



Promising Practices Guide



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance

Healthy Marriage and Relationship Programs: Promising Practices in Serving Low-Income and Culturally Diverse Populations

Prepared for the
National Healthy Marriage Resource Center

with generous support from
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

This is a product of the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, led by co-directors Mary Myrick, APR, and Jeanette Hercik, PhD, and project manager, Patrick Patterson, MSW, MPH. This document was authored by Sharon McGroder, CFLE, PhD and Robyn Cenizal, CFLE. The NHMRC would also like to thank Kendy Cox, Courtney Harrison, MPA, Jane Koppelman MPA, Sharrie McIntosh, MHA, Anne Menard, Theodora Ooms, MSW, Serena Retna, Emily Rosenberg and Leah Rubio for their research and contribution efforts.

Dear Readers,

This guide shares what we have learned to date about promising practices in healthy marriage and relationship (HMR) programs, especially those serving low-income and culturally diverse populations. It is intended to be helpful to a variety of audiences, including those who are interested in starting a new program, those already involved in running a program, and those who are evaluating or funding such programs.

Support for the development of this guide was provided by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and The Annie E. Casey Foundation, which funded the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center to produce and disseminate a guide highlighting promising practices in providing HMR services, with a focus on how programs are responding to the needs of low-income and culturally diverse populations.

The information and ideas in this promising practices guide are based on our experience in providing technical assistance to numerous HMR programs over the years, a review of a growing number of reports on lessons learned in HMR programming, and a series of staff-conducted conversations held with a sampling of programs in recent months. Most of these programs are Federally funded, either by agencies that have integrated HMR programming into their existing missions and grant-making processes—such as the Office of Child Support Enforcement, the Children’s Bureau, the Administration for Native Americans, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement¹—or by OFA, which administers the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Grant program authorized by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. Some programs have grants from other or additional sources, including States and foundations such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Promising practices used by HMR programs are highlighted throughout this guide. Highlighted programs are cited as examples, and not meant to imply that they are the only programs using a particular practice. It is also important to note that although the programs highlighted in the guide may in fact be promising programs, the guide is focused on highlighting the innovative and promising practices used by these programs in a particular area of delivering marriage and relationship education services. It may be the case that while a program is implementing a promising practice in one area, it still may be facing challenges in implementing another aspect of its program.

¹ Head Start grantees were not included in this process as they had only been funded for ~6 months when this information was compiled.

What are HMR programs? HMR services are being provided across the United States under many different auspices to a wide range of couples and individuals, including high school students, unmarried adults, engaged couples, unmarried parents, married couples, remarried couples, single parents, and long-time married couples. The programs we draw upon in this guide typically provide structured classes or workshops of an educational nature on a voluntary basis. These can range from a few hours delivered in a single day or during a weekend retreat to a series of classes meeting once a week over the course of a month or more. Some HMR programs also conduct educational outreach events, develop public service ads, or organize family-friendly recreational activities in the community.

What do we mean by promising practice? By promising practice, we do not mean “best” practice or “effective” practice, which implies that rigorous evaluation methods have been used to examine a program’s impact on participant outcomes. Instead, by promising practice, we simply mean a practice that appears to promote the successful implementation of an HMR program; it helps the program achieve its operational objectives. These practices are not unique to the particular program, location, or program staff; they have the potential to work elsewhere.

Scope of the guide. This guide is comprehensive and covers promising practices in key areas related to program design, program infrastructure, and program implementation. It aims to capture and share the major lessons being learned from the experience of many of the hundreds of programs that now exist. However, it should not be considered the final word. New approaches and adaptations are continually being tried out, and we can expect many new promising practices – and eventually, best practices – to emerge in the future.

This guide is valuable because the HMR field is evolving and reaching out to more diverse populations. Until a few years ago, HMR programs had mostly been offered to white, middle class couples who were engaged or already married. But in the 1990s the advent of substantial Federal and some State funding has resulted in HMR programs now being provided free of charge to much larger numbers of individuals and couples from economically disadvantaged and racially and culturally diverse populations. This expansion – growing to scale – has presented many new challenges to and opportunities for traditional HMR models.

Many of the programs we draw upon in this guide are serving low-income and culturally diverse populations – large numbers of African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and, in smaller numbers, refugees from African, Southeast Asian, and Eastern European countries. It is beyond the scope of this guide to detail the various adaptations to curriculum, recruitment, and other operational practices that are specifically targeted to these culturally diverse populations. However, throughout the text we have included examples of how programs are meeting the challenges of serving low-income and diverse populations.

Who will find this guide useful? Depending on what your interests and needs are, some readers will want to read the guide in its entirety, and then return to discussions of specific issues later. However, others might want to skim the guide or focus on particular sections.

- ✓ **If you, your group, or community coalition is interested in starting an HMR program**, you should find almost every section of this guide useful, especially Chapter II which discusses issues to consider and promising practices pertaining to planning and designing your program.
- ✓ **If you are an HMR program administrator or staff member**, you will get some ideas for how to address basic issues, such as recruiting and retaining participants, and how to solve particular challenges that arise in various areas. This guide will help you assess and improve your current program and can provide a basic framework to review current practices and assess how you address certain challenges. By understanding how other programs have successfully addressed a specific issue, you may identify some new approaches to try in your program.
- ✓ **If you are a consultant, trainer, or technical assistance provider** asked to help a new or existing HMR program, this guide is an invaluable resource as it draws upon a wealth of experience and features a wide range of promising practices.
- ✓ **If you are an organization invited to join a coalition and/or to partner with an HMR program** you might be, for example, a responsible fatherhood program asked to refer dads who are in a relationship for couple-based services; a domestic violence program called upon to help an HMR program develop a domestic violence protocol; or a faith-based organization interested in developing or enhancing a current marriage ministry, you will learn more about the challenges involved in delivering HMR programs and how you can help.
- ✓ **If you are a potential funder**—a State agency, a community organization, family foundation, or community member—consulting this guide will reassure you that HMR programs are viable and grounded in decades of research on what it takes to form and sustain healthy relationships and marriages, and much is being learned about what works in local programs.

We welcome your comments and questions, and invite you to share your own lessons about promising practices. For additional information and resources, contact the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center at info@healthymarriageinfo.org or 866-916-4672.

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center Team
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We would like to thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, for recognizing the value of an HMR promising practices guide to the field and for supporting that vision financially.

This guide would not have been possible without Umi Chong, formerly at The Lewin Group (Lewin), who played a key role helping to define program elements, and a range of individuals who assisted in identifying promising practices: Leah Rubio and Kendy Cox (Public Strategies Inc.); Anne Menard, domestic violence expert and domestic violence liaison to NHMRC; and Whitney Engstrom, Emily Rosenberg, Karen Gardiner, and Jane Koppelman (all of Lewin). Helpful suggestions were also provided by Nathan Woods (Public Strategies, Inc.), Josh Good and Patricia Hoag (ICF International), and Allison Hyra and Sharrie McIntosh, co-manager for resource development for NHMRC (both of Lewin).

Ellen Holman, JoAnne Eason, and Jeremy Brown, (all of Public Strategies, Inc.) developed the design and layout of the guide, based on an initial design by Serena Retna.

We are indebted to the careful review and thoughtful feedback provided by Mary Myrick, president of Public Strategies, Inc. and NHMRC project director; Mike Fishman (Lewin) and Jeanette Hercik (ICF International), NHMRC associate directors; and Patrick Patterson, NHMRC program manager. Project officers Carole Thompson (Annie E. Casey) and Michelle Clune (OFA), as well as Robin McDonald (OFA), OFA Federal project officers, and other Annie E. Casey staff also provided helpful feedback to ensure this guide meets the needs of their target audiences.

Additionally, we would like to thank the many HMR programs we have had the opportunity to work with and learn from over the years.

This guide is dedicated to Nathan S. Woods (1976-2008), whose commitment to supporting healthy marriages and families was surpassed only by his commitment to his family and friends.

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Executive Summary

This guide shares what we have learned to date about promising practices in healthy marriage and relationship (HMR) programs, especially those serving low-income and culturally diverse populations. It is intended to be helpful to a variety of audiences, including those who are interested in starting a new program, those already involved in running a program, and those who are evaluating or funding such programs.

HMR services are being provided across the United States under many different auspices to a wide range of couples and individuals, including high school students, unmarried adults, engaged couples, unmarried parents, married couples, remarried couples, single parents, and long-time married couples. The programs we draw upon in this guide typically provide structured classes or workshops of an educational nature on a voluntary basis. These can range from a few hours delivered in a single day or during a weekend retreat to a series of classes meeting once a week over the course of a month or more. Some HMR programs also conduct educational outreach events, develop public service ads, or organize family-friendly recreational activities in the community.

Promising practices used by HMR programs are highlighted throughout this guide. Highlighted programs are cited as examples, and not meant to imply that they are the only programs using a particular practice. It is also important to note that although the programs highlighted in the guide may in fact be promising programs, the guide is focused on highlighting the innovative and promising practices used by these programs in a particular area of delivering marriage and relationship education services. It may be the case that while a program is implementing a promising practice in one area, it still may be facing challenges in implementing another aspect of its program.

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This guide is comprehensive and covers promising practices in key areas relating to program design, program infrastructure, and program implementation. It aims to capture and share the major lessons being learned from the experience of many of the hundreds of HMR programs that now exist. However, it should not be considered the final word. New approaches and adaptations are continually being tried out, and we can expect many new promising practices – and eventually, best practices – to emerge in the future.

The guide is divided into five main sections. First, the introduction describes the purpose of the guide, the way in which it is organized, background information on the healthy marriage movement, and challenges common to providing HMR services. Chapters two through four provide information on designing, developing, and implementing your program. Each of these chapters begins with a summary of the chapter’s topic. Each chapter is then divided into several subtopics, each with a “Things to Consider” section and a “What You Can Try” section, complete with promising practices. Chapter five discusses common themes that must be considered throughout the entire program life cycle.

To give you a flavor for the more detailed information you will find in this guide, here are highlights and promising practice programs that are presented in chapters two through four.

Chapter 2: Getting Started: Designing Your Program

Chapter 2 provides promising practices for planning a program, developing a service delivery strategy, selecting and adapting a curriculum, and choosing a program delivery format. Below are promising practice highlights from the chapter, followed by programs taking innovative approaches in these areas:

Invest in careful planning up front. Select your partners, curriculum, and service delivery strategy based on community needs and assets.

- *The Alliance for North Texas Healthy Effective Marriages (ANTHEM)*
- *The Oklahoma Department of Human Services*
- *The Minnesota Office of Child Support Enforcement*
- *The Clark County Department of Job and Family Services*
- *Oklahoma State Department of Human Services*
- *Colorado Coalition for Adoptive Families (COCAF)*
- *WAIT Training*
- *Power of Two*
- *Family Service and the Division for Families and Children of the Attorney General of Texas*
- *The Howard Phillips Center’s Healthy Families Orange Plus*
- *COPEs, Inc.*
- *Children’s Aid Society*
- *The Active Relationships Center*
- *YWCA of San Antonio*
- *Children’s Home Society of Washington*
- *Becoming Parents Program*
- *Weld County Department of Social Services*
- *DePelchin Children’s Center*

Choose a curriculum that contains core marriage content—communication, conflict resolution, commitment—and will resonate with your target population.

- *Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program (IVROP)*
- *Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families*
- *Adoption Resources of Wisconsin*
- *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*
- *Creciendo Unidos/Growing Together*
- *The Clark County Department of Job and Family Services*

Identify and adapt existing curriculum that take into account the unique cultural and family needs of your target population. If you find it necessary to develop a new curriculum, ensure that it meets these same needs and that program content is based in solid research on what it takes to form and sustain a healthy relationship and marriage.

- *AVANCE Houston*
- *National Multiple Sclerosis Society*
- *The Louisiana Department of Social Services*

Choose a program format that recognizes the needs and constraints of your target population.

- *The Relationship Research Foundation*
- *ANTHEM*
- *Family Service Association of San Antonio and the Division for Families and Children of the Attorney General of Texas*
- *Healthy Marriage Healthy Families Coalition*
- *Pennsylvania Supporting Healthy Marriage Project*
- *Family Connections*
- *The Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement*

Supplement the curriculum with other services and program supports, based on target population needs.

- *The Greater Houston Healthy Marriage Coalition*
- *The Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, Support Enforcement Services*
- *Family Road Building Strong Families Program*
- *The Montefiore Medical Center's University Behavioral Associates*

Work with local domestic violence advocates to develop a protocol that outlines how domestic violence issues are safely, routinely, and consistently identified and appropriately addressed.

- *Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) Together Project*
- *The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition*
- *Pennsylvania Supporting Healthy Marriage Project*
- *Baltimore Building Strong Families Program*

Create a network with community partners who share your organization’s goals and who are well established in the community.

- *The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)*
- *The Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children*
- *The Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*
- *The East Los Angeles Community Union, TELACU*
- *Child Inc.*
- *Meier Clinics Foundation*
- *The Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR)*
- *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*
- *The Alliance for North Texas Healthy Effective Marriages (ANTHEM)*
- *The Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, Support Enforcement Services*
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*
- *Healthy Families San Angelo*
- *Catholic Charities Inc. Diocese of Wichita*

Hold graduation ceremonies and other public events honoring program participants and celebrating healthy marriages.

- *The Better Family, Inc.*
- *The Active Relationships Center*
- *Relationship Research Foundation*

Chapter 3: Developing Your Program Infrastructure

Chapter 3 provides promising practices for program staffing, hiring facilitators, facilitator training and oversight, hiring and managing evaluators, financial and budgetary issues, and performance monitoring systems. Below are promising practice highlights from the chapter, followed by programs taking innovative approaches in these areas:

Based on program objectives and service delivery strategies, identify the education and experience needed by facilitators and evaluators.

- *The Becoming Parents Program*
- *Bethany Christian Services Inc.*
- *Granato Counseling Services, Inc.*
- *The Osborne Association*
- *Active Relationships Center*
- *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*
- *First Things First, Inc*
- *The California Healthy Marriages Coalition*
- *The Oklahoma Department of Human Services*
- *Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative*

- *The Illinois Department of Health Care and Family Services*
- *The East Los Angeles Community Union*
- *The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*

Whether you use paid staff or volunteers, select qualified people who fit well with your team. Establish roles, set clear expectations, and provide them with adequate training.

- *The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition*
- *AVANCE Houston*
- *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*
- *The Ounce of Prevention Fund*
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*
- *Family Connections*

Develop oversight strategies that ensure staff and facilitator buy-in and support program quality.

- *ANTHEM*
- *Auburn University*
- *The Weld County Department of Social Service*
- *Public Strategies, Inc.*

Create a realistic budget that supports your staffing plan marketing strategy, workshop staging, incentives, and recruitment. Ensure accountability and protect credibility with a system of financial checks and balances.

- *Healthy Families Nampa Coalition*
- *First Things First, Inc*

As part of program monitoring, train staff, facilitators, and evaluators on adhering to established processes and presenting the curriculum as it was designed. A logic model is a valuable visual tool for stakeholders to understand the connections among processes and responsibilities.

- *United Way of Jackson County*
- *The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*
- *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*
- *The Minnesota Office of Child Support Enforcement*

Collect data on processes and participants to inform your program as well as to document differences in participant circumstances, attitudes, or knowledge from registration through program completion.

- *The Georgia Department of Human Resources*
- *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*
- *AVANCE Houston*
- *Texas State University*

Chapter 4: Implementing Your Program

Chapter 4 includes promising practices relating to marketing and recruitment; registration, screening, and enrollment; delivery of HMR classes; participant retention, follow-up, and tracking; performance monitoring and quality assurance; and sustainability. Below are promising practice highlights from the chapter, followed by programs taking innovative approaches in these areas:

Use marketing and recruitment efforts to inform the community about your organization, its services, and the benefits of a HMR program to participants. Marketing and recruitment activities should be closely coordinated, as they both are important to successful service delivery and program sustainability.

- *The California Healthy Marriages Coalition*
- *Auburn University*
- *First Things First, Inc.*
- *The Georgia Department of Human Resources*
- *Meier Clinics Foundation*
- *Laugh Your Way America, LLC*
- *The University of Minnesota*
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*
- *Active Relationships Center*
- *ANTHEM*
- *Boat People SOS*
- *Jewish Family and Children's Service*
- *Indiana Healthy Couples, Healthy Families Program*

Increase participant retention by providing convenient, flexible workshop schedules; child care, meals, and other supports; and interactive sessions with facilitators who engage participants and make them feel welcome and respected.

- *Healthy Families Nampa Coalition*
- *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*
- *University of Minnesota*
- *The Active Relationships program*
- *The Georgia PAAM, Bethany Christian Services*
- *AVANCE Houston*
- *Texas Health and Human Services Commission*
- *The Oklahoma Department of Human Services*
- *YWCA of San Antonio*
- *Auburn University*
- *Children's Aid Society*
- *Youth Development, Inc.*
- *At Meier Clinics*
- *Creciendos Unidos*
- *First Things First, Inc.*

Collect participant and process data to document and inform others about your organization's work. Establish systematic processes to protect the integrity of the curriculum and use data collection techniques that resonate with participants and are not invasive.

- *Public Strategies, Inc.*
- *The Minnesota Child Support Enforcement Office*
- *The Texas Health and Human Services Commission*
- *COPEs, Inc.*
- *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work*
- *Indiana Healthy Couples, Healthy Families Program*
- *The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*
- *The Center for Human Services, Loving Families*
- *The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition*
- *The University of Minnesota*
- *The Washington Division of Child Support Enforcement*
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*
- *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*

Balance creativity with what appeals to the target population. For example, a dynamic web site will not recruit participants who are not technologically savvy and symphony tickets may not be an incentive within some populations.

- *Creciendos Unidos*
- *The Weld County Department of Social Services*
- *The Clark County Department of Job and Family Services*

Chapter 5: Putting the Pieces Together

Chapter 5 highlights important themes that should be considered when applying promising practices to a program's design, infrastructure, and implementation. Here are the major take-away lessons offered in the chapter:

- ✓ **Partnerships are critical, regardless of the form they take.** Whether a community-wide coalition or a stand-alone program, successful HMR programs partner with other community organizations. These partnerships can be formal or informal, extensive or modest. Community partners can provide referrals to your HMR program, and you can refer participants to other community services as needed.
- ✓ **Faith and community leaders can serve as ambassadors for your program.** When targeting culturally diverse populations, having the support of leaders within that community establishes credibility and increases access to families. Faith leaders are often supportive of HMR messages and may even be willing to host workshops. When working with faith leaders, be sure to educate them on Federal guidelines for faith-based organizations.
- ✓ **An organization's leadership and staff must commit.** Any organization sponsoring or partnering with an HMR program must buy into the HMR philosophy and understand and agree to the role it will play. The HMR program must fit with the organization's mission and values, and HMR programs seeking organizational partnerships must be prepared to help them understand and articulate this fit to funders, boards, and staff.

- ✓ **Successful HMR programs invest time and resources in developing a workable infrastructure.** Many promising practices in the areas of program design and implementation are taking place but relatively few pertain to developing program infrastructure. Successful HMR programs are thoughtful about the service delivery strategy that fits both their target population’s needs and their organizational capacity, and they develop an infrastructure, including training and professional support, to support this strategy. The success of HMR programs also depends on the relationships between facilitators and participants and collaborative relationships with other organizations.
- ✓ **HMR programs must recognize client needs.** Individuals, couples, and families are complex. Some may need more than HMR services, and some of these needs, such as employment, domestic violence counseling, and treatment for mental health problems or substance abuse, may require attention before they enroll in an HMR program. Successful HMR programs understand the population they are serving and offer or provide referrals to additional services as needed – either before or during the program.
- ✓ **Marketing your program is important, but do not rely on advertising for recruitment.** Marketing and recruitment are related but distinct activities with different purposes. Marketing strategies, such as advertisements on TV, radio, and billboards, can spread your messages and raise awareness of your program, but reflect a passive approach to recruiting program participants. Successful programs use a variety of recruitment strategies, some of which require community outreach to generate interest and enrollment opportunities.
- ✓ **Sustainable programs develop and use a performance monitoring system to improve.** To be successful, HMR programs need to be committed to program improvement. You can demonstrate this commitment by developing a process for obtaining feedback from participants, partners, and staff on what is working well and what could be improved. This process can be part of an evaluation, but should also be an institutionalized part of the program itself, owned and directed by program staff.

Conclusion

The field of HMR programming is relatively young. Consequently, promising practices related to implementation have been identified, but the benchmarks for service delivery have not been established yet. As a result, establishing standards for the field has only recently begun to answer questions such as: What are reasonable expectations regarding numbers served? How do we measure success when comparing different dosages and retention rates? What is an acceptable cost-per-unit? The field will advance as more programs adopt promising practices such as the ones discussed in this guide. Advancing the field also requires programs to track their performance and use quantitative and qualitative data to assess the effectiveness of various approaches and improve.

As the HMR field evolves, practitioners will continue to learn about promising practices that result in well-designed, well-implemented programs that stand the greatest chance of making a difference in peoples’ lives. Eventually, best practices may be identified by more reliably producing intended outcomes – healthier relationships, quality marriages, and improved child well-being. Until then, programs should continue to explore new methods and strategies for designing and implementing HMR services in a variety of settings and with a variety of target populations.





I Introduction

Social policy leaders and researchers have reached broad consensus that children typically do better when raised in healthy, married, two-parent families. As a result, State and Federal governments have increasingly sought ways to promote and support healthy marriages. One key strategy has been to fund State and local entities to provide healthy marriage and relationship (HMR) services to a wide range of audiences—premarital couples, new parents, adoptive parents, unmarried parents, step-parents, low-income couples, couples on the brink of divorce, and more recently, youth and unmarried adults.

Over the past six years, the Federal government has supported over 300 programs, with scores of additional programs operating across the country funded by foundation, State, or local dollars. Many innovative ideas that have been implemented around the country appear to hold great promise, and thus, this growing field can benefit from both an overview of these programs and an assessment of which practices appear to be “promising” at this point in time.

A. Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed to share lessons learned about practices that appear promising for meeting the HMR needs of various populations and under certain circumstances.

This guide will also be helpful to organizations providing, or considering providing, HMR services. This includes existing HMR programs seeking to expand services to low-income and culturally diverse populations, as well as community-based organizations already serving low-income and culturally diverse populations that wish to incorporate HMR programming into their current service delivery infrastructure.

This guide will be useful to funders and public officials interested in learning more about HMR programs and emerging promising strategies, as well as policy leaders considering proposing HMR programs as part of Federal, State, or local public policy.

