

Issue Brief



Social, Economic and Workforce Programs Division
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Resources for States Planning Initiatives to Support Healthy Marriages

There are a growing number of resources for state policymakers and program administrators who are interested in exploring initiatives to support healthy marriages in their state. Many of these resources can be accessed via the internet. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices has compiled a list of key websites where states can access research about family formation issues, learn about what is going on in other states to support healthy marriages, review marriage education curricula, and identify technical assistance providers. In addition to the resources listed below, the NGA Center is available to provide governors and their staff with information and assistance on these issues.

Research

There is a large body of research on family formation issues. Below is a list of organizations and government departments that conduct or sponsor research on family structure, trends and attitudes about marriage, and the benefits of marriage for children, as well as evaluations of programs to strengthen healthy marriages.

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) serves as principal advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of programs designed to improve the economic and social well-being of children and families. OPRE is responsible for all aspects of the collection, compilation, analysis, and dissemination of data on selected ACF programs. The OPRE site features research reports and evaluation of ACF programs, including programs to support healthy marriages.

www.Acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/indexnew.htm

Building Strong Families (BSF), a project of Mathematica Policy Research Inc, is an initiative to develop and evaluate programs designed to help interested unwed parents achieve their aspirations for healthy marriage and a stable family life. The website provides information about about the progress of the evaluation and the kinds of services that are being tested. Materials will be available to the public, but over time, a password-protected Learning Community will also be supported for the BSF research sites and others directly involved in the evaluation. <http://www.buildingstrongfamilies.info/>

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is a national non-profit that works to improve the lives of low-income people. One key area of the Center's work is on Couples and Marriage Policy, which focuses on (1) helping more children grow up with their two biological, married parents whose relationship is healthy and (2) when this isn't possible, helping parents--whether unmarried, cohabiting, separated, divorced, or remarried--cooperate better in raising their children. <http://www.clasp.org/publications.php?id=6>

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, also called "The Survey of New Parents," follows a birth cohort of (mostly) unwed parents and their children over a five-year period. The study provides information on the capabilities and relationships of unwed parents, as well as the effects of policies on family formation and child wellbeing. The website has links to published research briefs, city and national reports, and working papers. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is a joint effort by Princeton University's Center for Research on Child Wellbeing and Columbia University's Social Indicators Survey Center. <http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/index.asp>

The Healthy Marriage Initiative under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families aims to help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services that can help them acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage. The Healthy Marriage Initiative site features government-sponsored research. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/resources/research.html>

The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. The Heritage Foundation has written extensively about marriage issues as part of their Domestic Policy Studies Division. <http://www.heritage.org/research/family/index.cfm>

Resource Center for Healthy Marriages will soon be launched by the National Council on Family Relations. The resource center, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, will serve as a clearinghouse on best practices and other pertinent information. The center will evaluate and synthesize research on healthy marriage programs and develop products to help individuals and organizations create and implement marriage education initiatives. A website and program database will be created for policymakers, individuals, and practitioners to access information on marriage education. <http://www.ncfr.org>

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. MDRC is leading the ACF-funded "Supporting Healthy Marriages" project, which is designed to inform program operators and policymakers of the most effective ways to help couples strengthen and maintain healthy marriages. http://www.mdrc.org/project_12_64.html

The National Marriage Project is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian and interdisciplinary program at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. The project provides research and analysis on the state of marriage in America and educates the public on the social, economic and cultural conditions affecting marital success and child wellbeing. <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/>

The Urban Institute is a nonpartisan economic and social policy research organization. Making Marriage Work is one research focus of the Institute. Research focuses primarily on family formation and its impact on economic and child well-being. The Urban Institute is also evaluating programs for unmarried couples at the time they have a child, and "Community Healthy Marriage" initiatives on helping people form and sustain healthy marriages. <http://www.urban.org/content/IssuesInFocus/MakingMarriageWork/Marriage.htm>

State and Regional Marriage Initiatives

Below is a list of government-sponsored and independent state healthy marriage initiative websites, as well as reports that document state activities related to healthy marriages.

State and Regional Websites

California Healthy Marriage Initiative is a community and faith-based collaboration founded by Pastor Dion Evans: www.Cshmi.org

Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives replaced the Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood on July 1, 2003. The new commission assumes a broader approach to strengthening families by detailing comprehensive statewide strategies for Florida to promote safe, violence-free, substance-abuse-free, respectful, nurturing and responsible parenting; including connection or reconnection of responsible parents, both mothers and fathers, with their children. The Commission is comprised of 18 members appointed by the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives: www.Floridafamilies.org

Marriage Matters: A Guide for Louisiana Couples was funded by the Louisiana Department of Social Services: www.Dss.state.la.us/documents/OFS/Pages_1-16_Marriage_matters.pdf

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative was developed and gained momentum under former Governor Frank Keating and continues to grow, with new plans and visions on the horizon for the coming years. The site has information about marriage and relationship-strengthening strategies adopted by the state of Oklahoma as an important part of their continuum of services for families: www.Okmarriage.org

Ozarks Marriage Matters is a non-profit organization dedicated solely to strengthening marriages and reducing the divorce rate within the Ozarks. They are an all-volunteer organization, funded solely by donations: www.Ozarksmarriagematters.org

Utah's Governor's Commission on Marriage recommends and where possible, helps implement ways to promote, strengthen and increase awareness of the importance of marriage in the state. The Commission, along with the Department of Workforce Services and Utah State University Extension, operate the website "Utah Marriage." The website includes links to marriage-related events and training, and provides resources on critical issues such as financing and marriage, suggestions to help marriage succeed, and facts about divorce: www.Utahmarriage.org

Reports documenting state policies and practices

Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families. A State-by-State Snapshot by the Center for Law and Social Policy provides a state-by-state description of government-related activities in couples and marriage policy, includes profiles of seven high-activity states and descriptions of at least \$90 million in federal grants for marriage-related demonstration projects, technical assistance, and research and evaluation: http://www.clasp.org/publications/beyond_marr.pdf

Marriage-Related Policies: State Policies Choices by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) provides a cross-state comparison of marriage policies. NCCP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and

policy organization at Columbia University that seeks to identify and promote strategies that prevent child poverty in the United States and that improve the lives of low-income children and families. The Center also maintains a searchable database on marriage-related policies.

http://www.nccp.org/policy_index_27.html

State Policies to Promote Marriage is a report by the Lewin Group that inventories state-level marriage policies in the 50 states and the District of Columbia in several broad areas:

<http://www.lewin.com/NR/rdonlyres/e3yyudlgiltsj6joc44i5szilvy5atx7d26ebdbwxzveoqepn736wg5gac2cv4n5xo6q3w2moji7rp/StatePoliciestoSupportMarriageFinal.pdf>

State Policy Options for Supporting Healthy Marriages by the NGA Center for Best Practices describes actions that state policymakers have and could taken to support healthy marriages:

http://www.nga.org/center/divisions/1,1188,C_ISSUE_BRIEF^D_6253,00.html

Marriage Education Resources

The following is a list of non-denominational and non-partisan organizations that offer information on marriage education.

The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education serves as an information exchange and clearinghouse to help couples locate marriage and relationship courses; to help mental health professionals, clergy and lay educators locate training programs and resources; to connect those with an interest in the continuing development of the field; to support community initiatives, legislation and research; and to promote the effectiveness of the courses and increase their availability in the community:

www.Smartmarriages.com

The Dibble Fund is a non-profit organization that offers a variety of materials for teaching kids and teens how to build more successful relationships: www.Buildingrelationshipsills.org

The Institute for American Values, founded in 1987, is a private, nonpartisan organization devoted to contributing intellectually to the renewal of marriage and family life and the sources of competence, character, and citizenship. The Institute maintains a clearinghouse of resources for the marriage movement as well as links to most major marriage education curricula: www.Marriagemovement.org

Technical Assistance Resources

There are a growing number of organizations and agencies that offer technical assistance to government officials interested in implementing marriage education programs in their state. Both the National Governors Association and the Administration for Children and Families, listed below, can provide technical assistance directly, or connect state officials with other technical assistance providers, experts, and peer leaders in the field.

The National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices provides technical assistance to governors and their advisors and can assist in developing effective marriage education programs through information sharing and expertise in this issue area:

http://www.nga.org/center/topics/1,1188,D_7095,00.html

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families provides technical assistance to states on healthy marriage initiative issues, through both staff and contractors. Technical assistance for marriage education primarily involves consultations with marriage experts and program administrators who provide guidance in the areas of strategic planning, funding sources, evaluation and performance measurements, coalition building, and service capacity building: www.Acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage