun items or entertainment)

In-kind Contribution – donations of non-monetary items such as time, services, materials or resources

Interactive Teaching Style – a style of teaching that encourages classroom participation and "learning by doing" rather than a formal lecture of information

Kinesthetic Adult Learning Style – a preference to learn by doing something actively, rather than by just listening or observing

Learning Styles Assessment – a tool used by facilitators to self-assess their own learning style, as well as assess how MRE participants best learn

Listserv – an electronic mailing list application used to compose and send one email message to a list of email addresses; the list is composed of email addresses of individuals who have expressed an interest in receiving information

Logic Model – a visual illustration showing desired results, or outcomes; this tool helps key stakeholders develop a strategic plan to address an identified community problem

Marital Inventories – a research-based tool used by couples and practitioners that compares the expectations, family backgrounds, and personality traits of each partner to identify strengths and growth areas in the marriage

Marriage Counseling/Therapy – professional services provided by trained, licensed clinicians or therapists who help couples work to clarify issues and feelings in the relationship and help spouses work through or resolve serious issues that are potentially destructive to a couple's relationship

Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE) – educational services designed to teach couples/individuals the skills they need to manage and thrive in a relationship; usually preventative in nature and focused on skill-building

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – a document legally clarifying reciprocal commitments between two entities during a specified time frame; provides clear expectations, responsibilities and a system for accountability

Mission Statement – a statement summarizing the purpose and "big picture" goals of an organization or program

Non-profit Organization – an organization providing educational or charitable services without creating profit

Organizational Capacity – the range of knowledge, resources and capabilities needed to operate an (MRE) program

Organizational Framework – a hierarchical structure that outlines how roles and responsibilities are delegated within an organization

Organizational Self-assessment – the process of looking at the organization's strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the capacity to deliver MRE services

Over-recruitment – recruiting more individuals than necessary for a program, usually created by overcompensating for attrition

Partner Organization – an organization with an alliance or shared goal and a specific role in an MRE program

Performance-based Work Agreement – a document that clarifies expectations for performance and outcomes necessary for payment

Personality Assessment – a questionnaire that helps one better understand his or her own traits or characteristics in how they interact with others Program Outcomes – the end results a program hopes to obtain (e.g. the knowledge and skills program participants should have upon completing the program)

Program Protocols – procedures for how program staff are to address potential risks or issues that may arise during the course of program activities

Program Supports – assistance provided to increase participation in MRE services (typically include transportation assistance, food, gas cards, child care and other assistance)

Protective Factors – aspects of one's life or relationship that enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes and lessen the likelihood of negative consequences from exposure to risk

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) – a type of advertising featured on radio or television, or in print media, intended to impact public attitudes by raising awareness of an issue or program

Recidivism – a tendency to revert to a previous way of life or behavior that is destructive (e.g. criminal activity)

Recruitment – strategies carried out to enroll people in an MRE program

Retention – a measure of how many participants who start an MRE program complete the program

Risk Factors – conditions or variables associated with a lower likelihood of positive outcomes and a higher likelihood of negative or socially undesirable outcomes

Self-awareness – the extent to which someone (the marriage educator) is aware of his or her own issues, beliefs, feeling and behaviors; for MRE program leaders it includes the ability to have a healthy attitude about marriage and relationships

Service Delivery Strategy – the process by which MRE services are delivered to participants such as weekly sessions, retreats, one-on-one meetings, etc.

Social Networking/Social Networking Sites – an online avenue for connecting people to each other and communication; can be utilized by MRE programs to get the word out, provide program updates, recommend articles or links, and allow sharing of success stories and praise for the program

Social Services Agency – an organization that provides benefits and/or services to improve the lives of a given population or community

Staff Turnover – the rate at which a program loses and gains staff members

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) – written guidelines that allow an organization to run smoothly even when key staff members are gone; the guidelines should be clear and concise

Start-up Costs – one-time expenses related to establishing a program which may include buying furniture, computers, hiring/training costs, graphic design for logo development, etc.

Sustainability – the long-term survival and continued effectiveness of an MRE program

Teach-Out-Of-The-Box Curriculum – MRE curriculum that provides facilitators with all of the preparation and training materials required to deliver the program; no formal training is required

Training Plan – refers to required staff training; the plan would include human resources and service delivery trainings such as policies/procedures, curriculum, facilitation skills, learning styles, domestic violence, etc.

Visual Adult Learning Style – a preference to learn concepts and ideas that are conveyed graphically through pictures or are reinforced with images or video

ADDITIONAL NHMRC RESOURCES

Tip Sheets

Appealing to Hispanic Men (Migrant Workers): Strategies for Recruitment and Engagement in Marriage Education http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3318

Characteristics of Successful Marriage Educators http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2663

Developing Media Relations http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3335

Effective Facilitation: Tips for Improving Skills and Engaging Audiences http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2155

Getting Free/Low Cost Media Coverage for Your Program http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2049

How to Get Men to Open Up in MRE Classes http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3712

Managing a Disruptive Participant in Your Marriage Education Program http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3343

Marketing Healthy Marriage Programs to Married Couples http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2395

Marketing Your Healthy Marriages and Relationships Program on the Web http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3308

Operational Issues for Marriage Education Programs http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3344

Personal and Professional Boundaries for Marriage Educators http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3317

Preventing Staff Turnover Within Healthy Marriage Programs http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2993

Recruiting Couples That Are Living Together for Relationship Education http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2971

Recruiting Expectant Couples http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=1980

Referral Partner Organizations: How to Approach and Engage Them http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2156

Selecting Partner Referral Organizations http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3347

Training Marriage Education Practitioners http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3348

Using Volunteers Effectively in Delivering Marriage Education Workshops http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2998

Writing a Press Release for a Healthy Marriage Program http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3350

Writing Radio PSAs http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3351

Writing Television PSAs http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3352

When an Incentive Isn't an Incentive http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3349

How-to Guides

Appealing to Teens to Participate in Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2992

Branding a Marriage and Relationship Education Program http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3689

Engaging Men in Marriage Education How-to Guide http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3361

Hiring Marriage Educators for Your Healthy Marriage Program How-to Guide http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3362

Laying the Foundation How-to Guide http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3946

Operational Issues for Marriage Education Programs How-to Guide with Simple Operation Forms http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=2368

Recruiting Premarital Couples for Marriage Education How-to Guide http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3365

Research Brief

Effective Marketing Messages for African American Couples Brief http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/resource-detail/index.aspx?rid=3009

Toolkits

Evaluation Toolkit http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/educators/manage-program/evaluating-your-program/evaluation-toolkit/stage-1-planning/index.aspx

Facilitator Toolkit http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/educators/marriage-relationship-resources/facilitator-toolkit/index.aspx#

Sample Community Needs Assessment

(for community leaders, agency representatives, and social services staff)

Background Data	Comments
1. What are the demographics of your community (i.e., African American, Hispanic, military, low-income, etc.)?	
2. What is the divorce rate in the community you serve?	
3. What is the marriage rate?	
4. What is the rate of out-of-wedlock child births and teenage pregnancies?	
Focus Group Questions for Discussion	**Comments**
5. What types of family services are already available within the community?	
6. What MRE services are currently available, and what is the target audience(s) of those programs?	
7. How well do existing services currently meet family needs (i.e.,health care, job training, public transportation, GED preparation, after-school programs, etc.)?	
8. Discuss the quality of services already provided. How might agencies better serve the community?	
9. What are the opportunities to develop and disseminate resources and services to families?	
10. What barriers are preventing agencies from addressing certain needs of families in this area?	
11. What do community members say they need?	