This guide was developed by staff at the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC), which is funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The NHMRC’s mission is to be a first stop for information, resources, and training on healthy marriage for experts, researchers, policymakers, media, marriage educators, couples and individuals, program providers, and others.²

Support for this guide was provided by OFA and by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, which funded the NHMRC to produce and disseminate a guide highlighting promising practices in providing HMR services, with a focus on how programs are responding to the needs of low-income and culturally diverse populations.

² National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. www.healthymarriageinfo.org. “About Us.” (2008).

B. Organization of This Guide

The guide is organized into three chapters, corresponding to three key phases of program design and implementation. HMR programs may have promising practices in one or more of these areas:

- II. Getting Started: Designing Your Program
- III. Developing Your Program Infrastructure
- IV. Implementing Your Program

Each chapter discusses specific program elements, identifies key issues to consider, and offers suggestions you can try, based on promising practices gleaned from programs in the field, especially those serving low-income and culturally diverse populations.

This guide integrates discussion of domestic violence issues because they are important for HMR programs to address comprehensively and at all stages of programming.³ There is not a separate chapter on domestic violence. Providers should be mindful of these issues from the outset—from developing partnerships during program planning and selecting a curriculum during program design, to staffing their program and recruiting participants during program implementation.

Similarly, this guide does not have a separate chapter on HMR programming for low-income and culturally diverse populations. Regardless of the target population, successful HMR programs share many features; they are well-designed and well-implemented, mindful of participants' needs and provide services accordingly, and have built-in mechanisms for program improvement. In fact, these are common features of any well-run health or human service program. There are, however, additional considerations when providing HMR services to low-income and culturally diverse populations, and there are some practices that appear particularly promising for addressing their unique needs. These issues and examples of promising practices appear throughout the guide.

At the same time, the purpose of this guide is not to provide one-size-fits-all guidance on implementing an HMR program. The diversity of the populations served, program approaches, and program settings make it impossible to take a uniform approach to defining a successful program. Because a strategy seems to work for one HMR program does not mean it will work for all HMR programs.

Therefore, the guide highlights HMR practices that appear promising regardless of the target population or contextual factors, as well as practices that appear especially promising for certain target populations and in particular situations or settings.⁴

³ For additional information, see: Menard, A. (2008). Promoting Safety: A Resource Packet for Marriage and Relationship Educators and Program Administrators. National Healthy Marriage Resource Center and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

⁴ Currently funded State and Federal grantees should keep in mind that some of these practices may not be allowable activities under your particular grants. Check with your State or Federal project officer for any clarification.

C. Background

Before discussing promising practices, it is important to understand the history of HMR programming and current efforts to learn about how best to serve diverse populations.

1. Research on Marriage and Healthy Relationship Programs

Researchers have been studying marriage for decades, and there is now a consensus that children raised in married, two-parent families typically fare better than children raised in single-parent families.⁵ Studies also show that most adults desire marriage—even low-income and culturally diverse populations that have lower marriage rates.^{6,7}

Historically, many churches have offered or even required premarital counseling for couples. Secular HMR programming has its origins in the 1970s and 1980s when mental health professionals became increasingly concerned about the rise in divorce and single parenthood but felt that “existing counseling and therapy services offered too little help, too late, to too few people.”⁸

Much research has emerged on the effectiveness of HMR programs, with studies showing short-term gains in interpersonal skills and relationship quality among premarital couples.⁹ Studies also show that increased communication leads to decreased divorce potential among married couples.¹⁰ These studies demonstrate that relationship skills and behavior can be improved through educational interventions.

However, these programs were developed largely for premarital couples, and their evaluations typically studied white middle-class families. The research provides less insight about the effectiveness of HMR services for low-income and culturally diverse populations and whether the programs need to be adapted to better meet the needs of these groups.

WHAT ARE HMR PROGRAMS?

- Impart knowledge about what constitutes a healthy relationship and insights on relationship dynamics
- Teach skills pertaining to conflict resolution, problem-solving, empathy, and communication
- Promote positive attitudes and beliefs about healthy relationships and marriages
- Improve the quality of current and future marriages
- Foster a culture that endorses and supports healthy marriages and relationships

⁵ For additional information, see: Amato, P. R. (2001). Children of divorce in the 1990s: An update of the Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 355-370 and Milardo, R. M. (Ed.) (2000). The decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 873-875 and Waite, L. J., & Gallagher, M. (2000). *The case for marriage: Why married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially*. New York: Doubleday.

⁶ Fein, D. J. (2004). *Married and poor: Basic characteristics of economically disadvantaged couples in the U.S.* Working Paper SHM-01, Supporting Healthy Marriage Evaluation.

⁷ Blackman, L., Clayton, O., Glenn, N., Malone-Colon, L., & Roberts, A. (2005). *The consequences of marriage for African Americans: A comprehensive literature review*. New York: The Institute for American Values and Edin, K., & Kefalas, M. (2005) *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

⁸ Ooms, T. (2006). *Adapting healthy marriage programs for disadvantaged and culturally diverse populations: What are the issues?* Washington, DC: CLASP, 2.

⁹ For additional information, see: Carroll, J. S. & Doherty, W. J. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: A meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family Relations*, 52(2), 105-118.

¹⁰ Stanley, S., Markman, H., & Whitton, S. (2002) *Communication, Conflict, and Commitment: Insights on the Foundations of Relationship Success from a National Survey*. *Family Process*. 41: 4, 659-675.

2. The Healthy Marriage Movement

On the policy front, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 replaced the 61-year Federal entitlement to welfare with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Two of the four TANF goals relate to increasing the proportion of children raised in married two-parent families.

Not coincidentally, 1996 also witnessed the emergence of grassroots efforts to strengthen marriage. The Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education, which sponsors the annual Smart Marriages Conference, was founded by Diane Sollee, a marriage and family therapist. Marriage Savers, which works with faith-based organizations to launch community marriage support programs, was co-founded by Mike and Harriett McManus to reduce divorce and cohabitation rates and increase marriage rates by helping local communities adopt a Community Marriage Policy then training local clergy and mentor couples in participating churches. First Things First, Inc.-Chattanooga, a grassroots organization led by Julie Baumgardner, was also initiated in 1996 by business leaders concerned about the economic toll that divorce and unmarried childbearing was having on their community. The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) was developed by former Governor Frank Keating in 1998 in response to a joint study by economists at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University showing the economic impact of Oklahoma's high divorce rate. Offering HMR programming statewide, OMI is currently the longest-running state-sponsored HMR initiative in the country. During this same time, there was also the emergence of efforts to promote not only healthy marriages, but healthy relationships between couples (married or unmarried) with the goal of improving attitudes toward marriage and supporting positive co-parenting.

3. Recent Developments

The convergence of science and socio-political forces related to strengthening marriage resulted in a 2002 Federal healthy marriage initiative (HMI) aimed at "help(ing) couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage."¹¹ Over the last 6 years, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in DHHS has used existing program authorities to fund over 300 State and local organizations which provide HMR programs and related services to tens of thousands of unmarried pregnant and parenting couples, foster and adoptive parents, refugee families, and parents currently in, or at risk of, entering the child welfare system. The Deficit Reduction Act in 2005 created a new funding source for HMR services to diverse populations, authorizing an additional \$100 million to support healthy marriage programs and another \$50 million for responsible fatherhood programs. In September 2006, OFA awarded grants to 125 healthy marriage programs and 98 responsible fatherhood programs, approximately one-third of which include HMR programs.

During this time, ACF also launched the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative, the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative, and most recently, the Native American Healthy Marriage Initiative. Components of ACF's HMI, these initiatives seek to promote culturally competent strategies for fostering healthy marriages and responsible fatherhood, improving child well-being, and strengthening families within their respective communities.

¹¹ Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative (2008), www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/mission.html.

WHAT DO HMR PROGRAMS LOOK LIKE?

HMR programs are quite diverse. They are sponsored by a wide array of organizations, offered in a variety of settings, involve a number of different activities and services, and serve various audiences depending on their family life stage and other unique cultural and marriage and relationship needs.

Organizations sponsoring HMR programs:

- Community-based health and/or social service organizations
- Both nonprofit and for profit organizations
- Schools
- Faith-based organizations
- State, local, and tribal governments

Some target populations served:

- Youth
- Premarital couples
- New parents
- Unmarried parents
- Adoptive parents
- Remarried couples/step-parents
- Couples on the brink of divorce

HMR activities:

- Educational curriculum
- Mentoring/coaching
- Group activities
- Community events
- Case management
- Low-income individuals and couples
- Refugee families
- African American individuals and couples
- Latino individuals and couples
- Native American individuals and couples
- Asian American individuals and couples
- Prison populations

Program formats:

- Weekend retreats
- One-day workshops
- Multiple session classes
- Workplace lunch-n-learns
- School-based
(e.g., in health or family & consumer sciences classes)
- After-school programs

In addition to funding programmatic initiatives, ACF funded research on marriage and healthy marriage programming. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF began funding three large national demonstration evaluations to test the effectiveness of particular healthy marriage program models with more diverse populations. The Building Strong Families demonstration designed a comprehensive program model and is testing its effectiveness with unmarried expectant parents and unmarried parents of newborns; the Supporting Healthy Marriage demonstration designed a comprehensive program model and is testing its effectiveness with low-income married couples; and the Community Healthy Marriage Initiative is evaluating the effectiveness of community-wide initiatives designed to promote healthy marriages, parental responsibility, and the financial well-being of children. These demonstrations will provide valuable information about the implementation and effectiveness of their program models. To complement these findings, OPRE and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) also funded the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative Evaluation to document and uncover lessons about the diverse programmatic approaches to improving Hispanic family well-being through HMR programs.

D. Challenges of Providing HMR Services

Given the nature of HMR programs, there are some unique challenges that service providers have faced, stemming largely from the fact that this is a relatively new service area. Additional challenges emerge when seeking to provide HMR services to low-income and culturally diverse populations.

Overall, HMR programs and initiatives aim to improve child well-being by increasing the proportion of children raised in healthy, married, two-parent families. To achieve this goal, some programs focus on reducing the risk of divorce by strengthening existing marriages; other programs focus on strengthening future marriages by helping individuals—youth, young adults, and single parents—make good decisions about relationships and marriage. Still other programs seek to foster positive relationships between unmarried parents with the goal of supporting new parents’ aspirations about marriage and improving co-parenting, should the couples eventually break up.

There are many practical challenges with respect to the capacity, program infrastructure, and organizational climate necessary to provide HMR programs. For example, organizations that are experienced in recruiting and serving individuals may find it challenging to serve a couple or even an entire family. How do you recruit both members of a couple? What works best for recruiting men versus women? What program services meet the couple’s relationship needs as well as their broader family needs?

Another challenge providers sometimes face is to understand and respect the line between education and counseling. Other than the therapeutic programs for couples on the brink of divorce, HMR programs originated as preventive educational interventions for premarital couples and marital enrichment for married couples. As interest in and funding for HMR has expanded, so too have the populations targeted by HMR programs. As a result, providers are increasingly serving individuals and couples with multiple needs that must be addressed. Some HMR providers are staffed by educators, and others by mental health professionals, but all have to be equipped to respond to serious relationship and family needs.¹² In particular, HMR programs need to understand the complex dynamics of domestic violence and recognize that HMR programs are not designed to be domestic violence interventions. Many HMR programs have developed and implemented a domestic violence protocol that articulates how program staff will identify and address suspected or confirmed reports of domestic violence, with the ultimate goal of keeping all program participants safe. Similarly, families facing substance abuse or mental health problems often need services beyond the scope of what a particular HMR program can provide.

¹²For this reason, Doherty (1995) advocates replacing the dichotomous “education vs. therapy” distinction with a five-level model of family involvement to encourage providers to plan services accordingly.

To respond to this challenge, some programs offer both preventive and therapeutic HMR services, while others rely on referrals to and partnerships with community agencies to meet participants' broader needs. Some HMR programs housed within nonprofit or government social service agencies are offered as another service to agency clientele. Whatever service delivery model is adopted, programs need to be staffed by individuals who are qualified to provide the services offered and have experience with the populations they are serving.

In addition, Federal healthy marriage grantees must adhere to guidelines for faith-based organizations and must ensure that services are voluntary. These requirements have presented practical challenges, including whether sessions can open in prayer, whether participants are allowed to discuss their religions, and whether grantees can have faith-based content on their Web site. Ensuring voluntariness has posed challenges for programs serving populations that face mandatory service requirements, including TANF recipients and families in the child welfare system, and for programs serving "captive" audiences, such as school-based youth and prisoners.

These challenges are heightened, and new challenges emerge, when providing HMR services to low-income and culturally diverse populations.¹³ Some programs are implemented by organizations with a longstanding commitment to supporting marriages and families. These programs understand the importance of the marital relationship for healthy families and children, are knowledgeable about how to provide couple-focused, marriage-related interventions, and the HMR program fits well with the organization's mission. The biggest challenges these organizations face when targeting their HMR services to low-income and culturally diverse populations are how to recruit these specific populations and address their more serious needs when they arise. These challenges require that organizations find ways to better integrate into existing service delivery systems for low-income and culturally diverse populations, and their sustainability requires that they develop the capacity to solicit and manage a variety of funding streams.¹⁴

CHALLENGES

IN EXPANDING EXISTING HMR PROGRAMS TO LOW-INCOME AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE POPULATIONS

- Recruiting low-income and culturally diverse populations
- Addressing their more serious needs when they arise
- Becoming better integrated into existing service delivery systems for low-income and culturally diverse populations
- Developing the capacity to solicit and manage multiple funding streams

¹³ For additional information, see: Ooms, T. (2006). Adapting healthy marriage programs for disadvantaged and culturally diverse populations: What are the issues? Washington, DC: CLASP and Ooms, T., & Wilson, P. (2004). The challenge of offering relationship and marriage education to low-income populations. *Family Relations*, 53, 440-447.

¹⁴ Macomber, J., Murray, J. & Stagner, M. (2004). Service delivery and evaluation design options for strengthening and promoting healthy marriages: Investigation of programs to strengthen and support healthy marriages. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Other HMR programs are implemented by organizations new to the HMR field, such as government agencies and social service organizations. These organizations have a history of working with low-income and culturally diverse populations, so they know how to recruit and engage these populations in services. They typically have formal collaborations with other community-based organizations, allowing the establishment of cross-referrals and cross-recruitment. Organizations that work with low-income and culturally diverse populations also tend to have the experience and capacity to identify and address other issues, such as domestic violence, substance abuse, physical and mental health problems, and employment needs. The biggest challenge for these organizations stems from their lack of experience providing marriage-related services, including overcoming reservations about HMR programming in the organizational culture and resolving conflicts where HMR programming may not naturally fit with their mission.¹⁵ They may also find it difficult to recruit both members of a couple for services as they have previously only engaged individuals in their programs.

CHALLENGES

FACED BY COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS ALREADY SERVING LOW-INCOME AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE POPULATIONS

- Lack of experience providing marriage-related services
- Recruiting couples and not just individuals.
- Overcoming organizational culture reticent about HMR programming
- Resolving conflicts where HMR programming may not naturally fit with organization's mission

Regardless of the strengths and challenges faced by organizations providing HMR services, they need to learn how to adapt HMR curricula and program approaches to be appropriate for culturally diverse and low-income populations. For example, selecting an appropriate curriculum that resonates with the values, experiences, and needs of the target population is always important, but it is especially critical when serving low-income and culturally diverse populations for whom the curriculum may not have been designed. Curriculum materials may need to be adapted to accommodate low literacy levels. Materials may need to be translated and sessions may need to be offered in more than one language, which requires hiring bilingual or multilingual facilitators.

¹⁵ Macomber, Murray, & Stagner (2004).

Curriculum content may also need to be adapted to target issues that are a major source of marital/relationship conflict. For example, based on research on unmarried parents,¹⁶ the Federally sponsored Building Strong Families curriculum supplements the standard topics (communication, conflict management, and commitment) with modules on the transition to parenthood, parent-infant relationships, children by prior partners, stress and postpartum depression, family finances, and considering marriage.¹⁷ Similarly, the Federally sponsored Supporting Healthy Marriage curriculum contains supplemental information on strengthening parenting, strengthening relationships beyond the couple, and enhancing couples' ability to manage challenging external circumstances.¹⁸ In addition, both the Building Strong Families and Supporting Healthy Marriage program models address case management, ancillary services, and referrals to outside services as needed.

Providers targeting Latino families need to understand the cultural value of familismo (i.e., valuing parenting roles over marital happiness and their roles as spouses/partners) when designing program content and recruiting participants (who may respond better to a family-centered rather than a couples-centered program). Programs targeting African Americans can build upon cultural strengths, such as collectivism/communalism, spiritualism, role flexibility, egalitarian relationships, kinship bonds, authenticity, extended family supports, and resilience.¹⁹ Programs also have to think creatively about how and where to recruit low-income and culturally diverse populations.

These challenges are real but can be overcome by organizations that are well-respected in their communities, dedicated to their mission, and strategic about how they offer quality HMR services that meet the needs of their target populations.

E. Funding for HMR Programs

Those interested in launching an HMR program typically want to know how to fund the program and where to find funding. Obtaining funding can be difficult, especially for a new type of service such as HMR programs. But over the last decade, the more than 300 HMR programs that now exist have successfully tapped many sources of Federal and State government funding as well as private sector funding.²⁰

Successful grantees have learned that before you can obtain funding, potential funders must be convinced that you have done your homework and have a clear idea about what you want to do and why these services are needed. Funders are also interested in knowing what kind of support you have in your community.

¹⁶ For additional information, see: The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study. The Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/about.asp.

¹⁷ For additional information, see: Dion, M., Avellar, S. Zaveri, H. & Hershey, A. (2008). Final BSF Implementation Report. Washington, DC: MPR.

¹⁸ For additional information, see: Knox, V. and Fein, D. Supporting Healthy Marriage: Designing a Marriage Education Demonstration and Evaluation for Low-Income Married Couples. MDRC and Abt Associates. <http://www.supportinghealthymarriage.org/publications/9/workpaper.pdf>.

¹⁹ Malone-Colon, L. (2007). Responding to the Black Marriage Crisis: A New Vision for Change. New York, NY: Institute for American Values.

²⁰ For additional information, see: The Chronicle of Philanthropy Guide to Grants, available for purchase at <http://philanthropy.com/grants/>.

F. CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- There is broad consensus that children typically do better when raised in healthy, two-parent, married families.
- HMR programs are grounded in research and theory on how to form and sustain healthy relationships and marriages.
- Since 2002, the Federal government has funded over 300 organizations that have provided HMR services to tens of thousands of individuals and couples.²¹
- These organizations have begun to identify practices that show promise for successfully developing and implementing HMR programs, in general and specifically for low-income and culturally diverse populations.
- Promising practices exist in all phases of programming: designing your HMR program, developing your program infrastructure, and implementing your program.

G. FOR MORE INFORMATION

Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/mission.html

- **Building Real Solutions for Real People**
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/healthmarrbk.pdf
- **African American Healthy Marriage Initiative**
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/aa_hmi/AAHMI.html
- **Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative**
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/hispanic_hm_initiative.html
- **Native-American Healthy Marriage Initiative**
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/programs/NAHMI/Index.html
- Coalition for Marriage, Family, and Couples Education www.smartmarriages.org
- National Healthy Marriage Resource Center www.healthymarriageinfo.org
- National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network
www.nermen.org/
- National Center for Marriage Research
<http://ncmr.bgsu.edu/>
- *Reviving Marriage in America: Strategies for Donors*
www.philanthropyroundtable.org/files/Marriage%20Guidebook.pdf

²¹ Ooms, Theodora, "Adapting Healthy Marriage Programs for Disadvantaged and Culturally Diverse Populations: What are the Issues?" Center for Law and Social Policy Brief No. 10, March 2007, http://www.clasp.org/publications/couplesmarriage_brief_10.pdf

II

Getting Started: Designing your Program

Designing a healthy marriage and relationship (HMR) program begins with a well thought-out plan articulating what you will do, for whom, and how it meets your community's HMR needs. In designing your HMR program, you have many critical decisions to make about service delivery strategy, community partnerships, curriculum, and other program components. A thorough review of HMR program research, available curricula, methods, and approaches to HMR programming will help you make informed decisions.

A. Program Planning

Launching an HMR program can be as daunting as it is exciting. The best place to start is with thoughtful planning, *before* you secure funding.

Begin by identifying your target population, assessing their needs for HMR services, and the strengths and assets in your community that you can build upon in serving your target populations. You are then in a better position to develop your program and devise a service delivery strategy that meets these needs and capitalizes on existing services, partnerships, and other assets in your community.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Define Your Purpose** – Whom do you want to help? What do you want to accomplish? How will individuals, couples, or the community as a whole benefit? You need to have a clear vision of what you hope to accomplish with your program and be able to convey this to potential funders, partners, and your target population.
- ✓ **Develop a Program Logic Model** (*see box*) – Increasingly, program funders request that applicants submit a logic model with their applications. A logic model is a pictorial representation of your program, showing program goals (the destination) and how your proposed activities (the routes you take) will help you achieve these goals. Because a picture is worth 1,000 words, a logic model helps you convey to funders and potential partners what your HMR program does and helps keep you on track as you implement your program.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A LOGIC MODEL

- Societal goals, the ultimate reason you are intervening.
- Program goals, what do you hope to achieve with your particular program.
- Assumptions regarding the nature of the problem and why the program should work (program theory).
- Inputs, or resources, required to operate the program.
- Interventions and activities, what the program is and does.
- Outputs produced by program activities, including participation.
- Immediate outcomes reflecting what participants learned in the program, their reactions to the program, and any immediate behavior change.
- Subsequent outcomes reflecting sustained learning, new or sustained behavior change, and spillover to other relationships.
- Context in which the program operates.

- ✓ **Identify Community Needs Before Applying for Funds** – Research the populations you wish to serve. How many are there in your community? How many can you realistically expect to serve in a year? What are their marriage and relationship needs? Do they have other more pressing needs that may have to be met before or while engaging in your HMR program?
- ✓ **Identify Community Assets** – What resources are currently available? What service delivery methods are working? What are the service gaps? Identify successful programs and community partnerships and build on them.
- ✓ **Participants May Have Multiple Needs** – It may be difficult for your target population to participate in your HMR program if other basic needs, such as food, shelter, physical safety, and employment, are not addressed.
- ✓ **Domestic Violence** – Domestic violence occurs in all types of families and in all communities. To help ensure that your response is thoughtful and appropriate, consider reaching out to domestic violence experts in your community. You and your service delivery partners will need procedures to identify and address domestic violence should you suspect it, or if participants disclose domestic violence at intake or during program participation. If you provide HMR services indirectly through partners, you should develop and adhere to a common protocol.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County is a Supporting Healthy Marriage site in Berks County, PA comprising the Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County, the Reading Berks Conference of Churches in Reading; Family Answers in Bethlehem; and Family Service Partners in Harrisburg*-provides HMR services to low-income married couples as part of the federally-funded Supporting Healthy Marriage demonstration project. Early in the program design phase, these agencies met with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the domestic violence programs serving the targeted communities to begin exploring how best to address domestic violence issues. Over the next 1 1/2 years, they met frequently to identify cross-training needs, collaboratively develop a domestic violence protocol, review its implementation, and modify the protocol and training as necessary once they had “on the ground” experience. Federal grant funds were used to compensate the domestic violence partners for their expertise and assistance.

