

Providing Culturally Relevant Services: Programs in the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative Implementation Evaluation



Introduction

The Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative is a focused strategy to address the unique cultural, linguistic, demographic, and socioeconomic needs of a growing population of Hispanic children and families in the United States.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), funded the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) Grantee Implementation Evaluation to learn how relationship and marriage education programs serving primarily Hispanic individuals and couples are marketing services and developing culturally appropriate materials and programming for diverse Hispanic populations. This study represents an implementation evaluation, not an impact evaluation.

Approximately 47 million U.S. residents are Hispanic. The Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative Grantee Implementation Evaluation is examining ways in which federally-funded healthy marriage grantees are developing, adapting and implementing culturally relevant and appropriate programs to strengthen Hispanic marital and family relationships. This brief introduces the design of the evaluation and sites that are part of the study. Future briefs will describe the services and adaptations in more detail.

According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, Hispanics comprise approximately 15% of the U.S. population, with an estimated 46.8 million individuals identifying as Hispanic.ⁱ Hispanics are currently the nation's largest minority group, and the Hispanic

population is projected to nearly triple in size by 2050, at which time nearly one in three U.S. residents will be Hispanic.ⁱⁱ Additional trends suggest the demand for services will grow, including family strengthening supports such as relationship and marriage education, parenting education, and fatherhood programs. In 2008, less than two-thirds of Hispanic children lived with their two married parents compared to three-fourths of non-Hispanic, white children.ⁱⁱⁱ From 2002-2006, the birth rate for unmarried Hispanic women rose 20% (approximately 106 births per 1,000 unmarried Hispanic women in 2006).^{iv} In 2002, 6.9% of Hispanic children lived with a cohabiting parent, an increase from 4.8% in 1997.^v While the rate of divorce for Hispanics is lower than for non-Hispanic whites (59%), approximately one in four Hispanics are divorced.^{vi}

If family strengthening programs are to successfully address the needs of this growing target population, it is essential that they develop and implement culturally appropriate services. This brief, the first in a series, introduces the HHMI Grantee Implementation Evaluation. It describes the goals of the evaluation, the site selection process, and provides summary information on each of the nine study sites.

The Evaluation

Little is known about how family strengthening programs—including relationship and marriage education, parenting education, and fatherhood programs—effectively reach and serve Hispanic



families. This implementation evaluation is examining ways in which nine federally-funded healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs are developing, adapting and implementing culturally relevant and appropriate services for Hispanic populations. The study will:

- ▶ Document the diverse programmatic approaches being implemented by the nine programs in the study;
- ▶ Identify lessons learned in adapting and implementing these services; and
- ▶ Generate a toolbox of promising practices for providing culturally relevant and appropriate healthy relationship and family strengthening programs for Hispanic populations.

This information will likely be useful not only to programs providing family strengthening services but the larger human services field that, as population demographics shift, are serving more Hispanic individuals and families.

The Lewin Group and its subcontractors, the University of Houston's Graduate School of Social Work, MDRC, Dr. Allison Hyra, Whitney Engstrom, and Washington University's Center for Latino Family Research, are conducting the study under contract to HHS. The implementation evaluation study began in September 2007 and will be completed in September 2012.

Site Selection Process

To select programs for the study, the evaluation team developed two sets of criteria (see Exhibit 1). Grantees were initially screened to determine if they met four criteria for study inclusion, in addition to a willingness to be in the study: 1) being fully operational; 2) having funding to support operations through September 2011; 3) having a service population at least 50 percent Hispanic; and 4) evaluation capacity—that is, documenting or willingness to document and provide “output” and “outcome” measures. From among the grantees that met these criteria, the evaluation team sought a diverse set of grantees. The team was interested in variation related to: geographic location; country of origin/population served; federal funding stream

(Office of Family Assistance (OFA) Healthy Marriage, Office of Family Assistance Fatherhood, and Office of Head Start (OHS)); family strengthening/relationship curriculum used; and additional program services offered.

Selected Grantees

Based upon the site selection criteria, nine grantees were selected for the HHMI Grantee Implementation Evaluation. Exhibit 2 illustrates the diversity of the grantees on selected characteristics: funding source, characteristics of the participants, and the services offered. In terms of service population, grantees serve married and unmarried couples, single individuals (youth and/or adults), and families. The country of origin of participants varies across grantees as well; grantees are working with individuals of Mexican, Central American, South American, Puerto Rican, and Dominican origin. The curricula and additional program services provided also vary, with some sites using established curricula, often with adaptations specific to their populations, while others use a curriculum they developed themselves. Often the family strengthening/relationship curriculum is followed by booster sessions, coaching (i.e., working one on one with participants on skills) or is the introduction to additional workshops (e.g., parenting, fatherhood). All grantees selected to participate in the study work with local domestic violence partners to provide resources and referrals to their participants. Many sites also provide referrals to other service partners as needed, e.g., for substance abuse, employment, or education.



Exhibit 1: HHMI Site Selection Criteria and Criteria for Grantee Diversity

Site Selection Criteria

- ▶ To be considered for the study, grantees needed to be **operational**. Because the evaluation is documenting promising practices and providing lessons for the field, the programs selected for the study needed to have completed their planning and start-up activities. For purposes of this study, being operational meant that programs must have begun implementation (i.e., providing services) and recruiting of participants. Grantees were expected to be on track to meet recruitment goals proposed in their funding applications.
- ▶ **Funding cycle**. Because the study will gather multiple rounds of information, through September 2012, grantees needed to have approved grant periods through this time period.
- ▶ **Hispanic target population**. Grantees needed to have a service population at least 50 percent Hispanic overall or at one or more of their service sites.
- ▶ **Evaluation capacity**. Grantees needed to be collecting a minimal amount of output and immediate outcome data and be willing to provide the data for use in the study.

Criteria for Grantee Diversity

Selected study grantees vary according to:

- ▶ **Geography**. Geographic diversity also serves as a proxy for variation in participant country of origin and provides the opportunity to document program operations within different policy and political cultures that may influence the implementation of services.
- ▶ **Characteristics of service population**. Selected grantees vary by the characteristics of participants (e.g., marital/relationship status, level of acculturation), in addition to country of origin.
- ▶ **Curriculum**. Selected grantees vary based on their choice of marriage and relationship education or responsible fatherhood curricula that provides the basis for core grant services – education skills classes and workshops – and on their approach to delivery (e.g., one-day seminars, weekly sessions).
- ▶ **Funding source**. Study grantees have different federal funding sources (OFA Marriage Education Programs, OFA Responsible Fatherhood Programs and OHS Marriage Education Programs).
- ▶ **Additional program services**. Selected grantees provide an array of additional program services such as booster sessions, coaching, additional levels of marriage education workshops, economic skills development activities, children’s programming, and referrals to other organizations for needed services.



Exhibit 2: Dimensions of HHMI Grantee Diversity

PROGRAM

	AVANCE Houston	Creciendo Unidos	ESC 19	Granato Group	HCS Head Start	Meier Clinics	NMSU	PRFI	TELACU
Federal Funding Stream									
OFA Healthy Marriage	⊙	⊙		⊙		⊙	⊙		⊙
OFA Fatherhood			⊙					⊙	
OHS					⊙				
Population Served									
Couples (married or unmarried)	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
Single Adults			⊙		⊙	⊙	⊙		⊙
Families	⊙	⊙							
Acculturation Level									
1st Generation Immigrants	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
2nd Generation		⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
3rd Generation			⊙		⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
Migrant					⊙		⊙		
Country/region of Origin - or Ancestry									
Mexico	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙		⊙
Puerto Rico					⊙	⊙		⊙	
Dominican Republic					⊙	⊙		⊙	
Central America				⊙	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙
South America				⊙		⊙		⊙	
Services									
Family Strengthening/ Relationship Education Curricula									
Family Wellness						⊙	⊙		⊙
Active Relationships					⊙				
Within My Reach/ Within Our Reach			⊙			⊙		⊙	⊙
How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk/Jerkette						⊙			
Organization-Created	⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙				⊙	
Coaching	⊙			⊙	⊙	⊙			
Booster Sessions	⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙				
Additional Series of Workshops		⊙			⊙				



The grantees also vary according to geographic location. **Exhibit 3** illustrates the geographic diversity of the selected grantees. Five grantees are located in the southwest (two in Texas); one in the mid-west; one in the mid-Atlantic; and two in the northeast.

Following the Exhibit, the remainder of the brief describes individual grantees and provides website addresses for further information.