SMART Goals Assessment

SMART GOALS	
SPECIFIC	☐ Uses action word(s) to describe what the program is going to do ☐ Describes what the program wants to accomplish ☐ Specifies when the program is expecting to see results
MEASURABLE	☐ Identifies the indicator of what the program will see when it reaches the goal ☐ Ensures there are data that will be collected to demonstrate results (in quantity or quality) that can be calculated
ATTAINABLE AND ACHIEVABLE	☐ Stretches the program to improve but is possible to attain ☐ Targets the population(s) that data show is in greatest need
REALISTIC AND RELEVANT	☐ Implementation is possible within the capabilities of the program ☐ Goal is consistent with the mission ☐ The bar is set high enough for significant achievement ☐ The goal does not contradict other goals
TIMELY	☐ The goal has an end point ☐ Time frame for accomplishment of the goal is realistic

Personnel Cost Development

Staff Name	Position Title	Hourly Rate	# of Hours	Cost
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
				-
			Total Salary	-
			Benefits	
Total Personnel Costs (salary plus benefits)				-
Other Than Personnel Costs				
Consulting and Professional Fees				
Materials and Supplies (office supplies, photocopying, etc.)				
Facilities (office space/facilities, utilities.)				
Equipment				
Travel and Accommodations, Conferences, Conventions, Meetings				
Communication (Telephone, postage etc)				
Other Direct Costs				
Total OTPS Costs				-

Overhead/Indirect Costs

Total Budget — -

Budget Template for Multi-Year Project

The following template is for a multi-year project and reflects personnel and other expenses needed as well as showing funding sources. Definitions associated with this template follow the chart.

	Year I 10/06-09/07	Year II 10/07-09/08	Year III 10/08-09/09	Year IV 10/09-09/10	Year V 10/10-09/11	Total Budget
PERSONNEL						
1 Staff salaries						$ -
2 Fringe Benefits						-
Total Personnel	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
OTHER THAN PERSONNEL SERVICES (OTPS):						
3 Consultants						$ -
4 Audit Expense						-
5 Curriculum training						-
6 Curriculum materials						-
7 Other training						
8 Child care/transportation/emergency assistance						
9 Participation support costs						
10 Furniture and Equipment						-
11 Travel						-
12 MIS						-
13 Telephone						-
14 Postage						-
15 Supplies						-
16 Reproduction Expense						
17 Facilities rental/ Occupancy Expense						
<mark>Insert additional line items as needed</mark>						-
18 Other Direct Costs						-
Total OTPS	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
TOTAL DIRECT COST	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
SUBCONTRACTOR COSTS						$ -
INDIRECT COSTS						$ -
GRAND TOTAL	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Funding						
Program Funds						
Other (please detail)						
Total Funding	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -
Surplus/ (deficit)	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -

Note: Please feel free to add any additional line items you feel appropriate or to provide additional spreadsheets as supporting documentation
for the line items above.
A complete explanation of each element of cost, detailing the rationale used in developing the estimate, must be included

BUDGET INSTRUCTIONS

1. Staff salaries - include in the staff loading chart all proposed staff, listing the person's name, title, number of hours worked, hourly rate, the total cost per person per year and a total amount. Please provide justification for the hourly rate for all staff proposed (i.e., payroll records, letters of employment, etc.).

2. Fringe rate/costs - show rate, base and total amount. Provide justification for the rates used (approved federal rate, past history, etc.). Provide breakdown of Fringe rate.

3. Consultants - include the name, number of days or hours worked, daily/hourly rate and the total amount per consultant. Please provide justification for the rate proposed, (i.e., consultant letters or contracts).

4. Audit costs - costs associated with the financial reviews and audit of this program

5. Curriculum training - costs for training (on-site or off) with curriculum developers. Costs based on the curriculum used.

6. Curriculum materials - costs of purchasing curriculum materials for staff and the couples from curriculum developers

7. Other training - costs associated with upfront and ongoing staff training, including consultants the site expects to engage for this purpose

8. Child care/transportation/emergency assistance - cost for transportation, child care services, and emergency assistance offered to program participants to enable them to attend activities

9. Other participation supports - costs of incentives and other supportive services to encourage participation. Please note different types of supports as separate line items in your budget: for example, cash (only modest/small amounts allowable); raffles/drawings, gift certificates, small gifts, etc.