*Family Service Partners only participated in the pilot phase of this project.

What You Can Try:

► Conduct a needs assessment

- *The Alliance for North Texas Healthy Effective Marriages (ANTHEM)*, an OFA grantee that works in the Dallas metropolitan area, used focus groups and surveys to help determine the needs of the different targeted areas. This allowed for the grantee to clearly define service delivery goals and processes accordingly.
- *The Oklahoma Department of Human Services*, a current OFA grantee that provides retreat services to special needs caregivers, partners with various State agencies and a local university to conduct focus groups with each anticipated target population. Information from these focus groups is used to tailor planning, recruitment, and service strategies to meet each group’s specific needs.
- *The Minnesota Office of Child Support Enforcement*, an Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) 1115 waiver grantee that contracts with the University of Minnesota to provide HMR to unmarried parents through mentor couples, had a stakeholder input process that put a lot of emphasis on creating a program that the stakeholders thought would be useful. The planning period was written into the waiver application.

► **Create a network of like-minded organizations**

- *The Greater Houston Healthy Marriage Coalition* was established in 2004. One of its founding members, Family Services of Greater Houston, acting as lead agency, became an OFA grantee in 2006. The coalition includes a variety of partners including faith-based organizations such as the local Catholic Archdiocese, community-based organizations, including the United Way, and various counseling centers and domestic violence organizations – all of which share the goal of strengthening families and healthy marriage. The coalition works together to educate the public about the benefits of healthy marriage; offer marriage education services; and ensure culturally competent services are delivered to diverse low-income communities.
- *The Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee serving low-income couples and individuals in Florida, was created in 2002, spearheaded by a pastor and a small group of organizations dedicated to addressing community issues such as increased juvenile delinquency, domestic violence, and substance abuse. Recognizing that most of these issues are related to the deterioration of families, the decision was made to focus efforts on strengthening families by increasing prepared marriages, reducing divorce rates, and increasing financial and emotional support of children.
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids program to low income parents in Grand Rapids, Michigan through a network of 10 partner community-based organizations (CBOs). City Vision, an intermediary organization that provides capacity-building services to community organizations, assisted in the recruitment of the 10 partner organizations. These partner organizations provide the relationship-strengthening services necessary to meet the needs of the target population. The partner organizations had long-standing relationships with people in the community because they had been providing other services including financial counseling, first-time home buyer programs, Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), and child care. City Vision and the 10 partners, along with the project director, determined the direction that the initiative would take, for example, in selecting and adapting curricula for delivery. Community partners continue to be key in delivering relevant services and enabling meaningful changes in participants' lives.

► **Pilot your program before you apply for funding**

- *The Clark County Department of Job and Family Services*, recipient of an OCSE 1115 Waiver, piloted the HMR model a year before they received the Federal child support waiver. They started off as a small program and developed flexibility within the program as they discovered the need. During the pilot period, they handpicked the staff based on skills and then shifted to hiring based on need.

► **Provide, or provide access to, additional services and family supports²²**

- *The Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, Support Enforcement Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee that contracts with Total Community Action, Inc. to provide HMR to low-income unmarried parents and individuals, acknowledges that the program participant's employment, housing, child care and education needs should be addressed, which are key factors for strengthening families. They use case managers to connect the individuals they serve to additional Total Community Action, Department and community resources to address these needs and more.
- *Family Road Building Strong Families Program*, a Building Strong Families (BSF) site in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, provides marriage education to unwed, expectant and new parents. The marriage education program is one of many services offered by the 108 agencies that contribute services to Family Road. By co-locating with these other social services, families in the BSF program have access to childbirth education, fatherhood services, parenting and child development classes, money management, job placement, and counseling, to name a few available services.

²² Currently funded State and Federal grantees should keep in mind that some of these practices may not be allowable activities under your particular grants. Check with your State or Federal project officer for any clarification.

- **Develop a domestic violence protocol that fits your program and the context in which it is offered.**
- Several agencies providing HMR services to immigrant families have found that disclosures of domestic violence are far more likely to occur after participants have been involved in the program for several weeks rather than at intake. *AVANCE Houston* separates couples at intake and administers a domestic violence protocol. In addition, *AVANCE Houston* has adjusted its approach to domestic violence screening and assessment to create multiple opportunities to disclose domestic violence and provide constant reassurances of confidentiality.
 - Multi-site HMR programs have often found it helpful to partner with the State domestic violence coalition rather than rely on multiple local domestic violence organizations that may not have the capacity to help. State coalitions in Alabama, Florida, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Texas have helped identify and assemble local domestic violence programs serving the HMR-targeted communities, coordinated cross-training, and assisted in protocol development.
 - Prior to implementing services to couples, the *Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) Together Project* in Central Florida worked directly with Harbor House, the local domestic violence prevention and intervention advocate, to create a detailed protocol and relationship assessment tool. When past or present domestic violence is disclosed by the victim or detected by staff using the Relationship Assessment Tool, and there are questions about whether an individual or couple should start or continue to participate in HMR activities, the *SHM Together Project* consults with Harbor House to help ensure that safety issues are fully explored and addressed appropriately. Harbor House provides annual training for *SHM Together Project* staff and volunteers.
 - *The Center for Urban Families (formally The Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development)* currently runs the Baltimore Building Strong Families (BBSF) program, which is one of seven sites participating in a national Federally funded healthy marriage study. The program adheres to an explicit domestic violence screening process that was developed in collaboration with the House of Ruth—the premier provider of domestic violence services in Baltimore city—and a number of other domestic violence advocacy groups in the area. A written survey is administered before program registration can occur. The survey is designed to identify and deem ineligible those couples who are actively involved in domestic violence. For any couple that fails the initial written survey, program providers speak with the partners separately and implement a “safety plan” for the individual who is potentially being abused, including the offer of emergency shelter, legal assistance, and intensive counseling for adults and children—all provided by the House of Ruth. House of Ruth staff also provides customized domestic violence training for all healthy marriage program staff working with families. The training includes understanding domestic violence (DV 101), assessing relationships for domestic violence, referring victims and perpetrators for services, creating safety plans and information on available community resources. Screening for domestic violence does not end at the intake session. In the BBSF program, which has a home visiting component, program staff checks in with couples to ask how they are handling any conflicts that might arise. Facilitators are also trained to look for signs of potential domestic violence during class sessions by observing body language and listening to comments of participants.

B. Develop Your Service Delivery Strategy

You may choose to offer services directly through staff and/or volunteers, or you may choose to provide services indirectly through partner organizations.

Providing HMR services indirectly through partners can take three forms:

1. An organization that partners by providing services on an in-kind basis.
2. An organization subcontracted to provide services for a fee.
3. An organization that, after participating in a curriculum training session (train-the-trainer), provides services independent from your organization.

The first two partnerships require oversight; the third is more of a capacity-building approach that does not include direct oversight.

Many organizations that provide direct HMR services partner with other organizations, cross-referring clients to offer relevant services. For example, an organization that provides first-time homebuyer classes may refer couples to your HMR program, while you may find some of the couples in your program are interested in a first-time homebuyer class.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Do You Have, or Will You Build, the Internal Capacity and Supports Necessary to Provide Services Directly?** – Do you have, or will you hire, staff to deliver and manage your HMR services? Will your organization embrace HMR programming as part of its mission? These are key elements when deciding how much to invest in providing HMR programming directly versus through partner organizations. (For promising practices on building the internal capacity necessary to provide HMR services directly, see Chapter III, Developing Your Program Infrastructure.)
- ✓ **Define What Partnership Means to Your Organization** – Partnerships can take many forms. Selecting the types of partnerships that are best for your organization should include assessment of potential partners: What is their capacity to provide services? In-kind or fee-based? How much oversight will they require?

EXAMPLES OF PARTNER ACTIVITIES

Private, nonprofit, government, education, and faith-based organizations may partner in many ways:

- Referring clients to your program.
- Receiving client referrals from your program.
- Collaborating on community awareness events to promote marriage and family resources throughout the community.
- Hosting workshops at their organization.
- Providing staff to be certified as marriage educators and serve as community volunteers.

- ✓ **Win/Win Partnerships Are Mutually Beneficial** – The best partnerships are the ones that benefit both organizations. Cross-referrals, shared marketing, and collaborative grant applications are several ways to leverage individual resources for the benefit of the community. Take time to learn about and articulate how your HMR program will benefit your partners’ clients.
- ✓ **Written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** – Use written MOUs for volunteer facilitators and partner organizations. An MOU does not need to be an elaborate document, but should define the relationship, clarify expectations, and provide a framework for accountability. It should be signed by both parties.
- ✓ **Adherence to Funder Requirements** – Be clear and forthcoming with staff and potential partners regarding funder expectations and requirements. Accepting Federal funds requires adherence to guidelines for faith-based organizations and specific reporting. Some programs will be willing to operate under those constraints while others will not. Knowing this early can prevent tremendous stress later.
- ✓ **Open and Ongoing Communication** – Whether you provide direct services or work through partners, relationships require time and patience to develop. Once developed, they require nurturing and attention. Regular meetings and open communication are essential to defining expectations, ensuring quality, and maintaining relationships. Be sure to keep everyone informed about program changes, challenges, and successes.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Consider a mixed strategy of service delivery through partners, but with centralized support.**
 - The *Oklahoma State Department of Human Services*, an OFA grantee and funder of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), a statewide marriage and relationship education program funded through annual allocations of State TANF dollars, has been strategic in designing a statewide service delivery system for marriage and relationship education. Community-based workshops are provided through a network of volunteer facilitators that have been trained by contracted curriculum developers. The community-based approach is complemented by the coordination of larger-scale events to heighten awareness of OMI services, management of partnerships and referrals, recruitment and training of new facilitators, provision of technical assistance to volunteer facilitators, and marketing of services.
 - The *Colorado Coalition for Adoptive Families (COCAF)*, a Children’s Bureau grantee, subcontracts with six county child welfare offices to provide marriage enrichment to couples recently adopting from the child welfare system. COCAF hired curriculum developers to train child welfare staff and key members of the adoption community such as adoption therapists, adoptive parents, and faith leaders, who then provide workshops to local families. In addition to managing the overall initiative, COCAF develops the marketing materials, using common “branding”, which each local county office then tailors to include the local schedule, location, and local contact information.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Auburn University has a dedicated staff person to serve as a liaison to its partner organizations throughout the state. This person works directly with the partner sites to ensure fidelity to curriculum and service delivery processes.

They provide ongoing training, observe workshop sessions, and use reflective processes to encourage program improvement.

Open communication through weekly calls, monthly phone conferences and annual face-to-face meetings keep partners on mission and provide a vehicle for partners to influence program improvements based on front-line experience.

▶ **Forge mutually beneficial partnerships.**

- *The East Los Angeles Community Union, TELACU*, an OFA grantee that works in the greater Los Angeles area, partners with faith- and community-based organizations to deliver services. Great effort was taken to choose partners who are based in the communities of service and who were already trusted by the community. Significant time and commitment is given to training and supporting the partners, reviewing data collection methods, HMR model, emphasizing reporting, and other details.
- *Child Inc.*, a Head Start provider in Austin, Texas, with State funding and an OFA grant, offers HMR services to low-income couples, singles, and teens. The program has trained its staff and community partners in multiple curricula to build capacity in the community for HMR services. By hiring full-time staff to oversee marriage-related services and having community partners trained to deliver services, Child Inc. is able to build a strong agency/community partnership that is strengthening the families of Austin and Central Texas, one family at a time.

▶ **Consider a protocol for communication with partners and subcontractors.**

- *Meier Clinics Foundation*, an OFA grantee, created a coalition of partners who provide HMR services to the Hispanic population. They contract much of its services to partners. Meier also provides services to better understand partners' experiences on the ground. They use manuals to communicate their goals and expectations, and they conduct a structured evaluation of partners by providing constant feedback.
- *The Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR)*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, and the Georgia Family Council (GFC) have a coalition of both community-based and faith-based partners that provide healthy marriage relationship education. DHR and GFC worked in collaboration with The Lewin Group to create a Management Information System to manage data from partner sites more effectively.
- The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families* partners with over 50 organizations in the community to provide supplemental services to families. They use a written MOU that outlines specific expectations, roles, and responsibilities of each partner.

▶ **Choose partners that are well established and have credibility in the community.**

- *The Alliance for North Texas Healthy Effective Marriages (ANTHEM)*, an OFA grantee that works in the Dallas metropolitan area, created the ANTHEM Family Safety Council; a partnership of domestic violence advocates and service providers to develop a domestic violence protocol and educate community partners on the issue of domestic violence. The partnership clarifies that ANTHEM's mission is about safe and healthy marriages. ANTHEM also created HIPES (Helping Individuals Participate in our Excellent Services) as a 1-2-3 step strategy to develop partnerships with organizations that have access to people in the community who would benefit from the HMR services.
- *The Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, Support Enforcement Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee that contracts with Total Community Action, Inc. to provide HMR to low-income, unmarried parents and individuals, partners with the government, a hospital, and other agencies that have a long established presence in the community.
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids program to low income parents. They recognized that faith-based community organizations often are trusted by low income communities, and the project established partnerships with such organizations to recruit and serve participants.
- *Healthy Families San Angelo*, a BSF site in San Angelo, Texas, had a strong reputation as a community provider when Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. and the Texas Office of the Attorney General partnered with them to deliver marriage education services to unwed, expectant, or new parents. Although the services were new, the program was well-respected and able to successfully reinvent themselves as a healthy marriage provider in their community.

- *Catholic Charities Inc. Diocese of Wichita* is an OFA grantee working with three other Catholic Charities organizations in Kansas to provide the *Marriage for Keeps* project to low-income married couples with children. Catholic Charities is historically known to serve these communities and, because many couples turn to faith-based organizations for marriage-related services, is a credible provider of marriage education. Although the organization did not have a history of delivering marriage-related services, its community credibility allowed it to successfully implement 12-month programs at four locations in the state.

▶ **Make your HMR program relevant to your partner’s goals.**

- *The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)* is an OFA grantee delivering healthy marriage education services statewide. HHSC partnered with four local Head Start agencies for service delivery. Head Start programs promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children by providing educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. Because of the benefit of healthy marriage to child development, these agencies agreed to partner and bring relationship strengthening programs to Head Start parents.
- *The Howard Phillips Center’s Healthy Families Orange Plus* which is funded by the *Ounce of Prevention Fund, Inc.*, a BSF grantee, serves unwed parents of newborns in Orlando, Florida. The *Healthy Families Orange Plus* program uses the Healthy Families America home visitation model, a program designed to prevent child abuse. Because of the importance of healthy couple relationships to their goals of strengthening families, promoting positive parent-child relationships, and optimizing the health and development of children, implementing marriage education services was a natural fit. *Healthy Families Orange Plus* builds on the home visit model (to work with couples and manage relationship stressors) and adds a group-based marriage education workshop component.

▶ **Partner with your local domestic violence program or state domestic violence coalition to provide training for HMR program staff and volunteers about domestic violence issues and to assist with other aspects of program design and implementation..**

- *The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition* has worked closely with the Missouri Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence to provide on-going training, assist with protocol development, and help develop domestic violence resource materials for participants.
- The multi-site *Pennsylvania Supporting Healthy Marriage Project* has worked closely with three community-based domestic violence agencies and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence as the program developed its domestic violence response.

▶ **Partner to capitalize on existing structure.**

- *The Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, partnered with the University of Kentucky, which in turn partnered with numerous organizations throughout the various sectors of the community. This partnership model capitalizes on the trust people have in organizations with which they are affiliated, increasing access to targeted populations as well as their chances of taking advantage of available resources. Such a model also leverages the technical and human resources of a variety of community agencies, helping to avoid over-burdening certain individuals or organizations.
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships program to low income parents. Services are provided by partners that have long-standing relationships with people in the community in 10 locations across Grand Rapids. Participants can attend a class in their own neighborhood run by a trusted organization.

C. Curriculum Selection and Adaptation

Unlike marriage therapy, HMR programming is skills-based and typically delivered in a group setting. Many curricula are available, varying in approach, topics, activities, emphasis, and methods. Communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving skills are considered foundational and are included in most curricula, along with an emphasis on commitment. It is important to select a curriculum that is suitable to, and resonates with, your target audience and fits your organization's proposed approach.

You may choose one curriculum that offers a broad appeal and can be used with varying audiences, or you may choose different curricula for different target audiences.

Curricula can often be adapted for diverse populations by incorporating supplemental material and varying the methods and activities. Keep in mind, however, that adhering to a curriculum once it is implemented affects program consistency, so selection and adaptation should be carried out carefully.

A variety of new HMR curricula have been developed and existing curricula revised and customized to meet the needs of populations previously unexposed to such education.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Select Existing Curriculum or Create Your Own?** – Curriculum development is a time-consuming endeavor that requires substantive and technical expertise. However, many curricula for a variety of audiences already exist. Review existing curricula to see if they meet your needs. The Marriage Education Assessment Guide, created by the Administration for Children and Families, can provide guidance for reviewing existing curricula. If you decide to create your own curriculum, it should be grounded in research on what makes a healthy relationship and marriage.
- ✓ **Consider Curricula That Were Developed with Your Target Population in Mind** – Increasing numbers of curricula are being designed to meet the needs of various populations, such as low-income couples, Hispanic populations, African Americans, and youth. Various resources are available on curricula adaptations. The NHMRC held a seminar on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC on *Healthy Marriage in Culturally and Racially Diverse Populations* where panelists discussed lessons learned on serving African American, Hispanic and Native American populations in healthy marriage programs.²³
- ✓ **Curriculum Should Be Research-based** – Curricula should contain relationship subject matter that research has shown to be effective in building or supporting healthy marriages and relationships. This may prove challenging for programs serving culturally diverse populations for whom there have been fewer, though a growing number of, research-based curricula.

²³ Transcript/audio-cast of the September 2008 seminar are available at www.healthymarriageinfo.org.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services

(formerly known as East Capitol Center for Change) serves seriously dating, engaged and married couples in primarily African American communities in Washington, D.C. In selecting a curriculum, LifeSTARTS was interested in finding one that would resonate with their low-income participants in a culturally competent manner. They decided to teach Basic Training for Couples, a curriculum developed by two African American marriage experts.

The curriculum provides real-life lessons and examples that the participant couples identify with. For example, many of LifeSTARTS's families are blended families, and the curriculum deals with learning how to become a family and parent your partner's children. Additionally, one of the developers is local to the DC area and was able to teach the first session of marriage education with a co-facilitator. This allowed the program to better ensure fidelity to the curriculum and allowed the developer to "field test" the curriculum.

✓ **Recognize the Literacy Level of Your Target Population** – If your target audience has low literacy, consider a curriculum that does not require much reading or one that is written at an elementary school reading level.

✓ **Interactive Curricula Increase Content Retention** – Participants are more likely to enjoy engaging in discussion and hands-on activities. Not only will they be more likely to return to the program, but research shows they will retain more of what they learn.

✓ **Relationship Inventories** – These can help couples identify areas in which they are similar or differ in their attitudes and beliefs. Inventories can serve as the foundation of your program, using coaches to meet with the couple individually to discuss the results, or they can supplement another curriculum.

✓ **Will You Offer Faith-based Content?** – Some curricula are faith-based and others are not; some couples want a faith-based HMR program and others do not. Decide whether you will provide faith-based HMR programming, secular programming, or both. Remember that Federal funds cannot be used to “engage in inherently religious activities, such as worship, religious instruction, or proselytization.”²⁴

✓ **Meeting Funder Requirements** – Funder requirements often vary. For example, if a program is funded with Federal dollars, the curriculum must meet guidelines related to faith-based material. Always check with your funder before investing in curricula or training.

✓ **Cultural Relevance Is Essential** – When serving culturally diverse populations, materials should be available in their preferred languages and reflect concepts that resonate with and are culturally relevant for those populations. Visual materials should reflect the target audiences; the visual affirmation of ethnic and mixed-ethnicity couples in healthy relationships and families encourages the principles addressed by HMR programs.

²⁴ Executive Order: Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-Based and Community Organizations. The White House. 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021212-6.html>.

What You Can Try:

▶ Adapt or supplement curriculum to reflect target audience's values and needs.

- *Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program (IVROP)* is an OFA grantee that works primarily with a Hispanic population of various backgrounds and generations with a high rate of unemployment. While they presented their material in Spanish, they realized they needed to adapt the curriculum to incorporate cultural values. The message of strengthening families as a consequence of couple relationship resonated with the family-centered values of the community.
- *Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families*, funded by the Children's Bureau, provides marriage enrichment to couples adopting from county child protective services. They worked with Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) developers to supplement the PREP curriculum with information on family dynamics in adoptive families and how keeping their marriage strong will benefit their adoptive child.
- *Adoption Resources of Wisconsin*, a Children's Bureau grantee, also provides marriage enrichment to couples adopting from county child protective services. They worked with the Gottman Institute to adapt their curriculum for adoptive families. They also provide a supplementary "forgiveness" curriculum to help parents work with their young children about feelings of loss and abandonment.
- *Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*, an ACF grantee operating in a rural reservation setting, adapted their locally developed Native American-based substance abuse prevention and family wellness curriculum, to emphasize marriage/relationship-specific concepts. They found that this approach better reflected Native American cultural values and story-based methods of teaching than adapting a didactic, research-based curriculum.
- *Creciendo Unidos/Growing Together*, an OFA grantee serving Hispanic married couples in the Phoenix area, ensures that each piece of the curriculum ties to one of five values they consider important to Hispanic families: unity, respect, honesty, hope, and identity. They use cultural dynamics to convey key concepts by incorporating storytelling, poems, role play and interactions, reflections, humor, music and traditional idioms into their classes. The curriculum is focused on the couple and recognizes the importance of family in Hispanic culture.

▶ Develop your own culturally relevant curriculum.

- *AVANCE Houston*, a nonprofit organization funded both by OFA and the Children's Bureau to deliver HMR services to Hispanic couples in Texas, developed its own curriculum, *Parejas Unidas...para una mejor vida* or *Couples United...for a better life*. AVANCE determined that available curricula did not meet the cultural and linguistic needs of its target population.
- The *National Multiple Sclerosis Society*, based in Denver, Colorado, is an OFA grantee working with couples nationwide who are coping with MS. To best reach their clientele, they developed *Relationship Matters: A Program for Couples Living with MS*. This curriculum draws upon other research-based curricula. The *Relationship Matters* program delivery method includes in-person workshops but is also delivered on-line and through teleclasses. This enables the program to meet the needs of those who cannot easily travel to a marriage education workshop.

CURRICULUM RESOURCES

For information on HMR curricula and educational materials, visit these Web sites:

Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center
www.healthymarriageinfo.org

National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network
www.nermen.org

The Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education
www.smartmarriages.org

▶ **Address faith-based needs.**

- *WAIT Training*, a non-profit organization with an OFA grant to develop statewide marriage education services, has partnered with local community and faith-based organizations to deliver services through the Colorado Healthy Marriage Project. WAIT Training trains, monitors, and supports community and faith leaders in secular curricula; however their faith partners have the option to teach their own faith-centered lessons at a different time or location (in accordance with federal faith-based guidelines). WAIT Training has a “teach out of the box” healthy relationship and marriage preparation curriculum entitled, *It’s All About M.E.* (Marriage Education) for use in high school and college.
- Many grantees partner with churches to provide services indirectly. Federal funding supports the secular HMR programming and the church offers faith-based lessons and discussions at a different time and/or place. This approach adheres to guidelines for faith-based organizations because it allows couples to choose whether to participate in the faith-based session.

▶ **Simplify the language of an existing curriculum.**

- *The Louisiana Department of Social Services* designed its own curriculum, “Exploring Relationships and Marriage with Fragile Families” to reflect Louisiana’s unique culture and population. The curriculum has three parts: a program for mothers, a program for fathers, and a program for couples. The curriculum was paid for with TANF funding and is being used by many healthy marriage organizations across the country.
- *The Clark County Department of Job and Family Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver recipient, recognized the varying literacy levels of their target population and simplified the curriculum language to increase accessibility to the skills taught. Facilitators also read curriculum materials out loud for individuals with poor reading skills.

▶ **Use examples that resonate with the target audience.**

- *Power of Two* is an OFA grantee that targets young expectant couples nationwide. They created on-line interactive activities/games that demonstrate skills and teach life lessons relevant to couples expecting a baby. The activities are designed to teach a specific marriage skill and give viewers a sense of the benefits of marriage education. See examples at www.poweroftwo.org.
- *Family Service and the Division for Families and Children of the Attorney General of Texas*, an OCSE grantee, serves a young, low-income population. They realized that using examples that were unlikely to be achieved by this group could weaken the impact of the curriculum. For example, during a session on budgeting, they changed the example provided by the curriculum from saving for a new set of bedroom furniture to budgeting for smaller-scale items such as diapers, children’s clothing, and cribs.
- *The Howard Phillips Center’s Healthy Families Orange Plus* program in Orlando, Florida, funded by the *Ounce of Prevention Fund, Inc.*, uses talk show-like videos to cover hard-to-discuss topics such as infidelity and dealing with children brought into the relationship by their partners. The program delivers marriage education to low-resource couples using the *Loving Couples, Loving Children* curriculum developed by the Gottman Institute. The videos spark a facilitated discussion with the couples group and provide an entertaining way to teach communication strategies.
- *COPES, Inc.*, an OFA grantee in Jefferson County, Kentucky, serves married couples in which one partner has recently been released from prison. The program uses examples in teaching marriage skills specific to the needs of their target population. For example, married couples are encouraged to practice validating each others’ feelings related to managing household responsibilities, including parenting children, when one partner returns home after being incarcerated.
- *Children’s Aid Society*, an OFA grantee, serves low-income couples in rural Pennsylvania. It is aware of the financial hardships and stress that couples face related to unpaid bills and high gas costs. While using examples with the couples, the program makes sure the activities are either free or inexpensive. Staff members also understand that the couples have low budgets for recreational activities, so they highlight community-based activities, such as bonfires, community fairs, and going for walks.

D. Other Program Components

In addition to offering an HMR curriculum, many programs include program components addressing marriage/relationship needs, program supports to encourage participation, and broader family needs.

Low-income populations, in particular, may have multiple needs that cannot be addressed by your HMR program alone. There are a variety of ways to identify these additional needs. (See Section A, Program Planning, in this chapter and Section D in Chapter III.)

Additional components should support or complement the core mission, not distract from it. Trying to do too many unrelated activities can make it difficult for your organization to define its identity and purpose in the community.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Program Supports Remove Barriers to Participation** – Child care, transportation, and meals are a few suggested program supports that remove barriers to attendance. If you cannot provide child care or transportation directly, consider stipends to offset the expense. Snacks or meals are important if your sessions are at traditional meal times.
- ✓ **Additional Programming Options** – You will find many participants are interested in additional opportunities to practice their skills, learn new skills, and stay in touch with other participants. Consider offering additional programming options, such as booster sessions, or developing partnerships with organizations that offer complementary services. Financial literacy classes that focus on budgeting and money management are popular options for many individuals and couples.
- ✓ **Referrals and Case Management** – Offering referrals to other community services provides an opportunity to continue relationships with participants while meeting individual needs beyond the scope of your HMR program.
- ✓ **Partnering with Other Community Organizations** – In addition to referring your HMR clients to other community services, consider partnering with community organizations to provide joint programming and co-sponsor events.

FUN FAMILY INCENTIVES

Contact local family-friendly businesses and community organizations to sponsor a family outing. Here are a few ideas:

- Zoo passes or annual memberships
- Football/baseball tickets or use of a stadium box for a party
- Museum or symphony tickets
- A family picnic basket with grocery gift certificate
- Movie passes or tickets to attend a play at a local theater

- ✓ **Recreational Activities** – Hosting recreational activities in local parks and community centers provides an opportunity for individuals, couples, and families to enjoy time together. It is also a great opportunity for introducing HMR programming to your target population.
- ✓ **Find Ways to Celebrate Program Completion and Acknowledge Healthy Marriages and Relationships** – Public support for healthy marriages/relationships fosters a positive marriage culture. Consider program activities that show public support for healthy marriages/relationships. Celebrating program completion can provide a “booster” to program participants and create informal support networks.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

AVANCE Houston, an OFA grantee, has been working with families most in need, addressing poverty, education and various social issues through parenting and early childhood education. After working with parents independently, marriage education was a logical next step to creating a seamless integration of services for the Hispanic community.

Eligible couples are selected to participate in a 19-week class that consists of one intake and pretest session with a fun group activity, 16 three hour lessons, one posttest session with a closing activity, and a graduation.

AVANCE- Houston understands the importance of family in the Hispanic Community. In addition to serving couples, services are provided to children from birth to age 18. Early childhood education, adolescent and teen services are provided using similar topics as are presented to the parents. This integration of education provides a comprehensive approach to healthy relationships for the entire family.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Provide onsite child care or reimburse for child care.**
 - Many grantees provide child care onsite. Others have encountered challenges with liability and instead offer reimbursement for child care expenses.
- ▶ **Provide a service to children of participants.**
 - *ANTHEM* offers sessions to teens on the same lessons that their parents are learning in the HMR course. This allows the entire family to learn about communication and relationship skills. *ANTHEM* also offers child care as an incentive for parents who want to attend a workshop.
 - *Family Service Association of San Antonio and the Division for Families and Children of the Attorney General of Texas* is a Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) site offering the Healthy Opportunities in Marriage Education (HOME) program to lower-income married parents. Their program workshop is co-located with other community organizations allowing them to have on-site child care provided by a certified child care provider with separate, but convenient space, in the same building. The program provides infants through middle-school aged children with age-appropriate activities. The entire family shares a meal together before they separate for their workshops.
- ▶ **Offer booster sessions or a sequence of activities.**
 - *The Active Relationships Center*, an OFA grantee, serves Hispanic rural communities in Cameron County, Texas. The Hispanic Active Relationship Program (H.A.R.P.) offers a seminar series including communication, money, romance, and wise choices for couples and singles. The cohesion between the class members allows for community support and offering a series of courses helps maintain these relationships for an extended period of time.

- *YWCA of San Antonio*, an OFA grantee serving low-income Hispanic pre-marital adults and youth, hosts participant reunions at a local park. All participants bring food (potluck style) and connect with each other to visit and reinforce skills learned.
- *Children’s Home Society of Washington*, a Children’s Bureau grantee, serves couples who have adopted from the public child welfare system. Intensive services are offered through the Gottman Institute Loving Couples Loving Children curriculum (LCLC, adoptive couples version). The program also offers booster sessions by inviting speakers from the Gottman Institute to present on a particular topic four times per year. Couples who have participated in a previous weekend training course are notified about these booster sessions via email or in-person at other Children’s Home Society programs. A recent booster session featured a speaker who discussed the importance of going on dates with your partner. The speaker distributed goodie bags with candles and chocolates, and the Children’s Home Society provided child care while the couples participated in the session.
- The *Becoming Parents Program* for expectant couples and parents of newborns in Seattle, Washington is an SHM site that offers prenatal marriage education followed by postnatal “booster” sessions. These boosters reinforce core curriculum skills and normalize new-parent experiences, while helping couples learn about what to expect at critical stages of infant development.
- The *Weld County Department of Social Services*, an OFA grantee, offers 8-12 hours of marriage education to a variety of couples and individuals in Northern Colorado. Following the group workshops, married low-income couples can access couple mentor services, allowing them to receive intensive one-on-one support to reinforce their skill building and strengthen their relationship.

▶ **Provide referrals and/or case management services.**

- *The Montefiore Medical Center’s University Behavioral Associates*, a Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) grantee in the Bronx, New York serves low-income married couples with children. The program is both an OFA grantee and a SHM site. Like other SHM sites, the program model includes family support services through case managers. These services include regular meetings with couples in addition to their marriage education workshops to address stressors on the couple relationship. Referrals are made related to health, mental health, housing, employment, parenting, education, financial management, or other needed services provided in-house or by community partners.

▶ **Offer recreational activities.**

- *DePelchin Children’s Center*, a Children’s Bureau grantee in Houston, Texas provides marriage enrichment to couples who have adopted from the public child welfare system. In addition to a weekend PREP workshop, they offer “Fun Days” throughout the year for families to unwind, play games, enjoy a meal, and get to know other adoptive families. This serves as an effective recruitment tool for the program. The program also offers office- and home-based counseling services to their adoptive families at the time of adoptive placement.

▶ **Hold public events celebrating healthy marriages and relationships.**

- *The Better Family, Inc.*, a non-profit funded by OFA partners with private and community-based organizations, celebrates marriages in the African American community through Black Marriage Day. They acknowledge healthy marriages through optional vow renewals and communal activities.
- *The Active Relationships Center* acknowledged the community’s rich Hispanic cultural history of supporting families and of producing plays that tell community stories. The program produced a play that is culturally appropriate—in both Spanish and English—that creates an experience for the audience of being in a marriage education class.

- The *Relationship Research Foundation*, an OFA grantee, has their participants invite friends and family to their last session. Participants offer testimonials after the conclusion of the module. Each family member or friend that participates gets a raffle ticket for an “ultimate date” basket. Recruiting tables are located at the back of the room if eligible friends and family want to sign up for the next marriage education class.

▶ **Host graduation ceremonies.**

- The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families* hosts a graduation ceremony each month to celebrate program completion and to reinforce the learning experience. The ceremonies are strategically scheduled to allow the collection of follow-up data.
- Other programs host mini cake-and-punch ceremonies for each class or collective ceremonies with a light meal upon program completion. Some also present certificates and host a guest speaker.

▶ **Incorporate culturally appropriate activities.**

- The *Healthy Marriage Healthy Families Coalition* of Tarrant County, Texas is funded through the state to deliver marriage education to a wide variety of individuals and couples in the Fort Worth area. The Coalition’s Hispanic Committee hosted a “Lunch and Learn,” attended by more than thirty five Hispanic community leaders, which introduced attendees to the marriage education programs offered by the Coalition through curriculum demonstrations. The presentations were given in English and Spanish. There is also an active African American subcommittee that hosted a successful Black Marriage Day in 2008. Outreach to difficult to reach populations has been successful and includes relationship classes for homeless individuals, substance abusers, and families involved with Child Protective Services.
- The *Pennsylvania Supporting Healthy Marriage Project*, operating in multiple sites in Pennsylvania, provides marriage education workshops and wrap around services to low-income married parents and is part of the SHM demonstration. With a large immigrant population, the program celebrates cultural diversity by hosting a “share your culture night.” This is a potluck event designed to support the development of positive peer networks among married couples. Couples bring a dish and share a story of their heritage.

E. Delivery Format: Duration, Frequency, Intensity of Classes

Curriculum contact hours vary, which should be considered during curriculum selection. While a 20-week curriculum may work with some populations, others find it difficult to complete such a long program, especially families who have multiple demands on their time.

The length of the curriculum will to some degree determine class duration, but there are other factors to consider. It may not be realistic to expect participants to attend a class that takes 2 hours per session for five nights in a row, especially if they have children and work full-time.

There may also be trade-offs required regarding program outcomes. A 20-session program is likely to have more long-term impact, but serve fewer participants, whereas a weekend retreat format may net more participants but produce only short-term outcomes.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Minimum Curriculum Contact Hours** – The most recently funded Federal HMR programs were required to provide at least 8 curriculum contact hours. If you are planning an all-day program, allow additional time for a meal break. Organizing the training into modules may be an effective strategy to enhance the learning experience without increasing the duration of the program.
- ✓ **Frequency (How Often You Should Meet)** – Fewer sessions may yield higher participation and completion rates, but they may provide less opportunity to practice skills between sessions. Individuals and couples who practice skills more often may be more likely to master and use the skills when the program ends.
- ✓ **Intensity (How Long Each Session Should Be)** – Participants may more easily fit a short class into their schedule, but you need to allow enough time at each session for delivering the content, facilitating a conversation, and sharing participant homework and insights. You also want to foster peer support by providing time for participants to gather and socialize informally at the beginning and end of each class. Rarely can this be accomplished in less than 2 hours.
- ✓ **Curriculum Fidelity Is Important** – Ideally, once you select a curriculum, you should try to provide the entire curriculum as recommended by the developers. Straying too much from the recommended length, content, or format may compromise fidelity. If you need to adapt or shorten the curriculum, be careful that concepts do not build from omitted sections or that missing material makes the curriculum seem disjointed. You should also make sure sections dealing with core relationship topics are not omitted. Work with the curriculum developer when considering any modifications.

ADULT LEARNER THEORY

Adult learners have different learning styles than children.

Adults need to:

- Buy in to the process
- See the relevance of the material
- Have direct, concrete examples of how to apply the learning in their lives
- Have opportunities to apply the learning

Adult learners function best in a student-centered learning environment instead of in an instructor-centered environment.

Small group activities are preferred as they reduce fear of judgment and encourage sharing.

Adult learners also need freedom to stay on a topic a little longer and excuse themselves as needed.

- ✓ **The More Convenient You Make It, the More Likely People Will Come** – Hosting classes in convenient locations at convenient times will increase the likelihood of attendance. Provide program supports as needed to remove barriers and increase retention.
- ✓ **Involve the Community in Deciding Workshop Schedules** – Host focus groups or survey families from your target population to find out what scheduling works best for them. You may find that you will want to offer the program using different strategies depending on targeted populations

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Find ways to continue contact with couples and individuals served.**
 - *Active Relationships Center* is an OFA grantee that serves a largely Hispanic community in rural and urban areas of Cameron County, Texas. The program offers a series of classes for marriage education skills. These courses are offered on a regular basis and give participants an opportunity to continue to expand their skill sets while reinforcing those skills learned in past classes.
 - Some grantees provide their curriculum in one 8-hour session but find it useful to offer support groups to allow couples to interact and to practice and reinforce the skills learned during the class.
 - Some grantees offer booster activities to provide additional lessons that may not have been covered during the regular course. This also allows opportunities for post-testing.
- ▶ **Consider ways to make your program flexible to address population needs.**
 - *Family Connections* is an OCSE grantee that is a partnership between Alabama Children’s Trust Fund and Auburn University’s Department of Human Development and Family Studies, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, and the Alabama Office of Child Support Enforcement. The program schedules class times immediately following the initial recruitment of participants. This allows the program to schedule classes around the unique schedules of the recently recruited class.
 - *The Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Support Enforcement*, funded by Children’s Bureau, offers its marriage and responsible fatherhood program through Family Resource Centers (FRCs), which are trusted entities in their communities. Locating the program in neighborhood FRCs not only provides easy access for the target population, but the FRCs are equipped to identify and address other needs that participants may have.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Children’s Home Society of Washington, a Children’s Bureau grantee providing marriage strengthening to couples adopting from the Pierce County child welfare system, provides both “intensive” and “less intensive” services in their Strengthening Adoptive Families through Education (SAFE) program.

All families calling the toll-free phone line receive non-intensive services, which includes access to parenting and marriage videos, 2-hour HMR workshops, 2-hour parent education workshops, and information/referral and a lending library.

Families determined (through a formal intake assessment) to need more intensive services can utilize phone case management and school advocacy and follow up, as well as attend the Gottman LCLC 12 module class designed for strengthening adoptive families. Couples are also encouraged to attend a two-hour HMR workshop, and a two-hour parent education workshop.

F. CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Invest in careful planning up front. Select your partners, curriculum, and service delivery strategy based on community needs and assets.
- Choose a curriculum that contains core marriage content—communication, conflict resolution, commitment—and will resonate with your target population.
- Identify and adapt existing curriculum that take into account the unique cultural and family needs of your target population. If you find it necessary to develop a new curriculum, ensure that it meets these same needs and that program content is based in solid research on what it takes to form and sustain a healthy relationship and marriage.
- Choose a program format that recognizes the needs and constraints of your target population.
- Supplement the curriculum with other services and program supports based on target population needs.
- Work with local domestic violence advocates to develop a protocol that outlines how domestic violence issues are safely, routinely, and consistently identified and appropriately addressed.

G. FOR MORE INFORMATION

Adapting Healthy Marriage Programs for Disadvantaged and Culturally Diverse Populations: What Are the Issues?

www.clasp.org/publications/couplesmarriage_brief_10.pdf

Effectively Launching Your Healthy Marriage Program: National Healthy Marriage Resource Center Webinar, May 16, 2007

www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/Tip_Sheets_for_Marriage.pdf

A Comprehensive Framework for Marriage Education, 2002–2003

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/compreh_frmwk/reports/comp_frmwk/comp_framework.pdf

Marriage Education Curriculum Assessment Guide

www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/ACF_Curriculum_Assessment_Guide.pdf

Building Strong Families: Guidelines for Developing Programs

www.buildingstrongfamilies.info/publications/bsfguidelines.pdf

Implementing Healthy Marriage Programs for Unmarried Couples with Children: Early Lessons From the Building Strong Families Project

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/build_fam/reports/implementing_healthy/implementing_healthy.pdf

G. FOR MORE INFORMATION

Summary of Issues to Be Considered in Curriculum Adaptations

www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/Summary_of_Issues_Curriculum.pdf

Tips for Marriage Education Curriculum Adaptation When Working with Hispanic Couples

www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/Tip_Sheets_for_Marriage.pdf

Guidance to Faith-based and Community Organizations on Partnering with the Federal

Government www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/guidance/index.html

Staying within the Boundaries: Understanding the Federal Faith Based Guidelines: NHMRC Webinar, June 20, 2007

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/June07FaithBased.pdf

Staying within the Boundaries: Understanding the Federal Faith Based Guidelines: Frequently Asked Questions from the June 20, 2007 NHMRC Webinar

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/june2007webinarfaq.pdf

Menard, Anne. Promoting Safety: A Resource Packet for Marriage and Relationship Educators and Program Administrators. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/marriage/Blob/62302.pdf?rpp=-10&upp=0&m=1&w=NATIVE%28%27TITLE+ph+is+%27%27Promoting+Safety%3A+A+Resource+Packet+for+Marriage+and+Relationship+Educators+and+Program+Administrators%27%27%29&r=1&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29>

Developing and Implementing Effective Domestic Violence Protocols: NHMRC Conference Call,

March 13, 2007. <http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/about/webinar.cfm>.

Developing and Implementing Domestic Violence Protocols: Where to Start?

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/protocolprocesschecklist.pdf

Blueprint to Guide Development of Domestic Violence Protocols

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/blueprintdvprotocolrev.pdf

Who's out There? Resources for the Field: NHMRC Webinar, February 27, 2008

Presentation Slides: www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/febwebpresentation.pdf

List of Organizations: www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/usefullinkshmr.pdf

On program startup: www.healthymarriageinfo.org/prog_grant/mprogstartup.cfm

On HMR curricula:

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/prog_grant/progmgmt.cfm#curricula

On domestic violence considerations:

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/policymakers/domviolence.cfm

III

Developing Your Program Infrastructure

The focus of this guide is healthy marriage and relationship (HMR) programs, but a solid organizational infrastructure is the foundation of any health or human service program. Adequate and appropriate program staffing; hiring, training, and overseeing marriage educators and evaluators; solid financial procedures; and a quality performance management system are critical for ensuring a well-run program.

A. Program Staffing

Develop your staffing plan based on the organizational objectives defined in your strategic plan. Hiring and training the right staff, facilitators, and evaluators for your program are essential. Creating a team spirit among your staff will empower them to take ownership for the success of your program.

Staff turnover is costly in terms of lost production, operational learning curve and relationship building in the community. With a little extra time and planning at the beginning, you can minimize turnover and strengthen your organization's reputation.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Hire People Who Fit the Position, Not the Other Way Around** - When you design a position to fit a person, you limit the position's potential to the skills and experience of the individual. Instead, define the skills and experience needed and hire the right person for that job.
- ✓ **Know the Laws Related to Hiring** - Become familiar with the Federal Labor Standards Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and other laws related to hiring and managing staff. Violating these laws can cost your organization money and credibility.
- ✓ **Panel Interviews Offer Differing Perspectives** - A panel might include board representation, leadership, and at least one peer staff person. This process can gain staff buy-in on new hires and provides an opportunity to discuss attitudes related to marriage.

SAMPLE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES FOR VARIOUS STAFF POSITIONS

Project Director:

- Project management experience
- Budget experience
- Good written and verbal communication skills
- Ability to develop and maintain community relationships
- Problem solving skills

Administrative Assistant:

- Proficient in computer software (e.g., Word, Excel, and Access)
- Good written and verbal communication skills
- Ability to multitask
- Team player
- Welcoming demeanor when greeting participants

Marriage Educator or Facilitator:

- Ability to coordinate workshops
- Facilitation experience and welcoming demeanor
- Knowledge of HMR program techniques
- Ability to relate to couples from all walks of life
- Ability to work evenings and weekends

Mentor/Coach:

- Knowledge of HMR program techniques
- Ability to build rapport with couples/individuals
- Capable of conveying understanding, not passing judgment

- ✓ **Offer a Competitive Compensation Package** – Most people are not drawn to this field to become rich. However, if you do not offer a competitive compensation package, you could find yourself filling the same positions repeatedly. Research the current compensation standards in your community.
- ✓ **Soft Skills Are Important** – A resume may tell you about education and work experience, but face-to-face interviews and checking references will give you more insight regarding soft skills. Never underestimate the importance of a positive attitude and the ability to build good relationships.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Hire staff based on necessary skill sets.**
 - *The Becoming Parents Program*, a program for expectant couples in Seattle, Washington uses a staff predominantly of nurses to deliver marriage education and provide unique family support/case management. The nurses, as trusted professionals, can address pregnancy and health-related issues of expectant couples while credibly discussing the importance of the couple for the baby's well-being.
 - *Bethany Christian Services, Inc.*, a Children's Bureau grantee serving adoptive couples in Atlanta, Georgia offers their program as a retreat. They hired event planning staff to plan the retreat, who tailored the themes to fit the unique interests of the individuals and couples served. Hiring staff with the skill sets specific to managing all of the event details and logistics ensures that the retreat experience will be dynamic and memorable.
- ▶ **Define the education backgrounds and experience desired before hiring facilitators.**
 - *Granato Counseling Services, Inc.* an OFA grantee serving married couples in Northern Virginia, found that facilitators with at least a bachelor's degree or postgraduate work in psychology, social work, counseling, and marriage therapy typically have the skills needed to understand and convey the curriculum.
 - *The Osborne Association*, a Children's Bureau grantee providing HMR services to prisoners, hired an individual with the appropriate education and experience working with formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. Knowledge, experience and credibility are particularly important when working with certain targeted populations.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

First Things First, Inc., an OFA grantee, is a non-profit organization that works to reduce the high divorce rates in Chattanooga, Tennessee, recognizes the importance of first impressions and the message conveyed to community leaders and potential funders of the program. They choose dynamic and charismatic facilitators who can articulate the organization's mission and the benefits of marriage education to the community. In addition to the standard expectations of relevant education and experience, First Things First believes that personality and energy are important soft skills. They recruit facilitators based on these soft skills, acknowledging that most applicants who have these skills can master the instructional content.

▶ **Capitalize on volunteers and former program participants.**

- *The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition*, an OFA grantee with previous funding from OCSE and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), provides HMR services to a variety of target populations through 16 collaborating partners. They use VISTA volunteers to work on their newsletters and other activities. This allows members of the community to be invested in the program while producing the newsletters at a very low cost. Based on experience, volunteers may be helpful in a variety of positions including office assistant, community presenter or workshop coordinator.
- *AVANCE Houston*, an OFA and Children’s Bureau grantee serving Hispanic married couples, uses former program graduates as classroom support and mentors for current participants. Graduate couples are given the title of “Compadres” – a Spanish term used to denote a relationship based on friendship or family. This is a mutually beneficial practice as many graduates want to continue with classes after graduation and facilitators need the extra support in the classroom. The Compadres share their experiences with new couples to help the class feel at ease and to develop informal support relationships.

▶ **Reflect on how to bring diversity to your staff.**

- *Active Relationships Center*, an OFA grantee that serves a largely Hispanic community both in rural and urban areas in Cameron County, Texas acknowledges that men are often more responsive to male leaders. The program employs male staff to facilitate recruitment and to expand the project’s outreach to target populations by having male facilitators offer presentations in rural and urban settings.
- Some grantees who work with low-income African American communities advertise job postings through faith-based organizations within the targeted community to increase the pool of candidates that reflects the community.

▶ **Dedicate staff to focus on partners.**

- *ANTHEM*, a Dallas-based OFA grantee and coalition of 80 or more community- and faith-based partners, has Outreach and Recruitment specialists who focus on developing relationships with community partners. To determine that the ANTHEM services are meeting the needs of the partner agency and their participants, ANTHEM conducts site visits and phone check-ins to be aware of issues that partners might be facing.
- *Auburn University*, an OFA grantee with nine primary community partner organizations across Alabama, created a staff position that provides technical assistance to partners and monitors their work. The individual serves as a liaison, is responsible for monthly site visits and weekly calls, and raises any concerns to the central office as necessary.

▶ **Consider personality assessments.**

- The *Oklahoma Marriage Initiative* uses personality assessments to quickly identify candidates most aligned with the attributes sought for a position. These types of assessments are widely available, inexpensive, and can be easily self-administered.

B. Hiring Facilitators

Facilitators are the frontline for your organization when it comes to client interaction. Participants who have a positive experience will almost always attribute that experience to the facilitator's ability to connect with them and make them feel welcome and valued.

Keeping in mind that facilitators are the face of your organization, the selection process must be taken seriously even if facilitators are unpaid community volunteers. Requiring potential facilitators to complete an application and participate in a panel interview provides an opportunity to assess written and verbal communication skills. It also communicates the message of professionalism, which you will expect from those selected

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Always Use a Formal Selection Process** – Resist the temptation to accept everyone who is recommended to you or offers to become a facilitator for your organization. A formal selection process communicates that your organization values this position.
- ✓ **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** – A written MOU defines expectations, responsibilities, and accountability. It also provides a reference point should questions arise. It should be detailed, but user-friendly.
- ✓ **Define the Combination of Training, Education, and Experience You Require in Facilitators** – A balance of facilitation experience, work with the target population, and good communication skills is important. Computer skills may also be required if facilitators will be working with reports and data.
- ✓ **Compassion, Empathy, and Respect Are Essential** – Some skills can be taught, other gifts are innate. Be wary of facilitators interested in “fixing” families or those who overuse autobiographical responses. HMR services are designed to educate and empower.
- ✓ **Communicate the Mission Before You Select** – A person who does not support your organization's value of marriage as it relates to positive child outcomes and community impact may not be a good candidate for marriage educator.

FACILITATOR RECRUITING IDEAS

Consider the following position specific recruiting ideas:

Couples Marriage Educators or Mentors - Couples who have completed your program may be good candidates. Also consider church bulletin boards or Couples Classes. Contact local faith-leaders for recommendations.

Teen Relationship Facilitators - Recruit through local colleges via dorm or student cafeteria bulletin boards; Fraternities or Sororities. College students often need community service hours or a part-time job. Contact social service degree program chairs and ask if they have any student recommendations.

Marriage/Relationship Educators - Neighborhood Associations, Churches, Civic Groups and other organizations have newsletters that are distributed to their network of contacts. If your program targets a specific community, recruit from that community when possible.

- ✓ **Facilitators do not have to represent the populations targeted, but they should be able to relate to them** – Socioeconomic and ethnically diverse populations will connect better with facilitators who can relate to their culture or circumstances.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Public Strategies, Inc. is an OFA grantee and recipient of TANF funding to serve expectant and new couples in Oklahoma City through the Family Expectations Program. It invests a significant amount of time in hiring its workshop facilitators. Due to the intensity of the program, workshop facilitators need to engage couples for 30 hours in the Becoming Parents Program Curriculum. For that reason, the program has learned the importance of seeing a potential workshop facilitator in action.

To ensure facilitators are engaging, they are asked to present in front of a panel of peers. They can present on any topic, but regardless of experience and qualifications, if the presenters can't hold the staff's attention for 10 minutes, they will not be hired.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Consider facilitators' passion for HMR program work.**
 - The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee serving low-income couples and individuals in Florida, has found success with facilitators who lack formal facilitation experience, but have a passion for empowering families and might have served in a social service position. However, the program emphasizes that facilitators are providing education and not conducting group therapy or counseling.
 - Some grantees agree that individuals who have already completed the program make great facilitators, particularly married couples who feel the program has helped their marriage. They tend to relate well to participants and can share their experiences with applying the concepts in their own relationships. Good communication skills are needed to maintain program quality.
- ▶ **Recruit facilitators who understand and are responsive to the needs of the target population.**
 - *First Things First, Inc.*, an OFA-funded grantee and, non-profit that works to reduce the high divorce rates in Chattanooga, Tennessee, recruits its facilitators based on the audience they are trying to reach. The facilitators understand the socioeconomic experiences of the target population and seek to communicate the curriculum in an appropriate manner. Program leaders find that having the ability to relate to the participants is as important as a facilitator's ability to clearly advocate for the institution of marriage.
 - *The California Healthy Marriages Coalition*, an OFA grantee that has a statewide saturation model, trains facilitators by first asking candidates to go through the course as participants and then take the Facilitator workshop. Facilitators are asked to offer phone skills coaching to couples, helping them integrate the skills into their relationship while deepening the facilitator's own use of the skills. Marriage educators are recruited from the community they intend to serve.

- *The Oklahoma Department of Human Services*, an OFA grantee that provides retreat services to special needs caregivers, schedules facilitators for retreats based on their experience with the given target population. For example, when a retreat is scheduled for grandparents raising grandchildren, the Department will ensure that they have experience providing services to grandparents or are themselves raising grandchildren. The bond created with participants because of this design is integral to the overall intervention.

▶ **Create a formal relationship with facilitators.**

- *The Weld County Department of Social Services*, an OFA grantee, offers 8-12 hours of marriage education to a variety of couples and individuals in Northern Colorado. The County contracted out for workshop facilitators. To ensure formal, professional relationships with these contractors, they must first present their educational and licensing credentials, agree to submit to a criminal background check, and deliver up to four marriage education workshops. The County also has a procedure manual that describes how contractors obtain curriculum materials, and are trained and monitored.
- Many grantees use an MOU that outlines details about the roles of the facilitators and the nature of the relationship between the facilitator and the organization.

C. Facilitator Training and Oversight

Once you have selected the right facilitators for your program, training is essential before they begin and as an ongoing effort to maintain quality control.

Depending on the curriculum selected, facilitators may be required to participate in a curriculum certification. This training is specific to the curriculum, but does not provide everything needed to become a successful facilitator.

Taking time to communicate overall goals and gain buy-in for the mission, along with training to enhance facilitation skills, can increase program quality and build positive relationships with your facilitators.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Some Curricula Require Formal Training and Certification of Facilitators** – Some curriculum developers require that facilitators and/or mentors attend a training workshop to become qualified to teach their program and/or administer their relationship inventory. These trainings, and accompanying program manuals, can cost hundreds of dollars.
- ✓ **Develop a Certification Process Even if You Use a Teach-out-of-the-Box Curriculum** – The process should include, at minimum, a review of the curriculum, facilitator techniques, and adult learner theory, along with an opportunity to demonstrate facilitation skills.
- ✓ **Encourage Facilitators to Attend a Workshop as a Participant** – If the certification process does not require it, make it part of your process where appropriate. It deepens understanding of the material and provides insight from a participant perspective.
- ✓ **Training in a Curriculum Does Not Equal Training in How to Conduct a Workshop** – Facilitators may benefit from training in how to conduct and manage workshops. Such training would address finding the right balance between covering necessary topics and allowing the conversation to flow, learning names, and managing participants who demand attention and other negative situations.
- ✓ **Periodic Audits of Facilitator Workshops** – Sitting in on facilitators' workshops allows you to experience what the participants experience and gives you an opportunity to provide feedback on areas for improvement.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Relevant Stories and Examples - A conflict resolution example related to a family vacation at Disney World may not resonate with low-income populations or those incarcerated. Develop a selection of stories and examples that resonate with differing populations for facilitators to use.

Personality Profiles - This quick activity can help couples identify differences and similarities with their partner, and help the facilitator reinforce curriculum messages. Personality profiles can be easily administered as a supplement to other program elements during lunch, on a break, or as a scheduled component of the workshop.

Win/Win Agreement - Instead of posting a list of workshop ground rules, ask facilitators to create a win/win agreement with the class. The group decides what behaviors (turning off cell phones, returning from breaks on time) create a positive environment for participants and facilitators.

Ice Breakers - Provide facilitators a selection of ice breaker activities that work with various populations. A pairing game based on U.S. celebrities may not resonate with a Vietnamese community, for example.

List of Community Resources - Facilitators will often be approached regarding other community resources. Having a list of organizations and contact information will allow them to respond.

- ✓ **Define Organizational Mission and Clarify Roles** – Facilitators need to know your organization’s mission and goals and how their role supports them. They also need to know their decision-making limits regarding participants who miss class, paperwork, and other administrative tasks.
- ✓ **Marriage Education Is Not Marriage Therapy** – Define the difference and educate facilitators on the boundaries. Facilitators may be tempted to provide counseling or advice when dealing with a distressed couple; role play techniques to use in those situations.
- ✓ **Hold a New Facilitator Orientation** – Provide an overview of organizational policies and processes; discuss guidelines for faith-based organizations, introduce domestic violence protocols, and explain reporting requirements.
- ✓ **Schedule Ongoing Training and Refresher Opportunities** – Gather facilitators regularly for meetings and training refreshers to keep them sharp and keep the program quality consistent. At monthly or quarterly gatherings, discuss best practices and have facilitators share challenges and brainstorm to find solutions.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Active Relationships Center (ARC) believes that investing in facilitators is key to delivering high quality workshops. In the H.A.R.P Project, for which they received an OFA demonstration grant, workshops are facilitated by trained community leaders. In addition to the training and certification they receive to teach the curriculum, facilitators are taught the "soft skills" needed to successfully engage participants. Most facilitators "team-teach," which provides another layer of support for newly-certified facilitators.

Facilitator training is ongoing - all facilitators regularly attend "huddle groups" or conference calls to exchange best practices and raise any challenges experienced. They are also required to attend Domestic Violence Protocol trainings at least once a year, presented by a local domestic violence agency. ARC also offers additional professional development opportunities to facilitators.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Train facilitators on your HMR model and domestic violence protocol.**
 - *The Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative*, an OFA grantee providing services across the state, developed and conducted a three-day training session for local staff members selected to facilitate classes. Four staff members from each local provider attended the joint training session. Topics addressed at the training included an overview of the program model, eligibility requirements, the curriculum, and evaluation requirements and procedures. Training also included a half-day session on domestic violence. Auburn University staff involved in the program’s evaluation, along with the curriculum developers, facilitated the training.
 - *The Illinois Department of Health Care and Family Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee serving married and unmarried parents, is a government agency that sub-contracts with the Catholic Charities, a faith- and community-based organization, to provide HMR in Women, Infants and Children (WIC) centers. They offered their staff forty hours of domestic violence training with an emphasis on screening out couples based on domestic violence concerns. This training was in addition to curriculum training.

▶ **Offer regular training for facilitators and partners.**

- *The East Los Angeles Community Union*, (TELACU), an OFA grantee that works in the greater Los Angeles area and offers HMR primarily indirectly through community partners, serves a sprawling urban area and uses partners to offer HMR. They invest in their partners by training them how to monitor and write reports as well as teaching them HMR.
- *The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*, a statewide marriage and relationship education program funded through State TANF dollars, offers regular and specialized training opportunities to a network of 2,600 facilitators. Topics for these trainings have included recruitment and retention, getting started, honing facilitation skills, using games and activities to enhance marriage education concepts, red flags for domestic abuse, updates on field research and more. This approach has yielded more communication among productive facilitators and provided the necessary resources for previously nonproductive facilitators to begin delivering services
- Some grantees offer regular training to educate staff and facilitators on the newest findings in the field. The training allows for open communication and sharing of available resources and knowledge in the HMR field, as well as opportunities to strengthen relationships between staff and facilitators.

▶ **Monitor facilitators' work to ensure quality.**

- The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families* employs a multi-pronged approach to ensure consistency of instructional messages and program quality. A staff person is dedicated to providing facilitator oversight through calls, workshop observation, and quarterly training sessions. A co-facilitation model provides immediate feedback among facilitators. Additionally, participants complete surveys related to the workshop experience. These surveys are reviewed and both accolades and concerns are relayed to facilitators.
- *The Ounce of Prevention Fund*, a BSF site, funds *The Howard Phillips Center's Healthy Families Orange Plus* to serve couples in Orlando, Florida. They have learned that passion for serving families is important, but passion alone does not always yield a successful facilitator. In the facilitator recruitment process, they ask numerous questions about applicants' motivations and expectations for the educator role. Once hired, the Gottman Institute dedicates time to assess facilitation styles, strengths and growth areas in order to pair facilitators to create a complementary facilitation team.
- Some grantees offer facilitator coaching sessions. They videotape the facilitator presenting a workshop. A staff person then watches the video with the facilitator and discusses what worked well and what may need to be improved. This approach is especially helpful for facilitators to recognize their gestures or body language that may be distracting. It also provides opportunity for discussing techniques to use when participants stay on a topic too long or stray to unrelated topics.

D. Hiring and Managing Evaluators

HMR programs across the country follow various approaches, and future success and funding for these efforts are directly connected to evaluation.

Program evaluation is conducted for two basic reasons: to assess program implementation and inform improvements to the program and to determine the effectiveness of the program after it has had time to demonstrate results.

Hiring competent and qualified evaluators with a background in human services data collection and analysis can position your program for sustainability.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Hire a Local Evaluator Invested in the Community** - Local evaluators with ties to your community will already be familiar with the social service landscape and can tailor an evaluation to illustrate how you are filling community gaps.
- ✓ **Ask to Review Previous Work** - Evaluator styles differ. Ask to see assessment tools and data analysis reports. Reviewing previous work will give you a better idea of what to expect.
- ✓ **Hire as a Contractor or Staff Member?** - Hiring an evaluator as staff offers advantages, but can be costly. Using clerical staff to input data and contracting with an evaluator for instrument design and data analysis may be more cost-effective. An advantage of contracting with a third party independent evaluator is that it may add credibility to your evaluation.
- ✓ **If Contracting, Use a Request for Proposal (RFP) Process to Select an Evaluator** - An RFP process requires defining the scope of the evaluation project, proposed deliverables, and costs. The process can be helpful if you are unfamiliar with evaluations as it puts the burden on evaluator applicants to provide the information instead of you having to know the right questions to ask.

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

(Formative) Implementation Evaluation - Investigates implementation of a program. Was the program implemented according to the plan? If not, were the modifications justified? Also assesses barriers encountered and how they were overcome.

(Summative) Outcome and Impact Evaluation - Examines if a program met its goals. Is it effective and replicable? Were there any significant unintended outcomes?

Quantitative Data - Data represented by numbers, such as survey responses or number of participants within specific demographic categories.

Qualitative Data - Represented by written or verbal information collected through participant interviews or anecdotal success stories.

Likert Scale - A point system assigning values to varying survey responses. A five-point system might assign "1" to unsatisfied and "5" to very satisfied.

Mean Score - Score based on averaging a collection of scores using the Likert scale.

- ✓ **User-friendly Data Management System** – Work with the evaluator to develop a system that is sophisticated enough to manage the data, but also easy to use. Ensure you have ready access to basic data regarding number of participants served and retention rates.
- ✓ **Develop a Regular Feedback and Reporting Process** – Require frequent status reports and include evaluators in staff meetings as appropriate. Open communication between staff and evaluators can ensure they fulfill their needs and understand how their functions relate.
- ✓ **Evaluate Your Processes** – As your evaluator begins to analyze outcome data, you may determine a need to change data collection instruments or processes.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

A Wisconsin Children's Bureau grantee, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW), has developed a good working relationship with its evaluator. The program found the evaluator, a professor at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, through a recommendation from one of its curricula developers.

ARW's evaluator plays a very active role in the program. He participates in program meetings regularly and worked with program staff to create an evaluation that would answer questions of interest both from a programmatic and academic publication perspective.

The program created an evaluation focused on program implementation and program improvement and refinement. In addition to providing information on program implementation and immediate post-program outcomes, the staff surveys participants after each class on customer service and satisfaction. Such mini-surveys allow the program to make corrections and changes in the middle of a class series, rather than having to wait until a cohort graduates to learn how they felt about the experience. At the same time, ARW's evaluator also conducts pre and post surveys on outcomes such as marital satisfaction, and reduction in anger, anxiety, and depression among children.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Contracting with university evaluators.**
 - *The Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids program to low-income parents. They contracted with Bowling Green State University to conduct a qualitative evaluation of their program. The evaluator interviewed a sample of program participants at program completion and again six months later. Many of the participants interviewed said that they not only continued to use the skills they learned, but had also shared the lessons with family and friends in an effort to improve the lives of those around them.
 - *Family Connections*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, partnered with Auburn University to conduct both a qualitative assessment and quantitative evaluation. The qualitative interviews identified how participants felt the program had benefited them personally and as a family, while the quantitative data focused on individual and relationship functioning, awareness and behaviors.
- ▶ **Establish web-based user-friendly data management systems.**
 - *The Georgia Department of Human Resources*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, and the Georgia Family Council worked in collaboration with The Lewin Group to create a web-based system to allow data to be collected at sites throughout the state while allowing for real-time access to data. The program found that this management information system was easier for the evaluator and the staff at the local service sites to use.

- The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families* uses a web-based data management system that also allows participants to register online.

▶ **Evaluate tools and processes in addition to programs.**

- *AVANCE Houston*, an OFA and Children's Bureau grantee serving Hispanic married couples, utilized a well-known relationship scale that was challenging for the educational level of the couples. An educationally appropriate survey based on the AVANCE HHM (Healthy Hispanic Marriage) curriculum was developed that better resonated with the population and more accurately measured what was being taught by the curriculum.
- *Texas State University – San Marcos*, an OFA grantee, held a focus group of teen parents after the post-test was administered to see if the questions resonated culturally or translated well. They found that many concepts were not understood and subsequently adjusted their questionnaires and drastically reduced the length.

E. Financial/Budgetary

Developing a realistic budget for your program requires knowing the answers to four questions:

1. *What are our program objectives?* Identify key program components corresponding to each program objective. How many participants do we plan to serve? How many workshops are needed to serve them? Identify the associated costs for curriculum, participant materials, and workshop supplies. Think about the costs associated with a social marketing campaign, if your program includes one.
2. *What is our service delivery strategy?* Expenses for direct service delivery differ from expenses for indirect service delivery. For direct service delivery, you will have to provide the workshop space, associated utilities, and equipment (laptops, projectors). For indirect service delivery, these costs are typically covered by the host organization. Discuss with service partners who will pay for refreshments and child care, if provided, and who will pay to train facilitators.
3. *What staff will we need to accomplish it?* Develop a staffing plan based on your service delivery strategy. If you provide direct services, more staff or volunteers may be needed to conduct workshops. If providing services indirectly through partners, you may want a staff person to provide oversight. Either way, you need to determine what equipment, furniture, and supplies staff members need to do their job.
4. *How will we recruit participants?* Will you use low- or no-cost recruitment methods, or will you hire personnel to spearhead recruitment? Some recruitment costs may be higher the more participants you are trying to reach.

The answers to these four questions can be the framework for your budget. Once the budget is developed, the challenge is to manage it effectively and efficiently while accomplishing the goals of your program. Developing proper fiscal controls and hiring competent, ethical staff to manage the finances are paramount.

Funders may vary in their expectations of financial management and reporting requirements, but it is your responsibility to know the expectations and comply. Failure to comply can result in loss of funding.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Think Compensation Package, Not Just Salary** – Staff costs also can include benefits such as insurance and vacation time or perks such as cell phones and mileage and travel expenses.
- ✓ **Media Budgets Vary by Market** – Know what a media buy will cost in your area and budget realistically. Look for free and reduced media opportunities. Use flyers for recruitment, but do not skimp on brochures. A professionally developed brochure creates a positive image for your organization.

- ✓ **Partnerships Can Be Costly** - Use an MOU to clarify partner expenses. Define fees or stipends and determine who will pay for meals, child care, recruitment materials, and related expenses.
- ✓ **Develop Internal Safeguards** - Written policies and standard operating procedures help ensure proper handling of financial matters. This includes a written check and balance system for handling purchases or incentive distributions.
- ✓ **Remember to Budget for Indirect Costs** - When developing your budget and managing your finances, do not forget to include the unavoidable costs of doing business that are not related to service delivery.
- ✓ **Establish Routine Financial Analysis and Reporting System** - Regardless of funder requirements, develop a system of analyzing financial data on a monthly or quarterly basis to stay current and identify any trends that may need to be addressed. Provide a copy of the report to the program's board for review.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **To raise in-kind contributions, focus on community support for your program.**
 - *Healthy Families Nampa Coalition*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, struggled to raise money during the first year and a half of the initiative. Efforts to secure the match requirement through a private foundation grant were unsuccessful. Fundraising was a major concern and led to the creation of a comprehensive resource development plan. In order to sustain the healthy marriage initiative in Idaho after the expiration of the OCSE1115 waiver funds, the Healthy Families Nampa Coalition established itself as a 501c3 non-profit, broadening the target audience and impact area of the organization's program services to all of Idaho. Cultivating a larger constituency is believed to have resulted in expanded funding options and program sustainability.
 - Some grantees keep track of volunteer hours as in-kind contributions. Using the dollar values assigned for non-agriculture volunteers, grantees can reflect these contributions as in-kind match when applying for grant dollars through certain funders.

TIME IS MONEY

Use Timesheets - The form does not need to be elaborate, but should show time worked each day and should be signed by both the employee and the supervisor. This is especially important when staff works a percentage of time on a project and is paid from multiple funding sources or grants.

Federal Labor Standards Act - Know how this act applies to your staff and overtime requirements.

Written Policy - Establish a written policy related to employee time-keeping. The policy should address how time off is requested and charged, including for vacations and illness.

Written policies only serve as a safeguard if they are current and all staff are required to adhere. Write policies that your organization can live with and for which you can require compliance.

Deviations from policy can create an impression of favoritism, which is not only bad for morale, but also can lead to legal challenges.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families conducts a quarterly analysis of its budget and monitoring expenses, making program adjustments as needed. Realignment of available funds occurs annually to meet program requirements. Additional financial safeguards include:

- A check and balance purchasing process. Requests for purchases are approved by the executive administrator and purchases are made by the administrative aide. The requests are then processed by the accounting department.
- Written policies related to gift card distribution include requirements for participant signatures and staff documentation for accountability.
- Sign-in/sign-out logs for equipment, such as projectors and laptops, used by facilitators.

▶ Do not depend on just one source of funding to support your program.

- *First Things First, Inc.*, an OFA funded grantee and non-profit that works to reduce the high divorce rates in Chattanooga, Tennessee did not originally have a Federal grant to support their work. Their goal was to build community support and ownership. The program developed corporate sponsorships, and held fundraisers in the form of banquets, motorcycle rides, family fun runs and a Flower Fest. These events helped to establish community buy-in to the program. Individual donors were also targeted through hosting home events with small groups.
- Many programs do not allow fundraising activities or staff time to be used for fundraising. Some organizations use board members to chair volunteer resource development committees. Others require a financial commitment from board members as a seed to pay for fundraising activities coordinated by community volunteers.

▶ Maintain checks and balances.

- *The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*, a statewide marriage and relationship education program funded through annual allocations of State TANF dollars, has established monthly reviews of financial reports and planned expenditures to ensure that resources are dedicated to areas that most benefit program objectives. Additionally, staff regularly evaluates the financial impact of managing tasks or the trade-offs involved in producing work in-house versus using contractors.
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids program to low income parents. Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services serves as the fiduciary for the collaborative project. The indirect service delivery strategy relies on up to ten local partners to provide marriage education to the community. Contractual agreements with these partners define fiscal responsibilities and deliverables of the pay-for-performance arrangement. The web-based data management system allows the Project Coordinator to view workshop documentation in real-time in addition to receiving invoices and required reports from partners. Periodic site audits are also conducted to ensure proper financial record keeping.

F. Performance Monitoring Systems

When developing performance monitoring systems, you should not only consider the program, but also the processes that support the program. Here is an example of how the two are related:

The goal is to have participants complete the program. Participant recruitment is a process. An indicator of how well this process is working would be the number of participants who attend the first session of a workshop. A program indicator might be the percentage of the participants who complete all the sessions.

In that example, if no one is recruited, the goal will not be reached. If the program does not support retention, you cannot achieve the goal, regardless of the number of participants recruited.

Open communication and regular meetings allow staff to understand how support processes are connected and why they must work in sync. Staff must take ownership for how their functions support the organizational mission. This is only possible with ongoing staff training on objectives and processes, and how each connects to specific responsibilities.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Logic Model or Process Map?** - A logic model or process map can help staff visualize the procedures within your program and identify check points that can serve as indicators.
- ✓ **Written Standard Operating Procedures** - Having written procedures ensures consistency and makes it easier to gauge if processes are flawed or external factors are affecting outcomes.
- ✓ **Fidelity to Curriculum** - Changing activities and dropping sections in mid-course not only skews evaluation data, but also can alter the workshop experience and affect retention. Maintaining fidelity allows better monitoring of participant response to the curriculum.
- ✓ **Clearly Define Roles and Authority** - Written job descriptions and partner agreements should clarify duties. The supervisory reporting structure and decision-making authority should also be defined.

MEETING TIPS

Respect people's time - set a timeframe for the meeting then start and stop on time.

Use an agenda - Providing it to participants in advance allows them to properly prepare.

Allow for roundtable time - Allow each person 3 minutes to talk about what is happening in his or her area.

Make a written summary - Keeping minutes is great, but at minimum, provide a written summary of staff meetings, listing any action items, deadlines, and responsibilities.

Address concerns - Praise your staff members in front of their peers; save concerns for one-on-one discussions.

- ✓ **Performance Evaluations and Individual Goals** – Work with staff to define two or three individual goals that support the organization’s overall objectives. Develop a performance evaluation process that includes regularly scheduled feedback sessions and an annual evaluation of overall performance.
- ✓ **Use Regular Meetings to Maintain Consistency** – Invite board members to attend staff meetings and encourage staff to attend board meetings. Increased communication and transparency create trust that benefits everyone.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The Michigan Department of Human Services, an OCSE grantee serving low-income participants in urban Grand Rapids, Michigan, uses a web-based data management system as a performance monitoring tool. The system allows the project coordinator to monitor partners' efforts at a glance. The user-friendly system collects demographic, recruitment source, workshop attendance, pre-/post-test results, and marriage attitudes survey data. Monthly partner meetings provide an opportunity to discuss program challenges, data trends, and targeted recruitment strategies as needed. Real-time data and open communication with partners inform program decisions and keep stakeholders connected.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Standardization of processes leads to consistency.**
 - The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families* developed standard operating procedures for staff functions such as processing referrals, scheduling workshops at host sites, data collection, gift card distribution, and graduation events. These written policies ensure consistency of processes and cross-training of staff. Processes are reviewed annually or as needed to make improvements. One process revision occurred when the program faced the challenge of collecting follow-up survey data. The graduation date was adjusted to the month following completion and survey responses increased by 30 percent.
 - The *Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids program to low-income parents. They used the state analysis of child support payments and found that there was an increase in child support payments among program participants.
- ▶ **Track the recruitment sources that are attracting the most participants.**
 - The *Minnesota Office of Child Support Enforcement*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee that contracts with the University of Minnesota to provide HMR to unmarried parents through mentor couples, found that identifying eligible participants through the Department of Human Services database of persons who had signed a Recognition of Parenthood form was their most effective approach. Attempting to recruit through health care settings was the least effective approach. This information led to the program readjusting their recruiting strategy.
 - Many grantees track how participants come to their programs. Radio ads may be a better recruitment strategy in some communities, while billboards work best in others. Asking participants questions at intake or registration on how they learned about the program allows programs to spend their marketing budgets and time on higher yield recruitment opportunities.

▶ **Provide oversight for curriculum fidelity.**

- *ANTHEM*, a Dallas-based OFA grantee, has dedicated staff persons who oversee facilitators and focus on curriculum fidelity. They observe workshops and provide feedback. They also provide incentives to facilitators for quality work. Those who excel are awarded the title “Lead Facilitator”, and are given additional responsibilities and receive an increase in their stipend amount.
- *Public Strategies, Inc.*, an OFA grantee and recipient of State TANF funds to serve expectant and new parents in Oklahoma through the Family Expectations program, which utilizes the Becoming Parents Program Curriculum, designates staff members to oversee ongoing training with facilitators to maintain facilitation standards and curriculum fidelity. Staff audits workshop sessions and provides ongoing feedback to facilitators. In addition, the program has created tools for use during workshop sessions to ensure adequate coverage of all curriculum concepts and activities.

G. CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Based on program objectives and service delivery strategies, identify the education and experience needed by facilitators and evaluators.
- Whether you use paid staff or volunteers, select qualified people who fit well with your team. Establish roles, set clear expectations, and provide adequate training.
- Develop oversight strategies that ensure staff and facilitator buy-in and support program quality.
- Create a realistic budget that supports your staffing plan marketing strategy, workshop staging, incentives, and recruitment. Ensure accountability and protect credibility with a system of financial checks and balances.
- Monitoring begins with training of staff, facilitators, and evaluators on adhering to established processes and presenting the curriculum as it was designed. A logic model is a valuable visual tool for stakeholders to understand the connections among processes and responsibilities.
- Collecting data on processes and participants can inform your program as well as document differences in participant circumstances, attitudes, or knowledge from registration through program completion.
- Be consistent in your program delivery, but flexible enough to change as you identify opportunities for improvement.

H. FOR MORE INFORMATION

Referral Partner Organizations: How to Approach and Engage Them
<http://tinyurl.com/29epbg>

Effectively Launching Your Healthy Marriage Program: NHMRC Webinar, May, 2007
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/May2007.pdf

Effectively Launching Your Healthy Marriage Program: Frequently Asked Questions from the May 2007 NHMRC Webinar
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/may2007webinarfaqs.pdf

Menard, Anne. Promoting Safety: A Resource Packet for Marriage and Relationship Educators and Program Administrators. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.
<http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/marriage/Blob/62302.pdf?rpp=-10&upp=0&m=1&w=NATIVE%28%27TITLE+ph+is+%27%27Promoting+Safety%3A+A+Resource+Packet+for+Marriage+and+Relationship+Educators+and+Program+Administrators%27%27%27%29&r=1&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29>

H. FOR MORE INFORMATION

Guidance to Faith-Based and Community Organizations on Partnering with the Federal Government www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbci/guidance/index.html

Staying within the Boundaries: Understanding the Federal Faith Based Guidelines: NHMRC Webinar, June 20, 2007
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/June07FaithBased.pdf

Staying within the Boundaries: Understanding the Federal Faith Based Guidelines: Frequently Asked Questions from the June 20, 2007 NHMRC Webinar
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/june2007webinarfaq.pdf

Recruitment and Marketing to Couples and Individuals: National Healthy Marriage Technical Assistance Webinar, April 18, 2007
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/april2007recruitmentandmarketing.wmv

Implementing Programs to Strengthen Unwed Parents' Relationships: Lessons from Family Connections in Alabama: Final Report
www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/imppro.pdf

Characteristics of Successful Marriage Educators
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/successfulme.pdf

Tips Sheet for Program Leaders
www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/pdf/HHMI-001-01-inserts-012407.pdf

On program management and operations
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/prog_grant/progmgmt.cfm

On training HMR educators
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/prog_grant/becoming.cfm

On domestic violence considerations
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/policymakers/domviolence.cfm

IV

Implementing Your Program

Once your program has been designed and the infrastructure is in place, you are ready to develop marketing and recruitment strategies. Assuming they are effective, the focus will shift to enrolling participants and delivering services. The type of service delivery strategies your organization selects will inform your implementation.

A. Marketing and Recruitment

The terms marketing and recruitment are often used interchangeably. Although there is some overlap, they have distinct purposes. Marketing promotes your organization, its mission, and the services you provide to the community; recruitment is specific to getting participants in the program. Understanding the difference will help you manage your resources more effectively while accomplishing the goals of your program.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Invest in Professional Looking Marketing Materials** – You never get a second chance to make a first impression. A professional-looking brochure and Web site define your image. Both should project the same message about your organization’s mission, purpose, and services. Be sure to include contact information but not staff names to save money on reprinting due to staff changes.
- ✓ **Recruitment Flyers Can Be Created In-house** – While important, flyers are date-specific and not likely to be saved, so do not spend too much money on them. Recruitment flyers should include program specifics such as date, time, location, and how to register. Also include any program supports such as meals or child care if available. Contact information should include phone number, address, and e-mail address so families can contact you in whatever way they feel comfortable.
- ✓ **Work Through Partners to Market Your Program** – Presentations to community leaders and established organizations should be your first marketing strategy. Educating these leaders on your program can lead to other opportunities. Established organizations can introduce you to others in their networks. Make sure you have brochures or handouts that capture the key points of your program.

TARGETED MARKETING

When targeting specific groups, be sensitive to nuances of their culture and community. For example:

Hispanic and Asian communities are traditionally close-knit and may respond better to one-on-one recruitment through a trusted community leader.

Beauty salons and barber shops may be good marketing locations in African American communities.

Include a phone number on marketing materials for people without Internet access.

Bus wraps are a good marketing tool for low-income communities.

- ✓ **Take Advantage of Free Media** – Contact local television and radio stations about opportunities to be interviewed on news programs or community talk shows. You will have more time to share information about your program than if you purchase 30-second commercials; plus, such coverage is free.
- ✓ **Consider the Message and the Messenger** – Recruiting can be challenging, especially for HMR programs seeking to make inroads in low-income and culturally diverse communities. Recruitment requires the right message delivered by the right messenger. Think about the messages that might resonate with your target population, and consider who would be trusted messengers. Try hosting focus groups in targeted communities to ask them how they are most likely to learn of programs and what messages might spark their participation.
- ✓ **Recruiting Through Trusted Community-based Organizations** – Think about organizations, such as places of worship and social service organizations, that are highly respected in your community, and invite them to help you recruit for your program. Highlight how the work you do supports the work they do. Ask them to host a workshop for their congregation/clients and encourage them to promote the program through their bulletin, Web site, or newsletter. Make sure faith-based organizations are aware of the guidelines that apply to their activities to prevent misunderstandings later.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, a Children's Bureau grantee in Northern Wisconsin, provides HMR services to Native American parents and youth who that are referred to the Indian Child Welfare Program, as well as Native American premarital and unmarried couples. Red Cliff staff has an extensive outreach effort, led by its project coordinator, a charismatic and well-known elder in the community. He builds relationships with and obtains referrals from service partners, including Indian Child Welfare, TANF, WIC, school health clinics, and Head Start centers.

The program also seeks self-referrals and referrals from family members, so the project coordinator advertises the program by word of mouth as he interacts with this tight-knit community on a daily basis. To help with this direct marketing, the grantee has a community access radio station that is used to advertise services. In addition, the program also encourages community members to come in and develop their own radio programming, which also gets potential participants in the door.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Evaluate marketing opportunities.**
 - *The California Healthy Marriages Coalition*, an OFA grantee that provides services through a statewide saturation model, works with coalitions and other ME program providers across the state. To reach participants and potential partners, the organization provides a statewide online directory of Marriage Education and Relationship Skills classes, linking individuals and couples to marriage education programs in their community. They also use Ultracommercials® – web-based commercials – through online publications that appeal to a tech-savvy population.
 - *Auburn University*, an OFA grantee providing HMR services across the state of Alabama, recognizes that media advertisements are not just a recruitment tool but a method for advertising to community leaders and funders. This approach allowed for community recognition and acknowledgement of the program as an essential social service.

▶ **Consider the message you want your community to know about your program.**

- *First Things First, Inc.*, an OFA funded grantee and non-profit that works to reduce the high divorce rates in Chattanooga, Tennessee prepares presentations about the relevance of healthy marriage based on the needs of each organization/individual with whom they meet. For example when meeting with a health care organization, they develop a fact sheet on the correlation between physical health and marriage. They also illustrate how services provided through First Things First support the other organization's mission. Any partnership, whether as a funder or a service provider, needs to be mutually beneficial.
- *The Georgia Department of Human Resources*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, and the Georgia Family Council (GFC) provided community development workshops that presented positive stories about marriage and family. This garnered support from local officials. GFC, the contracted provider of community leadership for the Healthy Marriage Initiative, also provided marriage and relationship skills education to develop teams of certified trainers in several Georgia communities. The final component of service will be a media and publicity campaign to promote healthy marriage and healthy marriage relationship skills education.
- *Meier Clinics Foundation* is an OFA grantee working with a coalition of partners to reach diverse populations, including Hispanic communities, in the Chicago area. The program has produced several television commercials featuring families who have completed the program. The message presented by these families relates to how the program has strengthened relationships within the entire family and reflects the strong value the Hispanic culture places on family.

▶ **Recruit through trusted community-based organizations.**

- *Laugh Your Way America, LLC*, an OFA grantee offering services to Hispanic communities nationwide, has successfully partnered with Catholic Parishes, Dioceses and Archdioceses in many different communities around the country. As a large number of Hispanics are Catholic and value the opinion of church leaders, partnering with the Archdiocese and local Catholic churches to recruit program participants has been effective in reaching Hispanic couples.
- *The University of Minnesota*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee under contract with the Minnesota Child Support Enforcement Office, relies on faith communities and professional associations to recruit resource couples who provide HMR to unmarried parents.
- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids program to low-income parents. Pine Rest partnered with largely faith-based organizations and congregations to help recruit and provide services.
- *Active Relationships Center* is an OFA grantee and the founder of the Hispanic Active Relationships Project (H.A.R.P.), a program that targets primarily Hispanic communities, in both urban and rural areas. Their partners for recruitment are often churches and pastors. Program staff finds that personal relationships through door-to-door and face-to-face recruiting with members of the church are the best way to recruit these partners.

▶ **Creative techniques to reach targeted or culturally diverse populations.**

- *ANTHEM*, an OFA grantee, organized a public awareness ad campaign on city buses. They advertised pithy statements on healthy marriage and relationship tips on bus wraps within low income communities in order to grab people's attention and promote the value and benefits of healthy relationships.

- *Active Relationships*, an OFA grantee, recognized that due to the hot climate in the Brownsville, Texas area, most people spend time in the mall and other air conditioned places. The program therefore targeted these locations to promote marriage education awareness and has held play performances at the Brownsville Sunrise Mall.
- *First Things First, Inc.*, an OFA grantee in Chattanooga, Tennessee targeted recruitment of men through teaching marriage education classes in hardware stores. They also hold classes in a variety of locations throughout the community instead of having participants come to their location.
- *Boat People SOS*, an ORR grantee, serves Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian married couples. They use recruitment materials and curricula in Vietnamese and distribute the information at markets within the close-knit community.
- *Jewish Family and Children's Service*, an OFA grantee in Sarasota, Florida, targets low-income expectant couples. The program also specifically recruits Hispanic couples and has formed partnerships to reach this population. Program staff regularly attends Spanish language Lamaze classes offered by local Healthy Start programs to promote HMR services and recruit Hispanic participants.
- *Active Relationships*, an OFA grantee serving primarily Hispanic communities, has found that billboards are the most effective form of advertising to reach their target population. Program staff notes that community members often stop by the office instead of calling for information after seeing a billboard.

► **Look for available databases that provide access to possible participants.**

- *Public Strategies, Inc.* an OFA grantee and recipient of State TANF funding for the Family Expectations program, which utilizes the Becoming Parents Program Curriculum, partners with Oklahoma's State Department of Human Services to conduct targeted mailings to expectant couples receiving Medicaid. This recruitment strategy provides regular opportunities to inform this high-risk population of services. Additionally, because mailings are done monthly, new Medicaid applicants are made aware of the services soon after they begin receiving benefits.
- *The Minnesota Child Support Enforcement Office*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee that contracts with the University of Minnesota to provide HMR to unmarried parents through mentor couples, uses the state database to review "Recognition of Parenthood" forms to recruit individuals for their program.
- *The Texas Health and Human Services Commission* is an OFA grantee providing services to low-income populations in four different geographic areas across the state by partnering with local Head Start agencies. The program conducts targeted mailings to married TANF recipients to advertise workshops.
- *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work*, an OFA grantee targeting low-income unmarried expectant couples, is utilizing a list of unmarried women who have given birth during the previous month for targeted recruitment mailings and for program services. The list is generated through a partner organization, the Durham County Health Department's Office of Vital Records.

B. Registration, Screening, and Enrollment

Program registration and enrollment processes can be as simple or comprehensive as an organization wants. Some programs solicit sign-ups at community events, other programs take registrations over the phone or Internet; while others take advantage of existing service intake processes to register participants in person when they come for other services offered by the organization. No matter what process you choose, it should be based on what information is needed to determine eligibility for services, appropriateness of services for potential participants, and the data needed for program evaluation.

Many programs administer simple assessment forms at registration/intake to identify other service needs. Some use relationship inventories to obtain baseline information for evaluation purposes and/or to identify particular relationship needs so the program can be tailored accordingly.

Whatever registration and enrollment process you choose, participants should understand the relevance of the process. If the process feels invasive, inconvenient, or irrelevant, participants are not likely to follow through with attending classes.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Screening Out Ineligible Participants** – Organizations that have a narrow target such as unmarried parents with a newborn or married couples under a specific income demographic, should look for ways to screen out ineligible clients as quickly as possible. You can refer these families to other programs for which they are eligible.
- ✓ **Use the Registration Process to Build Relationships** – If your registration process requires a face-to-face meeting, use this opportunity to introduce clients to the facilitator so they will have met before the first session. Consider offering snacks or child care during intake if it will take an hour.
- ✓ **Screening for Domestic Violence** – The registration process should include screening for domestic violence or other issues such as substance abuse or mental health problems to determine whether your program is right for certain participants at the time. Organizations should have a written domestic violence protocol and staff should be properly trained to screen for domestic violence and respond to any disclosures.

ASSESSMENT TOOL RESOURCES

The National Healthy Marriage
Resource Center
www.healthymarriageinfo.org

National Extension Relationship
and Marriage Education Network
www.nermen.org

Virginia Tech University
www.testscoring.vt.edu/questionnaire_dev.html

Practical Assessment, Research &
Evaluation
<http://pareonline.net/Home.htm>

American Association for Public
Opinion Research
<http://www.aapor.org/bestpractices>

U.S. Department of Education
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/primer7.html>

- ✓ **Think Broadly When Collecting Data** – Work with your evaluator or data management team to determine the data you need to collect. Think broadly about the impact your work may have in the community. Capturing data related to the broader picture will not only help better inform your program, but will also prove beneficial when seeking funding for sustainability.
- ✓ **Assessment Tools Should Gather the Information You Need, But Only What You Will Use** – Lengthy assessment tools can provide thorough information, but if that information is not used to help the clients or to support your program, do not waste everyone’s time collecting it. Clients will appreciate your consideration.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) oversees the Healthy Marriage Demonstration Project (HMDP) operated through four Head Start providers in the State. HMDP targets low-income couples and individuals. To enroll participants they recruit from the Head Start parent population and receive referrals from community providers such as the local TANF office. Generally, participants register at Head Start events or at the first workshop. During the registration process, participants complete a questionnaire where they provide demographic information such as relationship and parenting status, and receipt of government assistance. The pre-test gives the evaluation team a baseline on how participants perceive their relationship skills. Finally, all participants receive a resource list at registration which highlights various community services, including domestic violence providers.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Screen out high risk couples and individuals not in the target population.**
 - *COPEs, Inc.*, an OFA grantee, serves a narrow population - married couples where one partner has recently been released from prison. Instead of turning unmarried couples away at intake, COPEs refers them to relationship programs such as their fatherhood program where couples are not required to be married.
 - The *Indiana Healthy Couples, Healthy Families Program*, a BSF site, screened out couples involved in the child welfare system, those who were not expecting or had a baby within the last three months, were experiencing domestic violence in their relationship, were married, or those who considered themselves “just friends.” The program seeks to enroll only those couples who meet their criteria of being unmarried, in a serious relationship, and expecting a baby.
- ▶ **A standardized and centralized enrollment and registration process.**
 - *Healthy Families Nampa Coalition*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, partners with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, which includes questions in its intake process for TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid that explore whether applicants are interested in couples relationship or parenting education. Those that respond positively are referred to a case manager who discusses options with them and makes referrals to Healthy Families Nampa (HFN) providers. On average, 40 percent of the program participants come to HFN through this pathway.

- The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee providing services to low-income couples and individuals in Florida, uses a web-based centralized registration process. Online registration allows participants to select the dates and location most convenient for them. Registrants go directly into the data management system, eliminating a second step of data inputting by staff. Participants can also print the registration form or call to register over the phone.

▶ **Collaborate with a domestic violence partner to create a screening and/or assessment process.**

- For its OCSE project with the Minnesota Office of Child Support Enforcement, *the University of Minnesota* partnered with the Tubman Family Alliance, the second oldest domestic violence center in the nation, to develop and train staff on a domestic violence protocol.
- Many grantees conduct the intake process for men and women separately, which allows for participant confidentiality as well as for partners to report any concerns.

C. Delivery of HMR Classes

With your curriculum selected and service delivery strategies determined, workshop locations and logistics will be driven primarily by the curriculum activities and specific populations targeted.

Consistently providing a quality program in a positive learning environment at a convenient location will enhance your program's reputation and increase word-of-mouth referrals.

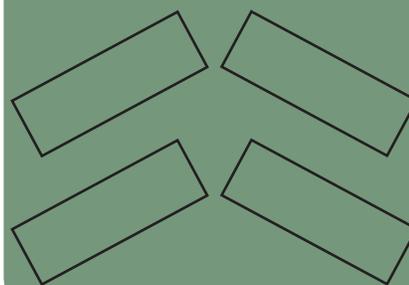
Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Deciding Where to Conduct Training** - Participants are more likely to attend at locations that are familiar and make them feel comfortable. Churches, community centers, and other sites within their immediate community offer good options.
- ✓ **Creating a Comfortable Learning Environment** - Select workshop space that is large enough for participants to be comfortable and not cramped. Comfortable room temperatures are also important.
- ✓ **Flexible Scheduling May Be Necessary** - Workshop schedules need to be considerate of families who work nontraditional schedules. Offering schedules that allow families to choose from daytime, weekend, and evening options may be needed to meet the community need.
- ✓ **Program Supports** - Offering supports such as meals, transportation, and child care may help remove barriers to workshop participation. Simple inexpensive gestures like coffee and donuts or a light snack can help create a friendly environment.
- ✓ **Participant Feedback** - Provide a mechanism for participants to provide feedback on the workshop environment and facilitator performance. Use this information to inform program implementation.
- ✓ **Indirect Service Delivery** - Working through partners requires oversight to ensure consistency of service delivery and quality standards.

SAMPLE CLASSROOM SETUP

Adult learners respond well to small group environments. Four to six participants per table works well. Angling tables as pictured below allows participants to see the facilitator while maintaining the small group settings.

Front of Class



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Lutheran Social Services of the South, in partnership with the State of Texas, facilitates marriage retreat weekends for couples who have adopted children through the state child welfare system. Retreats are held at multiple locations throughout the State to provide couples with a get-away and time to focus on their relationship. Many children adopted through the State are part of a sibling group or have special needs. A large portion of adoptive couples have reported that the retreat marked the first time they were away from their children. Being with other couples who have adopted provides a comfortable environment conducive to learning.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Present classes in formats that allow couples to practice skills in real life.**
 - *The Active Relationships program*, an OFA grantee that serves Hispanic communities, offers a retreat format for couples after they complete at least two eight-hour modules of classes, such as in communication or money management. Couples work together to complete the two modules, with the goal of attending the retreat that involves a third marriage education course.
 - *The Georgia PAAM, Bethany Christian Services*, offers programs in the form of a retreat, which allows for a relaxing and refreshing experience that allows the couples to focus on learning skills during the day and practicing them in the evenings.

- ▶ **Research the needs of your community and how your HMR program fits.**
 - *Creciendos Unidos*, an OFA grantee serving Hispanic married couples in Phoenix, Arizona identified the need for families to be involved in services. Grandmothers and other senior family members are trained as volunteer supervisors for child care services provided during HMR workshops. The volunteer family members are also involved with learning the concepts/skills from the program and implementing them into the programming for children.
 - *The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative*, a statewide marriage and relationship education program funded through TANF dollars, conducted a large-scale needs assessment via a statewide phone survey to obtain information about Oklahomans' attitudes and beliefs about marriage, relationships and divorce. This survey provided population-specific evidence of need and willingness to participate in educational services. In anticipation of the development of a program targeting expectant or new parents, a subsequent survey was administered to a sample of pregnant Medicaid recipients. The information gathered from these undertakings helped shape the service delivery models that the program operates today, ensuring appropriate design and marketing of services for a variety of target populations.

- The *Indiana Healthy Couples, Healthy Families Program*, a BSF site, screened out couples involved in the child welfare system, those who were not expecting or had a baby within the last three months, were experiencing domestic violence in their relationship, were married, or those who considered themselves “just friends.” Their goal was to enroll only those couples who met their criteria of being unmarried, in a serious relationship, and expecting a baby.
- Many grantees recognize the importance of scheduling classes in an accessible location, and offering courses consistently. Offering courses at convenient times and locations on a frequent and consistent basis is a good way to build word-of-mouth referrals as well.

▶ **Create a comfortable environment.**

- *AVANCE Houston*, an OFA grantee serving Hispanic married couples, emphasizes an educational classroom environment. The classrooms are decorated to reinforce the theme of the lesson. Parents also feel valued by the amount of attention and effort put into preparing the classroom for them. This practice is aligned with the AVANCE mission and philosophy of honoring and respecting all AVANCE families.
- The *Texas Health and Human Services Commission* is an OFA grantee providing HMR services to low-income populations by contracting with Head Start agencies. One contracted site, in Laredo, Texas has made significant efforts to create a comfortable environment for participants. The program utilizes a well-known, trusted Head Start facility as one of its service delivery sites and rearranges classrooms to be more conducive to adults. Workshops for married couples and single individuals are conducted simultaneously in separate rooms but participants are encouraged to interact during breaks and meal times. Child care is provided in nearby classrooms, and program staff and facilitators encourage the participants to check on their children during breaks and meal times.
- *The Oklahoma Department of Human Services*, an OFA grantee serving special needs caregivers through a retreat model, takes extra care to create a relaxing and comfortable experience for retreat attendees, while also providing much-needed marriage education and support services. Because the Department has chosen to serve at-risk families who many times have high-need children, the couples benefit from time away from daily stressors, respite care provided through the grant, hospitality of retreat staff, and the ambiance created through a comfortable and inviting workshop space.

D. Participant Retention, Follow-up, and Tracking

Participant retention can be difficult, particularly when targeting challenging populations to attend programs requiring extended commitments. Follow-up for the purpose of collecting data can also prove challenging with low-income or transient populations.

Overcoming these challenges requires strategic efforts to build relationships that enhance retention and design follow-up and data tracking systems to be as participant-friendly as possible.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Establish Clear Expectations** – At registration, participants need to know the length of commitment involved. If they will be expected to participate in follow-up sessions or complete surveys, make that clear in the beginning.
- ✓ **Consider Using Facilitators Outside of Class to Connect with Participants** – Participants often relate well to good facilitators. Having facilitators call participants prior to each session can help increase attendance. This serves as a reminder and provides an opportunity for facilitators to respond to any special needs participants may have.
- ✓ **Fun, Interactive Sessions Make a Difference** – Participants are more likely to look forward to attending the next session if they had fun at the last one. Look for opportunities to insert interactive activities that support concepts in the curriculum.
- ✓ **Data Tracking and Follow-up** – Attaching follow-up surveys to other events can increase response over mailings. For example, plan a graduation ceremony or class reunion at the approximate timeline for data collection.
- ✓ **Staying Connected to Participants** – Regular mailings or routine calls to participants to provide information about community resources or to ask how they are doing can increase the likelihood you will be able to locate them when you are ready to collect data.
- ✓ **Incentives May Help** – While there are differing opinions on the use of incentives, some organizations find them helpful. Providing door prizes or individual incentives may encourage retention. Offering a grocery gift card for survey data may also boost data collection.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS – NO-COST RETENTION STRATEGIES

Informal Support Systems - Allow time at the beginning of each session for participants to build relationships with other participants.

Free Community Events - Identify free community events and share the information with participants. Encourage them to attend with other participants.

Babysitting Co-op - Create a contact list of participants interested in a co-op to take turns babysitting for each other on date nights.

Participant Contact Cards - Ask facilitators to use an index card to keep track of incidental information related to participants. Call them each week to touch base. The cards help you personalize the conversation.

- ✓ **Know Your Target Audience When You Design Data Collection Processes** – Lengthy written surveys that feel invasive and irrelevant are not likely to be completed and returned by populations with low literacy levels. Use intake sessions or workshop time to capture more comprehensive information in case there are questions.
- ✓ **Reading Survey Questions Aloud During Workshops** – Reading pre- and post-test surveys aloud slows participants down and focuses them on each question. Do not discuss questions as it may lead participants in a particular direction and skew the data.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Catholic Charities Inc.- Diocese of Wichita, an OFA grantee and SHM research site, has a program completion rate of nearly 85 percent of the 175 couples enrolled in their Marriage for Keeps Program. In this program couples attend an average of 10 workshops of a 12-week series.

The combination of dynamic presenters, an inviting workshop setting, dinner before each workshop, gift cards to reimburse couples for child care and transportation expenses supports their retention strategy. Marriage for Keeps staff also calls couples to remind them of workshops and send out “we missed you” notes if a couple misses a session.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Encourage opportunities for close relationships between participant couples.**
 - *The Weld County Department of Social Services*, an OFA grantee providing marriage education to a variety of couples and individuals in Northern Colorado, organizes a walk/run for couples. The public activity allows couples to engage in healthy activities together while interacting with other couples. Such activities are also in a public setting for couples to express their commitment and to practice their skills in front of their peers.
 - *First Things First, Inc.*, an OFA funded grantee and, is a non-profit that works to reduce the high divorce rates in Chattanooga, Tennessee, offers ballroom dance lessons, cooking classes, and home improvement seminars in conjunction with their classes. Communication and relationship skills are practiced within the context of learning how to dance, cook or complete a home improvement project. The classes are offered for free by a local community organization, which demonstrates community buy-in and support for the program.
 - *The Clark County Department of Job and Family Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, allows couples to give their “State of the Relationship” with the facilitators at the beginning and end of their program in individual sessions. This emphasizes the skills on assessing the status of relationship, while also documenting the improvement they saw through the program.
- ▶ **Provide program supports.**
 - *YWCA of San Antonio*, an OFA grantee serving low-income Hispanic pre-marital adults and youth, hosts participant reunions at a local park. All participants bring food (potluck style) and connect with each other to encourage community and reinforce skills learned.
 - Many grantees provide child care on site. Others have encountered challenges with liability and instead offer reimbursement for child care expenses.

▶ **Offer incentives in ways that are relevant.**

- *Auburn University*, an OFA grantee providing services across the Alabama, offers goodie bags for women in prison re-entry programs. The bags have essential products, such as toiletries. It serves as an effective retention tool and allows for reaffirming skills of relationship-building through self improvement.
- *Children's Aid Society*, an OFA grantee, serves couples from rural communities who must drive extended distances to attend sessions. They provide gas cards as an incentive.
- *Youth Development, Inc.*, an OFA grantee serving expectant unmarried couples in New Mexico, offers small items that reinforce the concepts of intimacy and spending quality time with your partner. Following the session on closeness and intimacy, they provide a "romance basket" that encourages couple intimacy and includes a soft-music CD, non-alcoholic cider, stemware, and bath salts.

▶ **Create ownership among participants.**

- At *Meier Clinics Foundation*, an OFA grantee, former participants in the program serve as leaders and actively encourage and remind others to attend courses. They also offer opportunities for participants to bring food to the program, which creates a sense of community within the program.
- *Creciendos Unidos*, an OFA grantee serving the Hispanic community in Phoenix, Arizona, incorporates culturally specific stories, poetry, music and role-play exercises to illustrate concepts outlined in the HMR curriculum. In addition, community leadership and a sense of pride and ownership of the program are emphasized throughout the program. The majority of the program's participants go on to volunteer in an area specific to their interests and skill set after completing the HMR program.

E. Performance Monitoring and Quality Assurance

Despite the efforts you invest in developing and implementing your program, it can still fail if you do not implement safeguards to protect your reputation and the quality of your program. Successful programs rely heavily on word-of-mouth referrals. The importance of such referrals and “street cred” should not be underestimated. Participants will expect to have the same positive experience as the individual who referred them.

Systematic performance monitoring and quality assurance protocols help maintain the standard of service your organization worked hard to create.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Work with Staff on Performance Monitoring Systems** - Gaining buy-in is essential to performance monitoring. Define performance standards and develop corrective actions as a team so the actions are not viewed as punitive but focused on positioning the program and staff positively.
- ✓ **Observing Facilitators Should Be Carried out Carefully** - An observer’s presence can influence the learning experience. Try to avoid making facilitators uncomfortable or making participants feel like fish in a fishbowl.
- ✓ **Monitoring Partners Providing Indirect Services** - Monthly reports, regular meetings, and dedicated oversight are needed to maintain quality standards when delivering services through multiple organizations. Work with partners to establish standards. Include the agreed-upon standards in written Memorandums of Understanding and hold partners accountable.
- ✓ **Dedicate Staff for Quality Assurance** - Dedicate a staff person to provide oversight and monitoring of service delivery from facilitators and partners. Dedicating a specific person ensures consistency of message and critique, when necessary.

CO-FACILITATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Using a co-facilitation model offers multiple benefits

- Male/Female couples offer gender based perspectives even when not married.
- Co-facilitators can cue their partner if a concept is inadvertently left out.
- If one facilitator has emergency, the class can continue.
- They can monitor the time and keep the class moving.
- They can alternate presenting to provide variety.
- Differing personalities connect with different participants.
- One facilitator can prepare for upcoming activities while the other is wrapping up a section.

- ✓ **Monitor and Evaluate Facilitator and Partner Relationships** – Develop a formal feedback process to ensure open communication with facilitators and partners. Establish performance measurements and goals, making sure there is a component for them to evaluate organizational support. Ongoing evaluation is necessary to maintain strong relationships.
- ✓ **Be Prepared to Respond to What Is Not Working** – Underperforming staff, ineffective partners, or nonproductive processes can undermine your program. Be prepared to take thoughtful but swift action when challenges are identified.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The Center for Self-Sufficiency (CFSS) is a "hub" initiative that links together a diverse array of city-wide partners. In high schools, CFSS collaborates with teachers to offer relationship classes. In local prisons, it provides educators who teach marriage skills to qualified prisoners; and in religious congregations, CFSS partners with a consortium of faith-based and community organizations. Given this wide-ranging collaboration, CFSS developed a process for providing appropriate oversight and management. One key strategy was to introduce performance-based contracts, which tied compensation to participants served. Another was to sponsor a full-time staff member who routinely observed marriage classes, in order to ensure classroom compliance and project integrity.

What You Can Try:

- ▶ **Monitor to determine if facilitators are maintaining the integrity of the curriculum.**
 - *Public Strategies, Inc.*, an OFA grantee and recipient of State TANF funding to serve expectant and new parents in Oklahoma City through the Family Expectations program, which utilizes the Becoming Parents Program curriculum, schedules three facilitators for each marriage education session on the schedule. While two facilitators maintain primary responsibility for presenting the material, the third facilitator is actively engaged in the material being delivered and is responsible for ensuring that all information is covered and discussed accurately. This quality assurance measure has provided the program and curriculum developers with a level of confidence in cross-workshop curriculum fidelity.
 - The *Center for Human Services, Loving Families* program—a SHM site in Shoreline, Washington—serves low-income married parents. They use the *Loving Couples, Loving Children* curriculum developed by the Gottman Institute. Like other sites using this curriculum, they videotape workshop leaders, and the tapes are reviewed by the curriculum developers. Feedback from the curriculum developers is delivered through periodic conference calls with the site to ensure curriculum fidelity and improve workshop quality.

▶ **Review partners' work consistently and provide feedback.**

- *The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition*, an OFA grantee with previous funding from OCSE and ORR, has an executive grant committee that reviews partners' quarterly data reports using a team of representatives from the finance department, site coordinator, evaluator, and program director. They decide together the weaknesses in a partner's performance, where they can use assistance, and how the *St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition* can be of assistance. Although the project director makes the final decision, a committee approach is used to monitor partner performance, determine corrective action if deemed necessary and provide differing perspectives in relating with grant partners.

▶ **Course corrections made as a result of monitoring performance.**

- *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Social Work*, an OFA grantee, began as a random assignment study dividing recruited participants into a control group (no services) and an intervention group. Program monitoring found that referrals rates were lower than expected and further exploration linked this to referral partners' discomfort with the concept of withholding services from participants with the same level of need. Participants in the control group also had a high attrition rate, as they did not have as much incentive to maintain contact. To address the issue of equity as well as increase enrollment, the program shifted to a wait-list control design where all referred clients receive services after a 3 month waiting period which provides baseline comparison data. This shift in design was the result of ongoing evaluation and careful monitoring of the program's overall performance.
- *The University of Minnesota*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, originally had a service delivery model that emphasized experienced couples mentoring low-income couples. This proved too difficult as they not only had trouble recruiting couples to serve as mentors, but also had difficulty coordinating the schedules due to the instability in the lives of the participants. The focus shifted to providing in-home coaching and marriage education services. The project also learned that social service case work was essential to help couples stabilize their living situations. Finally, the project implemented monthly group relationship education events that featured learning from experienced married couples who served as resources, along with presentations by project staff and group discussion.

F. Sustainability

The word “sustainability” is used to refer to continuation funding, but means more than that. Sustainability is about building a program that not only can survive, but also thrive in your community beyond current funding, current staff, and future challenges. Funding is a key part of sustainability, but so are infrastructure, service delivery, and reputation.

Planning for sustainability should begin when you start planning your program. As each component is designed, consider how it affects the future of your program as you carry out your mission.

Things to Consider:

- ✓ **Building Community Relationships** - Develop relationships with community leaders and network with other organizations. Developing mutually beneficial relationships can help sustain your organization. These organizations and community leaders can serve as ambassadors for your organization.
- ✓ **Define Your Niche** - Determine what gap in community resources your organization can fill. Demonstrate how well you can meet the need through collaboration without competing against other organizations.
- ✓ **Build on a Strong Foundation** - Create a strong infrastructure and hire competent staff. Involve staff in developing sustainability strategies so they have ownership of the outcomes.
- ✓ **Diversify Funding Streams** - Local, State, Federal, and foundation grants are available. Study funding trends and consider opportunities that expand or complement the work you are doing. Keep in mind that while funds may be available, some funding, particularly private funding, may be available only on a limited basis.
- ✓ **Use Systematic Approaches to Maintain Quality Standards** - Deliver consistently high-quality programming. Establish a reputation as a quality program with solid leadership.
- ✓ **Fundraising Campaigns** - Local fundraising campaigns that rely on individual donors can reduce dependency on grant funding and generate unrestricted dollars. Check with current funders to determine if these fundraising strategies are considered allowable activities before expending staff time and grant funds.

SUSTAINABILITY PITFALLS

Managing a program that is not responsive to the community.

Use community needs assessments or focus groups to ensure you understand community needs and relevant issues.

Waiting to consider sustainability until your last year of funding.

It is never too early to start looking for continuation funding, but it can be too late.

Compromising your organization's core mission can undermine your identity and credibility in the community.

Consider how your mission supports the mission of potential funders, but do not change simply to suit their criteria

- ✓ **Use Data to Tell Your Story** – Design your data management system to be useful in documenting impact. Share results with all stakeholders. Staff, facilitators, partners, and funders should know how your program affects families and benefits the community.
- ✓ **Document Your Approach** – Documenting your approach and how it can be adapted for other communities increases expansion opportunities. Highlight challenges identified and overcome as well as quality assurance systems used.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The St. Louis Healthy Marriage Coalition provides examples of ways to ensure program sustainability. The coalition was first a loosely connected group of social service providers that planned and organized for two years before receiving any substantial funding. The coalition first received support from ACF's Office of Refugee Resettlement and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. They then received funding from OCSE and are currently an OFA grantee.

The coalition has also reached beyond the Federal government for funding. They receive in-kind support in the form of Americorp volunteers and use office space owned by St. Louis University. The coalition also approaches local businesses for gift cards and other items that can be used for program recruitment and retention purposes. The coalition constantly looks for ways to diversify and expand their support base so that marriage education programming can continue to be provided after a given funding stream ends.