Exhibit 3: HHMI Grantee Implementation Evaluation Sites



AVANCE, Houston, Texas

Established in 1973, the mission of AVANCE is to “unlock America's potential by strengthening families in at risk communities through the most effective parenting education and support programs.” Taking its name from the Spanish word meaning “to advance,” AVANCE serves primarily low-income Hispanic families, providing parenting skills, family literacy, Head Start services and early childhood development programs in addition to its marriage education/family strengthening program. AVANCE’s national headquarters are located in San Antonio and its 12 chapters are situated throughout Texas, New Mexico, and California. The Houston site opened in 1988 and serves primarily recent immigrants from Mexico. The HHMI program serves married couples in their 20s and 30s with primarily school-aged children. Drawing from two decades of providing support services to Hispanic families, AVANCE developed its own curriculum specifically for Hispanic families, *Matrimonios Saludables*, which includes a “life coping skills” module that focuses on stress management,

anger management, conflict resolution, and communication. The curriculum also weaves in discussions on gender roles, cultural values, media influence, and peer pressure. Nineteen weeks in duration, the program includes intake, orientation, the 16-week curriculum, and a completion ceremony. A corresponding curriculum for children is aligned with the parent curriculum (children and youth meet while their parents are in classes). Staff members note that the HHMI program is a natural extension of AVANCE’s mission because marriage education and parenting education programs are related. AVANCE believes that modeling interpersonal relationships for children starts with a positive open relationship between parents. For more information about AVANCE, please go to <http://www.avancehouston.org/>.



Creciendo Unidos, Phoenix, Arizona

Creciendo Unidos (CU), which means “growing together” in Spanish, is a grassroots organization that has served low-income Hispanic families in the Phoenix area since 1999. CU’s mission is to “build communities by enabling people to take care of each other, mobilizing neighborhoods, developing leaders, and taking responsibility for creating a healthy community that is worthy of their children.” CU’s internally developed 16-hour marital enhancement course, *Curso de Relaciones Exitosas* (Course on Successful Relationships), is built around five values they believe are central to Hispanic cultures and resonate with the community: hope, unity, respect, honesty (communication), and identity. Participants are typically married, Mexican-American, Spanish-speaking couples. The curriculum is usually delivered over two sessions by two facilitators, in Spanish, to a maximum of 40 couples. CU also delivers a basic healthy communication skills curriculum to the children while their parents are in class. In addition to their marriage education program, they offer programs for the entire family and specifically for men. Staff noted that the healthy marriage program not only supports the mission of the organization, but “it *is* the mission.” For more information about Creciendo Unidos, please go to <http://www.creciendounidosaz.org/>.

Education Service Center 19, El Paso, Texas

Education Service Center 19 (ESC 19) is a large regional Head Start grantee in the El Paso, Texas area. Their program, Promoting Optimal Parenting Skills (P.O.P.S.), began in 2006 under an OFA Fatherhood grant with the intent of improving the relationships Head Start fathers have with their children. While the P.O.P.S. program is for men of Head Start children, single mothers of Head Start children are not excluded from the program. ESC 19 also offers a wide array of services for Head Start mothers (single or otherwise). P.O.P.S. participants are generally recruited from ESC 19’s Head Start centers. Almost all participants are Hispanic and most are either U.S.-born or grew up in the U.S. The program serves a low-income population.

Courses are taught in both Spanish and English. The program works with fathers to develop their roles as individuals, fathers, providers, and partners. Spouses or significant others of program participants are invited to join one of three P.O.P.S. program components—the “I as a Spouse” component. The marriage education portion of the program is based on PREP-derived (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement program) curricula “Within My Reach” and “Within Our Reach.” The curricula were modified by program staff to fit the specific needs of the Hispanic community. Participants receive 24 hours of curriculum delivered over 3 consecutive Saturdays. The program also includes a workshop aimed at helping participants improve their economic and financial circumstances. The main goal of these classes is to equip participants with the skills and information they need to improve themselves as men, spouses, fathers, and providers. This, in turn, has the goal of increasing the well-being of their children. For more information about Education Service Center 19, please go to <http://www.esc19.net/>.

Granato Group, Vienna, Virginia

The Granato Group, founded in 1999, provides organizational development services, leadership training, and counseling in Northern Virginia. Granato originally planned to partner with a Head Start program in Washington, D.C. that typically serves African Americans. When this partnership did not move forward, Granato staff realized there was a need for relationship enhancement services in the local Hispanic community. Granato delivers relationship education to married couples for community agencies that want to offer the program to their clientele. Granato has provided marriage education training at approximately 20 community sites throughout Northern Virginia. Typically, the community site leaders (program directors or church leaders) are responsible for recruitment of participants and facility set-up, while Granato provides the facilitators and participant coaching. Participants are from



Central and South America, as well as Mexico, and are a mixture of newly arrived and more established immigrants. The majority of participants are couples in their 30s who have children. Granato uses the self-developed FIT Relationships™ curriculum, a 20-hour curriculum based on family systems theory that emphasizes communication skills, problem solving, parenting education, and increasing emotional awareness. The curriculum is offered over the course of 10 weeks through weekly 3-hour sessions. When participants complete the program they are offered booster sessions and family social events. The Granato Group sees the goal of the FIT Relationships™ program as building “strong marriages that contribute to a healthy, stable life necessary for couples raising healthy, successful children.” For more information about The Granato Group, please go to <http://www.granatogroup.com/>.

Holyoke/Chicopee/Springfield Head Start, Springfield, Massachusetts

Holyoke/Chicopee/Springfield Head Start (HCS) opened in 1970 as a Head Start agency when the organization obtained its first Head Start grant. The marriage education program provides services to individuals and couples that qualify for Head Start or Early Head Start (i.e., they meet income eligibility guidelines and are either pregnant or have children aged 5 or younger) in three Western Massachusetts cities and towns: Holyoke, Chicopee, and Springfield. The program, TLC Building Healthy Relationships, delivers the Active Relationships curriculum. The 16-20 hour program is delivered either on two Saturdays (8 hours each day), or over the course of 10 weeks (with participants attending a 2-hour class each week). Classes are offered in both English and Spanish, which reflects a desire to serve the longstanding Puerto Rican and Dominican communities (English speaking), as well as the more recent Guatemalan migrant population (Spanish speaking). The program aims to teach life skills, particularly those related to parenting and fatherhood, but also incorporates a mental health component, for which access has historically been limited due to the small number of Spanish-language service providers in the area. In addition to the curriculum, participants who have attended the requisite number of sessions are eligible for individual

coaching from program staff, which typically includes role play or additional activities that reinforce the curriculum. HCS also offers booster sessions that are tailored to the needs of participants, as well as additional parenting and fatherhood programs. HCS sees the TLC program as integral to their efforts to educate families and individuals on the benefits of healthy relationships and the important role relationships play in the lives of children. For more information about Holyoke/Chicopee/Springfield Head Start, please go to <http://www.hcsheadstart.org/>.

Meier Clinics, Chicago, Illinois

Meier Clinics, a faith-based organization, has been providing mental health services in several locations throughout the United States since 1976. In 2004, the Chicago branch of the Meier Clinics and several other community and faith-based organizations formed the Chicago Alliance for Latino Marriages Association (CALMA), with a mission “to strengthen Latino individuals, couples and families by developing their skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages and families, respecting the cultural and spiritual values of the Latino family.” Many of these organizations collaborated to apply for an OFA healthy marriage grant. Under the direction of Meier Clinics Foundation (the non-profit, tax exempt section of Meier Clinics), more than 20 CALMA partners provide marriage education through the healthy marriage program, Family Bridges, to high school-aged adolescents, single adults (both partnered and not in a relationship), and adult couples in six counties in the greater Chicagoland area.^{vii} Meier Clinics trains Family Bridges staff and partners on seven different curricula, and provides evaluation support and materials, while each partner organization is responsible for recruitment and site operations. Curricula vary in length from 10-16 hours, and are typically taught over the course of a month. Approximately 80 percent of Family Bridges services are delivered in Spanish, as the majority of their participants are first



generation immigrants or second generation Hispanics with Mexican, Central American, Dominican, and Puerto Rican ancestries. Family Bridges sees its goal as teaching underserved populations how to create and maintain healthy relationships that enrich each partner, their children and the community. For more information about Meier Clinics, please go to <http://www.meierclinics.com/>.

New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico

New Mexico State University's (NMSU) Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI) has been delivering services to the community since 1999 when they obtained their first family strengthening grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. In addition to marriage and relationship education, SFI is providing two related services: parenting education and fatherhood education for incarcerated men. Through its OFA healthy marriage grant, NMSU provides marriage and relationship education services to residents of Doña Ana County in southern New Mexico and the five-county metro Albuquerque area. Programs are delivered throughout the community—in community centers, churches, schools, and partner agencies. The *Family Wellness* curriculum is offered to couples and individuals with children in a weekly, 2.5 hour class over the course of 12 weeks. Families (with children age 8 and older) participate in the first 6 weeks of the curriculum together; in the final 6 weeks, parents and children are separated. Children participate in activities with themes that run parallel to their parents' curriculum. After completing *Family Wellness*, participants are then offered a 13-week parenting program, which most complete as well.^{viii} Program participants' demographics differ based on service location. Although both sites serve primarily low-income individuals, Albuquerque participants are typically more established residents with higher levels of acculturation, while rural Doña Ana participants tend to be recent immigrants. Consequently, services in Doña Ana County are typically in Spanish and those in Albuquerque are in English. NMSU's goals for their *Family Wellness* program are to "improve the couple relationship, to increase positive discipline skills and parent's ability to work together as a team, and to

enhance family functioning".^{ix} For more information about New Mexico State University, please go to <http://www.nmsu.edu/>.

Puerto Rican Family Institute, New York, New York

The Puerto Rican Family Institute (PRFI) has been providing social services to the greater New York City area (and Puerto Rico) since 1960 with the goal of preventing family disintegration and encouraging self-sufficiency. PRFI, along with several partner organizations, is providing marriage and relationship education under an OFA Fatherhood grant to married couples in four New York City boroughs (Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens), and in Jersey City and Hoboken, New Jersey. They are also providing relationship education to adolescents through partnerships with various high schools. Their adult marriage education clientele represent the diversity of New York's Hispanic population. They serve newly arrived Caribbean and Central or South American immigrants alongside recent and longstanding Puerto Rican mainland residents. Participants range from Spanish-speakers to those who only speak English. Most classes funded by this grant teach "Within Our Reach" (WOR), a version of the research-based and empirically-tested PREP curriculum adapted for low-income populations. The facilitators provide WOR over two 8-hour days. A faith-based partner organization provides two 8-hour Latino-oriented, self-developed programs: one called *Tertulias* (the Spanish word for "gatherings"), which covers the various stages of marriage through didactic and experiential components, and a more comprehensive Skills Development program. PRFI sees marriage education as addressing their goal of family stabilization by preventing divorce and separation. For more information about the Puerto Rican Family Institute, please go to <http://www.prfi.org/>.



TELACU, Los Angeles, California

The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU) has been conducting community and economic development for over 40 years, from the construction of senior centers to assisting with Latino self-sufficiency. TELACU began relationship education with a federal capacity-building grant they used to develop a network of partners to run youth and marriage education/ family strengthening programs. An OFA Healthy Marriage grant funds their current program, *Futuro Now*, which works with 18 community partner organizations to provide relationship education services to predominately low-income Hispanics in four southern California counties. Given the variety of audiences—youth, married and unmarried couples, and individuals—the partner agencies use a wide array of curricula including “Within My Reach,” “Family Wellness,” “Love U2,” and “Mastering the Mysteries of Love” (a “Relationship Enhancement” program) to teach 8 hours of marriage education to mostly first generation immigrants or second generation U.S.-born Latinos primarily of Mexican descent (though TELACU also reports serving persons whose country of origin is in Central America). TELACU contracted Urban Strategies^x to manage the day-to-day site operations of *Futuro Now* while TELACU oversees administrative duties (e.g., paperwork, financials, and data collection quality control). Meier Clinics is contracted to conduct *Futuro Now*’s data reporting and program evaluation. Staff report that the goal of the program is to strengthen families, the cornerstone of a thriving society. For more information about TELACU, please go to <http://telacu.com/html>.



Further Information

For additional information about the HHMI Grantee Implementation Evaluation, please contact the Federal Task Order Officers or the evaluation team.

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^{viii} While NMSU does evaluate this additional parenting component, it is not part of the HHMI evaluation.

^{ix} Devall, E. & Montañez, M. *Family Wellness Program*. New Mexico State University. Retrieved February 3, 2010, from <http://aces.nmsu.edu/ces/sfi/documents/familywellness.pdf>.

^x Urban Strategies is a consulting and technical assistance firm, whose mission is “to tool, connect, and resource faith and community-based organizations to serve children and families in need.” (<http://www.urbanstrategies.us/who-we-are.html>) Urban Strategies has also provided evaluation-related technical assistance to the OHS Healthy Marriage grantees.

ⁱ U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts. Washington D.C. Retrieved March 18, 2010, from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Census Bureau News. (2008). *An older and more diverse nation by midcentury*. (U.S. Department of Commerce Publication No. CB08-123). Washington D.C. Retrieved April 14, 2009, from <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/012496.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. Family structure and children's living arrangements: Percentage of children ages 0–17 by presence of parents in household and race and Hispanic origin, 1980–2008. Retrieved February 1, 2010 from http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/fam1a.asp?pop_up=true.

^{iv} Ventura, S. J. (2009). *Changing patterns of nonmarital childbearing in the United States*. NCHS data brief, no 18. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

^v Wherry, L. & Finegold, K. (2004). *Marriage promotion and the living arrangements of black, Hispanic, and white children*. Report No. B-61. Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute.

^{vi} Wherry, L. & Finegold, K. (2004). *Marriage promotion and the living arrangements of black, Hispanic, and white children*. Report No. B-61. Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute.

^{vii} All *Family Bridges* service delivery partners are CALMA members but not all CALMA members are service delivery partners.