10. Furniture and equipment - provide detailed cost breakdown of the equipment and furniture being purchased including cost per unit and number of units. Include vendor quotes where possible

11. Travel - include number of trips, destination, airfare, per diem, ground transportation, etc. Include travel to off-site curriculum trainings, if applicable. Use appropriate funding travel guidelines when budgeting.

12. Management Information System (MIS) - sites should budget any costs related to adapting or creating an MIS

13. Telephone - justification for telephone costs

14. Postage - justification of all postage costs

15. Supplies - justification of all supplies

16. Reproduction - costs for printing materials such as flyers, brochures, other marketing material, forms, etc.

17. Occupancy costs - costs of facilities rental, utilities, etc.

18. Other Direct Costs (ODC) - include a listing of all other direct charges to the contract not itemized above

Subcontractor Costs - Lead agency may enter into a subcontract with each of its collaborative service provider partners.
Provide a budget (with the same level of detail as required by the prime) for each subcontractor.
Indirect Costs - show rate, base and total. Please provide justification for the rate used (i.e., federal approved rate, history, etc.).
Provide basis for allocation of costs between different funders/programs.
Note: all costs above need to abide by the appropriate funding and contractual regulations.

Curriculum Review Checklist

Curriculum Title: _____

Materials checklist

- Facilitator guide or workbook
- Participant workbook
- Take-home resources or homework
- Additional document, book or text
- Audio-visual (AV) aids (computer, DVD, CD, VCR, overhead or LCD projector, TV)
- Internet or web-based resource(s) including podcast, webcast
- Flipchart or posters
- Other materials: _____

Instructional Methods checklist

- Lecture or similar presentation (by facilitator or co-facilitators)
- Guided discussion (between partners, within group, whole group)
- Guest speakers on special topics
- Reading of text
- Coaching or demonstration of skills by instructor, peer or mentor couple
- Use of pictorials for low-literacy groups
- Use of AV to present educational content (video, DVD, CD, audiotape)
- Other instructional methods: _____

Learning Activities checklist

- Communication or conflict resolution skills practice
- Role play or other creative, musical or artistic activity
- Written exercise (in session or for homework)
- Journal entry
- Survey, quiz or relationship assessment inventory
- Situational analysis of case study, couple interaction, role play
- Other individual exercise(s): _____
- Other couple or group interactive exercise(s) _____

Sample Job Description and Essential Job Functions

Marriage and Relationship Educator/Facilitator Job Description:

These individuals will facilitate or co-facilitate MRE workshops. This is a part-time position to facilitate the curriculum on weekends and evenings. Each facilitator will be hired based on his/her ability to demonstrate excellent presentation and people skills and a willingness to lead dynamic workshops. Experience working with [couples, parents, youth, etc.] in a group setting preferred. Background in or passion for strengthening families is necessary. They report directly to the Program Manager.

Essential Job Functions:

- Attend [curriculum] training and 5 hours of additional program training.

- Lead dynamic workshops for [program name] couples/participants.

- Attend and participate in monthly Marriage and Relationship Education planning meetings and additional training sessions as needed.

- Maintain workshop data, including attendance rosters, program support distribution, evaluations and other reporting documents as needed.

- Co-facilitate [curriculum].

- Aid in program growth by providing feedback to Program Manager on participants' responses to the program.

- Perform other duties as assigned.

Interview Questions for Marriage Educators

(Interview questions provided by Public Strategies, Family Expectations Program.)

General

1. Tell us about yourself.
2. What do you know about our organization?
3. How did you hear about this opening, and what encouraged you to apply?
4. What interests you about this position?

Curriculum

5. Have you ever taught from a set curriculum?
6. How would you describe your teaching style?
7. Have you ever worked with low-income and/or diverse populations?
8. Describe your public speaking skills or experience.
9. What was your most recent or favorite presentation?
10. How do make your presentations exciting?
11. What role do you normally take on a team?
12. Are you an advocate for marriage?

Personal Interests

13. What do you like to do during your free time?
14. What was the most recent book you read?
15. What is your favorite joke?
16. Where did you go on your last vacation?

Interactions with Participants

17. Attendance is important in our program. What ideas do you have to encourage couples to return each week?
18. You are facilitating a workshop and notice that one couple is sitting in the back of the classroom and not participating. What methods would you use to engage this couple?
19. One couple approaches you after class and says marriage is not an option for them. How would you respond to this couple?
20. One couple in your group discusses very personal issues during a session. How would you maintain appropriate group dynamics in this situation?
21. *This question should be used for candidates with a strong faith-based background:* I noticed that you have a strong faith-based background. Since this is a government-funded program, how would you separate your religious beliefs from the curriculum?

Teaching Styles Assessment/Quiz

This brief quiz is a self-assessment tool to help you identify your facilitators' teaching styles. Have your facilitator read each statement and decide whether it is true or false.

_____ 1. It is imperative that class start and end exactly on time.

_____ 2. A teacher should keep a physical distance between him/herself and the students.

_____ 3. Teachers should always be prepared with all the facts before they enter the classroom.

_____ 4. Never waste students' time with other students' questions.

_____ 5. Participants love a detailed PowerPoint slide for every point a teacher makes.

_____ 6. Participants should know nothing about a teacher's personal life.

_____ 7. Before one can be a credible teacher of marriage or parenting education, one must have his or her own life completely figured out.

_____ 8. The curriculum must be followed exactly as it was written to be effective.

_____ 9. If students drop out it is because they are just not ready to learn.

_____10. After sitting through one group session, participants should be able to make dramatic changes to their lives.

_____11. It is important to become friends with students so they feel comfortable in class.

_____12. People have busy lives so it is no big deal if they are late to class.

_____13. Even if something else is planned, it is always best to go with the flow.

_____14. It is OK for participants to become leaders in the group.

_____15. A teacher should make the class meet each individual's needs.

_____16. Participants can often give their facilitators good ideas on how to manage a facilitator's own problems.

_____17. If a participant drops out, the facilitator should consider it a personal failure and wonder why he or she was not liked.

_____18. Classes can be like large group discussions and sometimes like many disconnected discussions.

_____19. It is okay to hang out with students after class.

_____20. Planning for classes takes too much time and just interferes with the natural process of the group.

_____21. One of the most important things a teacher does is to help participants feel safe and comfortable.

_____22. It is important to stick to the curriculum, but understand it is going to look different with each group.

_____23. Sharing some past struggles with participants gives a facilitator credibility.

_____24. Participants should understand that they are not friends with their facilitator, but should also know that their facilitator cares.

_____25. Classes should be regularly updated with well researched information that is relevant to the topic.

_____26. Although it is sometimes uncomfortable, it is best to not let the most talkative person take over the group.

_____27. Change is hard. After being active in a group, participants are more able to make the changes as they see fit.

_____28. A facilitator should share when he or she disagrees with a participant, but should never want him or her to feel judged.

_____29. Class boundaries like start and end times should be respected, but anyone can have a bad day. If someone is chronically tardy, it is best to talk with them individually.

_____30. Always take time for questions. Students can learn a great deal from each other.

Scoring: Count and record the number of statements where you answered "true" in the following categories:

Questions 1 – 10: number of "true" responses _____

Mostly "true" responses on questions 1 through 10 indicates that you have "instructor" type tendencies. You tend to be very organized and thorough in your teaching. Be sure you are approachable with your students and integrate engaging activities into your classes.

Questions 11 – 20: number of "true" responses _____

Mostly "true" responses on questions 11 through 20 indicates that you have "colleague" type teaching tendencies. Your students often find you approachable and fun. Do your best to assure a structured environment in your classroom.

Questions 21 – 30: number of "true" responses _____

Mostly "true" responses on questions 21 through 30 indicates that you have embraced a facilitator style of teaching. This means that while you understand your role as a leader in the group, you also believe your participants have a great deal to contribute.

Learning Styles Assessment/Quiz

This assessment should be completed on your own. After reading each statement, put a check mark in the column that is most like you. The scores will be tallied at the end to determine your learning style.

Check either *often*, *sometimes* or *rarely* for each statement below.

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
1. I can remember more about a topic when I listen to a lecture with information, explanation and discussion.			
2. I prefer information written on a flip chart or board and assigned readings.			
3. I like to write things down and take notes for review.			
4. I prefer to use posters, models or actual practice when learning.			
5. I need explanations for diagrams, graphs and directions.			
6. I enjoy working with my hands and making things.			
7. I am skillful with and enjoy creating graphs and charts.			
8. I can identify patterns of sound.			
9. I remember best when I write things down several times.			
10. I can understand and follow directions on a map.			
11. I understand better when I listen to lectures and tapes.			
12. I play with coins or keys in my pocket.			
13. I learn to spell better by repeating words aloud than by writing them down.			
14. I understand a news item better when I read it in the paper than when I hear it on the radio.			
15. I chew gum, fidget or snack when I study.			
16. I feel the best way to remember something is to picture it in your mind.			
17. I learn spelling by "finger spelling" or "air writing" words.			
18. I would rather listen to a good lecture or a speech than read about the same material in a textbook or manual.			

19. I am good at solving jigsaw puzzles and mazes.			
20. I hold objects in my hand when I am learning something.			
21. I prefer listening to the news on the radio rather than reading about it in the paper or on the internet.			
22. I obtain information on interesting topics by reading pertinent materials.			
23. I feel very comfortable making contact with others by shaking hands and/or hugging.			
24. I follow oral directions better than written ones.			

Scoring

To score the Learning Styles Assessment, assign the number value that corresponds to your answers to the statements above. Then, add the numbers and enter the total on the line. The category with the highest score is your dominant learning style. This is the style of learning where you generally feel most comfortable and learn best.

Often = 5   Sometimes=3   Rarely=1

Visual

Question #	Points
2.	
3.	
7.	
10.	
14.	
16.	
19.	
22.	
Total: _____	

Auditory

Question #	Points
1.	
5.	
8.	
11.	
13.	
18.	
21.	
24.	
Total: _____	

Kinesthetic

Question #	Points
4.	
6.	
9.	
12.	
15.	
17.	
20.	
23.	
Total: _____	

Sample Press Release

RELEASE DATE: May 1, 2009

CONTACT:

<div align="right">

(Contact name)

(Contact's direct phone #)

(Contact's email address)

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Relationship Tune-up: *FREE Workshop*
***For Couples* – Saturday, May 31**

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Rochester, NY. The Greater Rochester Healthy Marriage Initiative (GRHMI) *[who]* is offering a FREE marriage workshop for couples *[what: addresses cost]* from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, May 31, 2008 *[when]*. This hands-on workshop for engaged and married couples *[who: target groups]* will provide useful tools to help couples communicate better, settle conflict and bring more excitement into their relationship *[what and why: shows benefits]*. This event takes place at Maritime Event Center located at 1221 Essex Boulevard in Downtown Rochester *[shows format and where]*. Free parking and on site childcare will be provided *[what: deals with hurdles]* as well as free lunches for all couples and children who register in advance *[what: motivation for attendance; encourages pre-registering]*. You may register online at www.GreaterRochesterHMI.org or by calling 212-534-5353 *[call to action]*.

Nationally, one in two marriages ends in divorce; Rochester residents are no exception. The Office of Family Assistance for the state of New York reports that one in two marriages in Rochester also ends in divorce with no change in this statistic in sight. The mission of the Greater Rochester Healthy Marriage Initiative is for all married couples to have the skills and tools needed for a healthy marriage. Couples will learn ways to create a peaceful home by discovering how to communicate better, solve problems together and offer each other understanding and support. "A happy marriage is great for individual health and society as a whole," said Executive Director John Johnson, PhD.

The Greater Rochester Healthy Marriage Initiative is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the improvement of healthy relationships and marriage. For more information, or to register online for upcoming workshops, visit us at www.GreaterRochesterHMI.org or call 212-534-5353.

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