What You Can Try:

► Build relationships with community leaders and members.

- *Auburn University*, an OFA grantee that provides services across Alabama, markets to inform funders and community leaders of HMR. Since HMR is a relatively new program in many communities; marketing is needed to increase awareness as well as to address misinformation and stigma attached to such family programs.
- *First Things First, Inc.*, an OFA grantee in Chattanooga, Tennessee recognized their board members' relationships with community leaders as an opportunity for educating the community about Healthy Marriage Resources. Board members are actively involved in increasing community awareness and support of the initiative.

► Think creatively about funding.

- *The Minnesota Child Support Enforcement Office*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee that contracts with the University of Minnesota to provide HMR to unmarried parents through mentor couples, convinced the State legislature to implement a \$5 increase to marriage license fees with the extra funds earmarked as match dollars for their healthy marriage program. This creates a potential funding stream beyond the existing grant.
- *The Washington Division of Child Support Enforcement*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee in Yakima, Washington serving unmarried parents is a coalition of five organizations. Each organization agrees to provide necessary administrative, coordinator, volunteer, and support staff as well as facilities to accomplish the goals of the program. Key to the success of the Yakima program is that each of the partners is asked to provide a one-third financial match for their necessary, pre-approved budgets to provide marriage education in their community. This has allowed community buy-in from multiple communities and at multiple sites.

▶ **Use evaluation data to promote your program.**

- *The Michigan Department of Human Services*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee, subcontracts with Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services to provide the Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids program to low-income parents. Pine Rest used data from an implementation evaluation conducted by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and a qualitative evaluation conducted by Bowling Green State University to demonstrate effectiveness to the state. The state of Michigan allocated funding for an additional three years to sustain the program.
- The *Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families*, an OCSE 1115 waiver grantee serving low-income couples and individuals in Florida, partnered with the Department of Juvenile Justice to serve parents of adjudicated juvenile offenders as part of an effort to determine if providing healthy relationship skills for parents can have an impact on juvenile recidivism rates. Recidivism rates of offenders whose parents attend the program will be compared to those juveniles whose parents do not attend. The program hopes to document reduced recidivism and apply for juvenile delinquency prevention funding.

G. CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Through marketing, you can tell the community about your organization, its services, and benefits. Recruitment strategies tell people when and where the program is offered and what the benefits will be to participants. Marketing and recruitment should be coordinated and both are important to program sustainability.
- Programs can increase participant retention with convenient, flexible workshop schedules; child care, meals, and other supports; and interactive sessions with facilitators who engage participants and make them feel welcome and respected.
- Collect participant and process data to document and inform others about your organization's work. Establish systematic processes to protect the integrity of the curriculum and use data collection techniques that resonate with participants and are not invasive.
- Balance creativity with what appeals to the targeted population. For example, a dynamic Web site will not recruit participants who are not tech savvy and symphony tickets may not be an incentive within some populations.

H. FOR MORE INFORMATION

*Recruitment and Marketing to Couples and Individuals: NHMRC Webinar, April 18, 2007
Presentation Slides*
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/april2007recruitmentandmarketingslides.pdf

Frequently Asked Questions
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/april2007recruitmentandmarketingslides.pdf

*Effectively Launching Your Healthy Marriage Program: NHMRC Webinar, May 16, 2007
Presentation Slides*
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/may2007effectivelylaunchingslides.pdf

Frequently Asked Questions
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/may2007webinarfaqs.pdf

Selecting Partner Referral Organizations: Tip Sheet, NHMRC, August 2007
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/reforgtip.pdf

*Retention: If Participants Were Boomerangs, NHMRC Webinar, August 15, 2007
Presentation Slides*
www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/retention.pdf

H. FOR MORE INFORMATION

Frequently Asked Questions

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/retention.pdf

Operational Issues for Marriage Education Programs: How To Guide with Simple Operation Forms

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/opissuesmedprognew.pdf

Menard, Anne. Promoting Safety: A Resource Packet for Marriage and Relationship Educators and Program Administrators. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

[http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/marriage/Blob/62302.pdf?rpp=](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/marriage/Blob/62302.pdf?rpp=10&supp=0&m=1&w=NATIVE%28%27TITLE+phis+%27%27Promoting+Safety%3A+A+Resource+Packet+for+Marriage+and+Relationship+Educators+and+Program+Administrators%27%27%27%29&r=1&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29)

[10&supp=0&m=1&w=NATIVE%28%27TITLE+phis+%27%27Promoting+Safety%](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/marriage/Blob/62302.pdf?rpp=10&supp=0&m=1&w=NATIVE%28%27TITLE+phis+%27%27Promoting+Safety%3A+A+Resource+Packet+for+Marriage+and+Relationship+Educators+and+Program+Administrators%27%27%27%29&r=1&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29)

[3A+A+Resource+Packet+for+Marriage+and+Relationship+Educators+and+Program+](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/marriage/Blob/62302.pdf?rpp=10&supp=0&m=1&w=NATIVE%28%27TITLE+phis+%27%27Promoting+Safety%3A+A+Resource+Packet+for+Marriage+and+Relationship+Educators+and+Program+Administrators%27%27%27%29&r=1&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29)

[Administrators%27%27%27%29&r=1&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/marriage/Blob/62302.pdf?rpp=10&supp=0&m=1&w=NATIVE%28%27TITLE+phis+%27%27Promoting+Safety%3A+A+Resource+Packet+for+Marriage+and+Relationship+Educators+and+Program+Administrators%27%27%27%29&r=1&order=native%28%27year%2FDescend%27%29)

On marketing and media

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/prog_grant/tta.cfm

On recruitment and retention

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/prog_grant/progmgmt.cfm

On domestic violence considerations

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/policymakers/domviolence.cfm

On evaluating HMR programs

www.healthymarriageinfo.org/prog_grant/progeval.cfm

V

Putting the Pieces Together

Healthy marriage and relationship (HMR) programs across the country are adopting creative approaches to providing services in their communities. Promising practices are emerging as programs continue to refine their activities to better meet the needs of their increasingly diverse target populations.

To be sustainable, programs need more than just a few promising practices in a few program areas; they need to have promising practices in all areas of programming:

- Designing your HMR program
- Developing your program infrastructure
- Implementing your program

This guide identified critical elements of HMR programs in each of these areas, discussed factors to consider when implementing these program elements, and offered examples of promising practices used by a variety of programs across the country. Several important themes should be highlighted:²⁵

- **Partnerships are critical, regardless of the form they take.** Whether a communitywide coalition or a stand-alone program, successful HMR programs partner with other community organizations. These partnerships can be formal or informal, extensive or modest. Community partners can provide referrals to your HMR program, and you can refer participants to other community services as needed. Community organizations may provide space for your program, or they may agree to have you train their staff so they can provide in-house HMR services to their clients. Collaboration is vital for successful HMR programs.
- **Faith and community leaders can serve as ambassadors for your program.** When targeting culturally diverse populations, having the support of leaders within that community establishes credibility and increases access to families. Faith leaders are often supportive of HMR messages and may even be willing to host workshops. When working with faith leaders, be sure to educate them on Federal guidelines for faith-based organizations.
- **An organization's leadership and staff must commit.** Any organization sponsoring or partnering with an HMR program must buy in to the HMR philosophy and understand and agree to the role it will play. The HMR program must fit with the organization's mission and values, and HMR programs seeking organizational partnerships must be prepared to help them understand and articulate this fit to funders, boards, and staff.

²⁵ Research also identifies these as critical elements in developing organizational capacity to sustain innovative interventions. For additional information, see: Flaspohler, P., Duffy, J., Wandersman, A., Stillman, L., & Maras, M. A. (2008). Unpacking prevention capacity: An intersection of research-to-practice models and community-centered models. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 182-196.

- **Successful HMR programs invest time and resources in developing a workable infrastructure.** Many promising practices in the areas of program design and implementation are taking place but relatively few pertain to developing program infrastructure. Stanley, Pearson, and Kline argue that effective HMR programming requires both “trains” (HMR services) and “tracks” (the infrastructure needed to deliver services).²⁶ Successful HMR programs are thoughtful about the service delivery strategy that fits both their target population’s needs and their organizational capacity, and they develop an infrastructure, including training and professional support, to support this strategy. The success of HMR programs also depends on the relationships between facilitators and participants and collaborative relationships with other organizations and the broader community you plan to serve.
- **HMR programs need to recognize client needs.** Individuals, couples, and families are complex. Some may need more than HMR services, and some of these needs, such as employment, domestic violence counseling, and treatment for mental health problems or substance abuse, may require attention before they enroll in an HMR program. Successful HMR programs understand the population they are serving and either offer or provide referrals to additional services as needed. This typically entails an intake and screening process, but also involves recognizing participant needs as they arise or are disclosed during the program.
- **Marketing your program is important, but do not rely on advertising for recruitment.** Marketing and recruitment are related but distinct activities with different purposes. Marketing strategies, such as advertisements on TV, radio, and billboards, can spread your messages and raise awareness of your program, but are a passive approach to recruiting program participants. Successful programs use a variety of recruitment strategies, some of which require community outreach to generate interest and enrollment opportunities.
- **Sustainable programs develop and use a performance monitoring system to improve.** To be successful, HMR programs need to be committed to program improvement. You can demonstrate this commitment by developing a process for obtaining feedback from participants, partners, and staff on what is working well and what could be improved. This process can be part of an evaluation, but should also be an institutionalized part of the program itself, owned and directed by program staff.

This guide discusses the need to make HMR programs relevant to an array of audiences, including low-income and culturally diverse populations. Cultural relevance is an important concept, as is awareness that the United States is a melting pot of races and cultures, where interracial couples and multiracial/ethnic individuals are commonplace. A single family may include members from various racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Great diversity also exists *within* racial and ethnic subgroups based, for example, on country of origin and date of immigration. Similarly, low-income families are a diverse group that includes the working poor, long-term recipients of financial assistance, and those experiencing short-term financial hardship. Therefore, HMR programs must be inclusive of numerous variances instead of thinking narrowly to appeal to target populations.

²⁶ Stanley, S. M., Pearson, M., & Kline, G. H. (2005). The development of relationship education for low income individuals: Lessons from research and experience. Annual Conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington, DC.

The field of HMR programming is relatively young. Consequently, promising practices related to implementation have been identified, but the benchmarks for service delivery have not been established yet. Many of the early programs have been funded as demonstration initiatives with varying funding amounts allowing flexibility in service delivery strategies, targeted populations, dosage, goals for number of participants served, and follow-up. As a result, establishing standards for the field has only recently begun to answer questions such as: What are reasonable expectations regarding numbers served? How do we measure success when comparing different dosages and retention rates? What is an acceptable cost-per-unit?

The field will advance as more programs adopt promising practices such as the ones discussed in this guide. Advancing the field also requires programs to track their performance and use quantitative and qualitative data to assess the effectiveness of various approaches and improve.

If there is one overarching theme that exemplifies promising practices in HMR programming, it is—not surprisingly—relationships. The success of your program will depend heavily on the individual relationships between facilitators and participants, and your collaborative relationships with other organizations and the broader community you plan to serve.

As the HMR field evolves, practitioners will continue to learn about promising practices that result in well-designed, well-implemented programs that stand the greatest chance of making a difference in peoples' lives. Eventually, best practices may be identified which more reliably produce intended outcomes—healthier relationships, quality marriages, and improved child well-being. Until then, programs should continue to explore new methods and strategies for designing and implementing HMR services in a variety of settings and with a variety of target populations.

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Appendix B:

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PROGRAMS FEATURED IN THIS GUIDE

Organization: **Active Relationships Center**
 Program Name: Hispanic Active Relationships Program (H.A.R.P.)
 Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
 Kelly Simpson, H.A.R.P., Executive Director
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Organization: **Adoption Resources of Wisconsin**
 Program Name: Science of Great Families
 Funding Stream(s): Children's Bureau
 Megan Fishler, Program Coordinator
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Organization: **The Alliance for North Texas Healthy Effective Marriages (ANTHEM)**
 Program Name: Strong Families Dallas
 Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
 Sonya Parker, Service Delivery Director
 (972) 322-3570
 sonya.parker@anthemnorthtexas.org

Organization: **Auburn University**
 Program Name(s): Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative (ACHMI), Family Connections
 Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
 Dr. Francesca Adler-Baeder, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Human Development and Family Services
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 Roberta Jackel, Project Manager
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Organization: **AVANCE Houston**
 Program Name: AVANCE Houston
 Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
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Organization: **Becoming Parents Program, Inc.**
 Program Name: Becoming Parents Program - Supporting Healthy marriage Projects (BPP-SHM)
 Funding Stream(s): SHM
 Aly Frei, Director
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Organization: **Bethany Christian Services of Georgia**
 Program Name: Relationship Enhancement for Adoptive Parents (REAP)
 Funding Stream(s): Children's Bureau
 Tracy Hall, Program Director
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Organization: **The Better Family, Inc.**
Program Name: Better Family Life Healthy Marriage Initiative
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
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Organization: **Boat People, SOS**
Program Name: Assistance to Refugee Couples (ARC)
Funding Stream(s): ORR
Trinh Pham, ARC Program Manager
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Organization: **California Healthy Marriage Coalition**
Program Name: Healthy Marriage Demonstration project
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Patty Howell, Vice-President & HMDG Project Manager
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Organization: **Catholic Charities Inc. - Diocese of Wichita**
Program Name: Marriage for Keeps
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Mike Duxler, Ph.D., Program Manager
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Organization: **The Center for Human Services**
Program Name: Loving Families
Funding Stream(s): SHM
Stacey De Fries, Director
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Organization: **The Center for Self-Sufficiency (CFSS)**
Program name: VOW To Succeed
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Jeanette Stevens, Program Director
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Grantee Name: **The Center for Urban Families**
Program Name: Baltimore Building Strong Families
Funding Stream(s): BSF
Afra Vance White, Program Director
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awhite@cfuf.org

Organization: **Child, Inc.**
Program Name: Responsible Relationships/Healthy Marriage Program
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Albert Black, Deputy Director
ablack@childinc.org
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Organization: **Children's Aid Society**
Program Name: Healthy Marriage Program
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Julie Kennedy, Program Manager
juliek@childaid.org
(814) 765-2686
Bonnie Floro, Executive Director
bonnief@childaid.org

Organization: **Children's Home Society of Washington**
Program Name: SAFE-Strengthening Adopting Families through Education
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Mike Fitzpatrick, Director of Adoption Services
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mikef@chs-wa.org

Organization: **Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families (COCAF)**
Program Name: Colorado Coalition of Adoptive Families
Funding Stream(s): Children's Bureau
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Organization: **The Colorado Department of Human Resources, Division of Child Support Enforcement**
Program Name: Partner Up
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 Waiver
Larry Desbien, Policy & Evaluation Section Chief
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Organization: **Community Prevention Partnership of Berks County**
Program Name: Strong Families/Familias Estables
Funding Stream(s): SHM
Cheryl Guthier, Executive Director, Community Prevention Partnership
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Organization: **COPEs, Inc.**
Program Name: Jefferson County Healthy Marriage Initiative
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
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Teresa Boyd Strader, National Training Coordinator
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Organization: **Creciendo Unidos/Growing Together**
Program Name: Anything is possible, (Todo Es Posible), Successful Relationship Course (Curso de Relaciones Exitosas)
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
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Organization: **DePelchin Children's Center**
Program name: Family Adoption Connections and Enrichments Services (FACES)
Funding Stream(s): Children's Bureau
Jenny Galske Reid, Program Supervisor
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jreid@depelchin.org

Organization: **The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU)**
Program Name: Promoting Healthy Marriage within the East Los Angeles Hispanic Community, Alliance For Latino Marriages
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
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Organization: **Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge**
Program Name: Family Road Building Strong Families Program
Funding Stream(s): BSF
Franka Cumberbach-Hankton, Program Manager
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Organization: **Family Service Association of San Antonio**
Program Name: Por Los Ninos
Funding Stream(s): SHM
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Organization: **Family Services of Greater Houston**

Program Name: Greater Houston Healthy Marriage Coalition
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Daphine Lambert, Ph.D., Project Director
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Organization: **First American Prevention Center of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa**

Program Name: Enhancing Healthy Relationships
Funding Stream(s): Children's Bureau
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Organization: **First Things First, Inc.**

Program Name: First Things First, Community Saturation Model
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Julie Baumgardner, Executive Director
(423) 267-5383
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Deborah Gunn, Grant Project Director
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Organization: **Florida Department of Revenue in Jacksonville**

Program Name: Network for Strengthening Families
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 waiver
Robyn Cenizal, Executive Administrator
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Organization: **Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR)**

Program Name: Georgia Healthy Marriage Initiative
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 waiver
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John Jauregui, Georgia Family Council (GFC)
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Organization: **The Granato Counseling Services, Inc.**

Program Name: FIT Relationships
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Laura Granato, Clinical Director
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Organization: **Healthy Families Florida, Ounce of Prevention Fund, Inc.**

Program Name: The Howard Phillips Center's Healthy Families Orange Plus
Funding Stream(s): BSF
Ester Wilson, Manager
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ester.wilson@orlandohealth.com

Organization: **Healthy Families Nampa Coalition**

Program Name: Nampa Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Coalition
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 Waiver
Tammy Payne, Executive Director
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tammy@healthyfamiliesnampa.org

Organization: **Healthy Families San Angelo**

Program Name: Healthy Families
Funding Stream(s): BSF
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Organization: **The Illinois Department of Health Care and Family Services**
Program Name: Illinois Healthy Relationship & Marriage Initiative, FUTURE (Families United Through Understanding Relationships and Empowerment)
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 Waiver
Patricia Godfrey and Andrew Lyke
Project Director, Healthy Relationship and Marriage Community Outreach and Development
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Organization: **Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program (IVROP)**
Program Name: Project Juntos (Together)
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
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Organization: **SCAN, Inc.**
Program Name: Healthy Couples, Healthy Families Indiana
Funding Stream(s): BSF
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Organization: **Jewish Family and Children's Service**
Program Name: Healthy Families/Healthy Children
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Betsy Schwartz, Project Director
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Organization: **The Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children**
Program Name: University of Kentucky Bluegrass Healthy Marriage Initiative
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 waiver
Dr. Ronald Werner-Wilson, Principal Investigator
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Organization: **Laugh Your Way America, LLC**
Program Name: Hispanic Multimedia Seminar - Rianse Hacia Un Matrimonio Mejor
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
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Organization: **LifeSTARTS Youth & Family Services (formerly known as the East Capitol Center for Change)**
Program Name: Healthy Marriage-Strong Families
Funding Stream(s): Children's Bureau
Shalyta LaBoo, Family & Community Initiatives Manager
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Organization: **Longview Wellness Center**
Program Name: Vow Enriching Relationships
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Justin and Tonya Waite, Program Directors
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Organization: **The Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, Support Enforcement Services**
Program Name: The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Community Demonstration Initiative (also known as Families Matter!)
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 Waiver
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Organization: **Lutheran Social Service of the South**

Program Name: Adoptive Couples' Marriage Enrichment Services
Funding Stream(s): Texas Health and Human Services Commission
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Organization: **Meier Clinics Foundation**

Program Name: Family Bridges
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Nancy Brown, President
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Organization: **Minnesota Office of Child Support Enforcement**

Program Name: The Minnesota Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 Waiver
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Organization: **National Multiple Sclerosis Society**

Program Name: Relationship Matters: A Program for Couples Living with MS
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Lara Rezzarday, Program Manager
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Organization: **The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Clark County**

Program Name: Parents As Partners
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 waiver
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Organization: **The Oklahoma Department of Human Services**

Program Name: Various
Funding Stream(s): The Oklahoma Department of Human Services
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Organization: **The Osborne Association**

Program Name: The Osborne Association's "I Do" Initiative
Funding Stream(s): Children's Bureau
Nadia Huntley, Program Coordinator
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Organization: **The Parenting Center**

Program Name: Community Healthy Marriage Initiative (CHMI), Healthy Marriage Healthy Families Coalition of Tarrant County
Funding Stream(s): State of Texas, Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)
Stacy Pacholick, Healthy Marriage Administrative Manager
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Organization: **Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services**

Program Name: Healthy Marriages Healthy Relationships Grand Rapids
Funding Stream(s): OCSE-1115 waiver
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Organization: **Power of Two**
Program Name: Healthy Marriage Online
Resource Library
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Abigail Hirsch, Director
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Organization: **The Texas Health and Human
Services Commission (HHSC)**
Program Name: Healthy Marriage
Development Program (HMDP)
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Connie Williams, Project Manager
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Organization: **Public Strategies, Inc.**
Program Name: Oklahoma Marriage Initiative
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG, State TANF
Kendy Cox, Director of Service Delivery
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Organization: **Texas State University -
San Marcos**
Program Name: Healthy Marriage
Demonstration project
Funding Stream(s): Healthy Marriage
Discretionary Grants
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Organization: **Public Strategies, Inc.**
Program Name: Family Expectations
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG, State TANF
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Organization: **Relationship Research
Foundation, Inc. (RRF)**
Program Name: Orange County Fatherhood
Healthy Marriage Project (OCFHMP)
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
M.P. Wylie, Ph.D., Executive Director of
Relationship Research Foundation (of non-
profit),
Program Director of Orange County
Fatherhood HM Project
(949) 725-3366
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Organization: **University Behavioral
Associates / Montefiore Medical Center**
Program Name: University Behavioral
Associates Supporting Healthy Marriage
Program
Funding Stream(s): SHM
Barbara Kang, Program Director
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Organization: **The St. Louis Healthy Marriage
Coalition**
Program Name: Healthy Families St. Louis
Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG
Bridget Brennan, Executive Director
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Organization: **University of Central Florida**
Program Name: Supporting Healthy Marriage
Together Project
Funding Stream(s): SHM
Matthew Munyon, Director of Operations,
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Organization: **The University of North Carolina at Chappel Hill School of Social Work**

Program Name: Strong Couples - Strong Children

Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG

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Organization: **United Way of Jackson County**

Project Name: Marriage Matters Jackson

Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG

Shelby Raines, Marriage Matters Jackson Coordinator

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Organization: **WAIT Training**

Project Name: Colorado Healthy Marriage Project

Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG

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Organization: **The Washington Division of Child Support Enforcement in Yakima, WA**

Program Name: Healthy Families Yakima

Funding Stream(s): OCSE 1115 Waiver

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Organization: **Weld County Department of Social Services**

Program Name: Building Healthy Marriages

Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG

Ann Bruce, Program Manager
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Organization: **Youth Development, Inc.**

Program Name: Caring Couples Healthy Children

Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG

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Organization: **YWCA of San Antonio**

Program Name: Familia Unida Initiative

Funding Stream(s): OFA-HMDG

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance