



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

Administration for Children and Families Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2002-2008



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

An Introductory Guide

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Introduction

Healthy marriage policy and programs are the “new kid on the block” in social policy. In the mid-90s several states and communities began to engage in marriage-related reforms and services designed to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce rates. In 2002, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) launched a Healthy Marriage Initiative and began funding research and service programs. This Introductory Guide provides a descriptive summary of the ACF Initiative in three parts:

- (i) Demonstration grants funded under existing discretionary programs administered by several offices and bureaus in ACF from 2002-2007;
- (ii) Demonstration grants funded in 2006 under the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Act provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act (2005), administered by the Office of Family Assistance; and
- (iii) Research and evaluation activities funded since 2002 and administered by the Office of Policy, Research and Evaluation in ACF, designed to inform, improve and assess healthy marriage programs. Also included is a selection of research activities funded and administered by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation that relate to, and support, the goals of the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative.

This guide gives a broad overview of the different types of activities that have been funded, the diversity of populations being served, and the various program settings in which these healthy marriage services are being offered. For more details about specific programs and funding information see www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage.

Background

The ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative arose from two parallel and related developments.¹ First, in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was an emerging movement in states and communities to strengthen marriage, reduce divorce rates and thereby improve child wellbeing. This movement was fueled by a growing and large body of research that identified the negative effects of divorce on many children and the greater likelihood of disadvantage experienced by children raised by single parents. Initially state reform activities focused on legislation to make divorce more difficult, but then shifted to providing encouragement and activities designed to prepare people better for marriage and help strengthen marriage. At the same time a growing number of marriage-related education services were being sponsored by the nongovernmental sector—faith-based organizations, university centers and community-based, non-profit organizations.

¹ This section of the guide draws substantially on the account of these developments in *Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two Parent Families. A State by State Snapshot* by Theodora Ooms, Stacey Bouchet and Mary Parke. Center for Law and Social Policy. April 2004. www.clasp.org. Also see “Marriage as a Public Issue” by Steven Nock. in *Marriage and Child Wellbeing* edited by Sara McLanahan, Elisabeth Donahue, and Ron Haskins. The Future of Children. Vol 15. No 2. Fall 2005. www.futureofchildren.org

Second, the interest in marriage at the federal level arose from the debates about welfare reform, with the concern focusing primarily on the effects on child wellbeing and on the public costs of nonmarital childbearing.² The U.S. Congress, with the help of the Clinton administration, passed a major overhaul of the welfare system in 1996, turning it into a block grant to states. Most of the attention focused on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) law's requirements for welfare recipients to work and the time limits on assistance payments. However, three of the four declared purposes—and several of the provisions—of the new law referred to promoting marriage and two-parent families and reducing nonmarital births. A handful of states—including Arizona, Oklahoma, Utah, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan—began allocating resources, including TANF dollars, towards strengthening marriage.

Beginning in 2001, the Bush administration began working with congressional leaders on reauthorization of the welfare reform legislation. Over the next five years several versions of a reauthorization bill were introduced that amended the 1996 law in several ways including adding provisions that would encourage states to make greater efforts to promote and strengthen marriage, and, to a lesser extent, responsible fatherhood. The reauthorization bill that eventually became law in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 included the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Act which established a new grants program to fund healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs.

In the new administration, Wade Horn, the founder and director of the nonprofit National Fatherhood Initiative, became the Assistant Secretary for ACF. In 2001, he declared that strengthening marriage would be one of nine ACF priorities. The declared mission of the ACF Healthy Marriage Initiative is “to help 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.”

Part I: ACF Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants, 2002-2007

In 2002, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) began using several existing program vehicles available in offices and bureaus that provide a range of services to children and families. The idea was to begin to explore and test different ways of integrating a focus on strengthening couple relationships and encouraging marriage, and thereby stabilize families in order to reinforce the goals of the existing service programs.

- **Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE).** The chief goals of the OCSE are to aid states and tribes in locating non-custodial parents, establish paternity and obtaining and enforcing child support orders. Since 2002, under the Special Improvement Project (SIP), twelve healthy marriage grants have been funded to faith and community-based organizations, as well as state, local, and tribal agencies. Fourteen, five-year demonstration and grants have been awarded to states under the Section 1115 waiver authority (of the Social Security Act). In these demonstration programs the aim is

² See Ron Haskins (2006), *Work over Welfare: The Inside Story of the 1996 Welfare Reform Law*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

to strengthen the relationship of low-income, unwed parents to better achieve program goals, as well as work to encourage marriage especially for those unwed couples who have newly become parents.

- **Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).** The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) working with states and local organizations provides refugee individuals and families with critical resources, including cash, medical assistance, housing, employment, legal and other social services, to assist them in becoming integrated members of American society. The refugee populations come primarily from countries in Africa, South East Asia, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.

Since 2002 the ORR has awarded discretionary grants to several national and local organizations to develop pilot programs in around 20 cities to help local community leaders understand the many challenges refugee couples and their families face during the resettlement experience, and develop ways of teaching culturally appropriate communication, problem solving and financial management skills to these couples and families.

- **Children's Bureau (CB).** The Children's Bureau mission is to provide for the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children through leadership, support for necessary services, and productive partnerships with States, Tribes, and communities. It works to develop programs that focus on preventing the abuse of children in troubled families, protecting children from abuse, and finding permanent placements for those who cannot safely return to their homes.

Since 2003 this bureau has awarded five healthy marriage training grants to universities to develop training programs and curricula to be integrated into training programs for child welfare staff. The goal is to improve staff ability to strengthen the relationships and ability to co-parent of adoptive and foster care parents and other families in the child welfare system. In addition it has funded around ten demonstration community-based programs to provide couples education and support services to couples adopting or fostering special needs children, and to low-income couples at risk of child abuse and neglect.

- **Office of Community Services (OCS).** The mission of the Office of Community Services is to work in partnership with states, communities, and other agencies to provide a range of human and economic development services and activities which ameliorate the causes and characteristics of poverty, promote self sufficiency and build the stability and capacity of children, youth, and families so that they become able to create their own opportunities.

In 2003, OCS funded three one-year grants to Community Action Agencies for pilot relationship and marriage education programs. In addition, it awarded a technical assistance contract to link marriage education services with financial literacy and asset development activities provided by over 300 organizations around the country that work to help low-income families build financial assets and achieve greater economic stability.

- **Administration for Native Americans (ANA).** ANA promotes the goal of economic and social self-sufficiency for American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other Native American Pacific Islanders. ANA funds a wide variety of services and projects aimed at the development of stable, diversified local economies, that safeguard the health and well-being of Native children and families; and reduce dependency, and that foster youth and intergenerational activities in Native American communities. ANA projects are planned, designed, and implemented by Native American community members to address the particular needs of their society.

Since 2003, the ANA has used discretionary dollars to fund 23 tribal healthy marriage programs and provide them with training and technical assistance. Some of these programs are also supported by tribal funds beyond the required federal match. The programs offer relationships skills training for individuals, couples, parents, and youth, promote father and extended family involvement, parenting education and other family strengthening activities.

- **Head Start (OHS).** The Head Start program mission is to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. They engage parents in their children's learning, offer parent education, and help parents make progress toward their own educational, literacy and employment goals.

In 2007, the Office of Head Start awarded 24 Healthy Marriage Initiative grants. These five-year grants provide funding for Head Start and Early Head Start grantees to offer marriage and relationship education services to their current service population, as well as Head Start eligible families in their service areas. The grants extend access to voluntary marriage education services to low-income couples and individuals who would not otherwise have these services available. The goal of these grants is to improve child wellbeing by strengthening family formation and healthy marriage among Head Start and Early Head Start families, including married couples, engaged couples or couples planning marriage, and individuals desiring to develop relationship skills for the future purpose of forming a healthy marriage and family.

The OHS Healthy Marriage Initiative Grants were awarded to provide an opportunity for Head Start and Early Head Start grantees to partner with other organizations in their communities to offer a full range of practical skill-building sessions on communication, joint decision making, parenting, managing of family budgets, conflict resolution, and other elements to enhance family stabilization. Services are offered to individuals and couples contemplating marriage and to couples wishing to strengthen their relationships.

In total, over \$7.7 million annually was awarded to Head Start grantees to provide healthy marriage and relationship education. The grants range from \$40,000 to about \$500,000, with an average award size of approximately \$324,500. Grantees are located in 16 states and Puerto Rico.

Part II: Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants, October 2006

Background

This snapshot provides an overview of the healthy marriage programs funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in October 2006. The snapshot details the types of organizations that have been funded by OFA and the activities they are being funded to conduct. The information summarized here was obtained, in part, by the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) team during discussions with grantees in early 2007, soon after the programs were funded. Additional information was gathered through interactions with grantees during the course of ongoing technical assistance.

The Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 included \$150 million each year for five years to support programs designed to help couples form and sustain healthy marriages and encourage and promote responsible fatherhood (\$100 million for healthy marriage and up to \$50 million for responsible fatherhood). In October 2006, OFA awarded 125 healthy marriage grants to 123 grantees (two organizations received two grants each). Award sizes range from \$132,000 to \$2,342,000, with an average yearly award size of approximately \$610,000. All grantees were required to provide a grant match (in-kind or cash) equal to 10% of the total project budget. Grantees are located in 33 states, the District of Columbia and American Samoa. Texas is home to the highest number of Healthy Marriage grantees, with 15. In addition, out of the \$100 million, funds were used to provide additional support for evaluation of the longitudinal evaluation of healthy marriage demonstration programs, technical assistance activities, and for staff to monitor the grants.

From the \$50 million that was allocated for responsible fatherhood (RF), 100 programs were funded. The goals of these programs are to help men be more committed, involved, and responsible fathers. Grantees could select to provide some additional services including employment-related services and marriage-related programming. Of the 100 currently funded RF grantees, more than one-third are including healthy marriage programming. For more information on Responsible Fatherhood grantees, and the media campaign to promote responsible fatherhood, contact The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (www.fatherhood.gov). The remainder of this snapshot will focus on healthy marriage programs and research.

In October 2004, under a cooperative agreement, the OFA funded the National Council of Family Relations and a consortium of Universities to operate a National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. In 2006, the Center was rebid and in September was awarded to Public Strategies of Oklahoma City.

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center's (NHMRC) principal mission is to support the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in furthering its commitment to promoting and supporting child well-being and healthy marriage by providing key audiences with research and program information and generating new knowledge about promising and effective strategies. NHMRC aims to be a "first-stop" shop for information

about marriage and family trends, marriage education and programming, scholarly research and training, and technical assistance resources. The NHMRC maintains a library, clearinghouse and web site. The key audiences are Healthy Marriage (HM) grantees, other healthy marriage programs, policymakers, program providers, researchers, marriage educators, the media, and the general public.

The NHMRC current team includes four organizational partners that together bring a comprehensive and unique set of skills, experiences, and expertise relevant to NHMRC's mission and functions. The partners include: Public Strategies, Inc., The Lewin Group, Caliber/ICF International and The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV). The NHMRC calls on scholarly advice and expertise from Oklahoma State University and individuals in other universities and research firms.

Who Are the Healthy Marriage Grantees?

Grantees represent several different types of organizations and partnership arrangements. The majority (60%) of grantees are non-profit, community-based organizations. Other grantees are institutions of higher learning, county or state governments, for-profit companies, faith-based organizations (16%) and other types of organizations. Some healthy marriage programs represent new service additions to established community-based service delivery organizations, while others are free-standing programs focused primarily on healthy relationship and marriage education. More than 40% of grantees indicated they were members of a community healthy marriage coalition.

Grantees vary in both their experience administering a federal grant and in delivering healthy marriage education. More than 70% of grantees have prior experience administering a federal discretionary award. Although about a quarter grantees reported that were very experienced marriage education providers, most grantees reported they were not. Indeed, a third reported that their experience with marriage education was nominal or non-existent.

What kinds of activities and services do the grantees provide?

Under the Deficit Reduction Act and Office of Family Assistance (OFA) regulations, grantees are allowed to conduct several types of activities with various target populations. This section briefly describes the structure of this arrangement. The DRA outlines eight "allowable activities" that the appropriated monies can support:

- 1) public advertising campaigns;
- 2) marriage education in high schools;
- 3) marriage education (including parenting, financial management and job services) for non-married expectant women and men;
- 4) marriage education for engaged couples and couples or individuals interested in marriage;
- 5) marriage education for married couples;
- 6) divorce reduction programs;

- 7) marriage mentoring using married couples as role models and mentors; and
- 8) programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested programs, in conjunction with another activity from above.

All of the eight allowable activities are currently being funded and nearly 60% of grantees are engaging in more than one allowable activity. More than half of grantees funded are providing marriage education to married couples, and nearly half are providing marriage and relationship education to engaged couples and interested individuals. A similar percentage of grantees are serving non-married, expectant couples and non-married parents with a child under the age of three months. Four in 10 grantees are conducting community wide public advertising campaigns, while approximately one-third of grantees are providing marriage education to high school youth. Smaller percentages of grantees are using marriage mentor couples or providing divorce reduction programs.

What additional requirements do grantees have to meet?

In addition to engaging in the allowable activities as delineated by the grant, programs must ensure compliance with several key requirements outlined in the Deficit Reduction Act. Grantees must adhere to the federal faith-based guidelines with regard to separation of church/state in curricula and the delivery of services (see 45 CFR Part 87). Grantees must also ensure that all client participation in healthy marriage and relationship education services delivered by the grant is voluntary. The DRA also requires grantees to consult with a domestic violence expert and describe how programs will address issues of domestic violence. Grantees report semi-annually on the steps they have taken to ensure compliance with these regulations.

Grantees are required to have an evaluation component, which at a minimum must clearly identify project milestones, expected outcomes, and describe the services and activities that were implemented in a program. In order to report semi-annually on their progress towards project milestones and service delivery outputs, grantees must collect this data on an ongoing basis.

What educational curricula do the grantees use?

Since these programs are demonstrations trying out different approaches, OFA did not restrict grantees to a recommended list of education curricula. Instead, OFA provided guidelines outlining required content for inclusion in any relationships or marriage education curriculum the grantee chooses to use. As such, grantees are able to use any curriculum that adheres to federal faith-based guidelines and incorporates crucial marriage education concepts. Minimum required elements of marriage education curricula are: communication skills; conflict resolution skills, benefits of marriage (for adults, children, community, and society); qualities of healthy relationships and healthy marriages; commitment to healthy marriage (for current or future relationship); and discussion of values and beliefs about marriage or family.

Grantees report using a wide number and variety of marriage education curricula. Approximately 60% of

grantees are using more than one curriculum, while nearly one third of all grantees are employing all or parts of three or more different curricula. Although many grantees report using established curricula (some of which have been formally evaluated for effectiveness), more than 30% of curricula being delivered have either been developed by the grantee or are less well-known in the field. Some of the curricula most commonly used include 10 Great Dates (though only nine dates are used in order to abide by Federal faith-based guidelines), Connections, FOCCUS/REFOCCUS, Family Wellness, Love U2, PAIRS, PICK a Partner, PREP, PREPARE/ENRICH, and Relationship Enhancement (RE). [For information on marriage education curricula contact info@healthymarriageinfo.org]

How are the grantees implementing the Domestic Violence requirements?

The DRA required that grantees consult with domestic violence providers during program development and implementation. Previous ACF-funded grantees were required to develop a domestic violence protocol, a document that detailed how programs would screen for domestic violence and address disclosures of domestic violence. Technical assistance was provided to help them develop these protocols.

Although the DRA does not require a written protocol but a process of consultation, many programs saw the benefit of creating a protocol during the initial phases of their project. During the initial NHMRC conversations with grantees, staff inquired whether they had developed a process to identify and respond to any domestic violence issues that participants might raise. In early 2007, nearly 85% of grantees were either in process of developing a domestic violence protocol or already had one in place.

To assist grantees with understanding domestic violence issues and concerns, the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence have developed numerous technical assistance resources. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the NHMRC recently published a Domestic Violence Resource Packet comprising a series of five related guides (www.healthymarriageinfo.org). This packet is designed to help marriage and relationship educators and program administrators understand and appropriately respond to domestic violence issues that may arise within their programs.

How many individuals and couples are being served by the healthy marriage programs and what are their characteristics in terms of racial and ethnic diversity?

Grantees are required to collect “descriptive statistics” on the number and characteristics of program participants, such as age, race, marital status, education, employment, and number of children. Grantees report this information in their final evaluation report, but are not required to formally report this level of detail on participant statistics on a semi-annual basis. The total numbers and characteristics of people being served by the healthy marriage programs will be available at the end of the five-year funding period.

It is clear however that grantees are serving a wide diversity of populations through these healthy marriage demonstration grants. Based on information provided by the grantees in original grant applications and in conversations with NHMRC staff in early 2007, the majority of grantees were targeting or intending to specifically recruit low-income individuals and couples as program participants. In addition nearly all grantees anticipated that some of their participants would be ethnic or racial minorities. Three-quarters of grantees expected to serve some Hispanic individuals or couples and a similar percentage believed some of their participants will be African-American. Approximately one in three grantees anticipated serving Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders, and one in five grantees anticipated serving persons who identify as Native American. Approximately ten percent of the OFA grantees are serving primarily African Americans, and another ten percent are serving primarily Hispanics.

What kinds of technical assistance and evaluation activities are being funded?

In addition to requiring grantees to collect program data to describe, manage and monitor their progress, OFA is funding several kinds of technical assistance activities designed to help grantees achieve their goals and improve their performance. Among these are the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center activities such as regular webinars, peer-to-peer roundtables and the development of guides and other materials available on their web site, and a Community of Practice. In addition, individualized onsite technical assistance is provided to grantees through additional contracts.

ACF has also invested substantial dollars in an evaluation strategy designed to assess “what works for whom?” in healthy marriage programming. The Office of Planning Research and Evaluation (OPRE) has funded three rigorously designed, longitudinal evaluations of multi-site demonstration programs targeting three types of populations and activities: services for low-income unmarried couples who are pregnant or have a baby less than three months old (Building Strong Families, BSF); services for low-income married families (Supporting Healthy Marriage SHM), and comprehensive community wide healthy marriage initiatives (CHMI). The implementation findings and impact results from these “flagship” evaluations are expected to provide useful early lessons for healthy marriage grantees whose activities are aligned with these three demonstration program models, as well as general lessons for other types of healthy marriage services.

Part III: The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) Healthy Marriage Research Projects, 2002-2008

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF supports research and evaluation focused on improving the efficiency of ACF programs. Rigorous research and evaluation has played an integral role in the design and implementation of the Healthy Marriage Initiative since its inception. For additional information and/or available reports go to the OPRE Web site at:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/project/projectIndex.jsp#strengthen>

Multi-Site Evaluations

ACF has launched three large-scale, longitudinal, evaluations of approaches to providing healthy marriage education services. These evaluations involve experimental and control groups. They study programs in sites operated by ACF partners at the state and local level in multiple sites across the country.

- **Building Strong Families (BSF).** The purpose of this project is to evaluate healthy marriage services for romantically involved low-income, unwed parents around the time of the birth of a child. The BSF project entails three major components: providing technical assistance to program sites, analyzing program implementation, and conducting impact analysis. This project is an important opportunity to learn whether well-designed programs and services can improve child and family wellbeing and indirectly lead to healthy marriage. Seven program sites are located in Atlanta, GA, Baltimore, MD, Baton Rouge, LA, Florida (Orange and Broward counties), Indiana (Allen, Manon & Lake counties), Oklahoma City, OK, Texas, (San Antonio & Houston). Implementation reports and issue briefs are available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/build_fam/index.html or www.buildingstrongfamilies.info. Contractor: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. Project Period: September 29, 2002 to December 31, 2011.
- **Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM).** In response to research indicating that lower-income couples separate and divorce at higher rates than higher income couples, the SHM study will evaluate a research-based model designed to help lower-income married couples strengthen and maintain their marriages. The project involves working in partnership with state or local agencies in eight selected sites, providing technical assistance in the design and implementation of programs following the SHM model, and analyzing program implementation and impacts. The program sites are located in: Orlando, FL, Wichita, KS, Bronx, NY, Oklahoma City, OK, Bethlehem and Reading, PA, San Antonio and El Paso, TX, Seattle, WA, Shoreline, WA. For further information go to: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/sup_stepfamilies/index.html or www.supportinghealthymarriage.org. Contractor: MDRC. Project Period: September 30, 2003 to September 29, 2012.
- **Community Healthy Marriage Initiative National Evaluation (CHMIs).** This project includes two components. The first involves evaluation of the implementation of healthy marriage demonstrations funded through the Office of Child Support Enforcement Section 1115 authority that aim to improve child support outcomes, support healthy marriage and the outcomes for children, adults, and the greater community in which they operate. The second component is an impact evaluation using a matched comparison site design. Impact sites are located in Lewis, Milwaukee, and Dallas. For further information and reports go to: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/eval_com/index.html or www.rti.org. Contractor: RTI International. Project Period: September 30, 2003 to September 29, 2011.

Other OPRE HMI Research Contracts

- **Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative: Grantee Implementation Evaluation, 2007-2008.** This project will result in a comprehensive process and output evaluation of selected ACF Healthy Marriage grantees that serve Hispanic families, addressing a key programmatic question of the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI): how are healthy marriage programs being implemented in order to provide services for Hispanic families? Contractor: The Lewin Group. Project Period: Base year - 9/28/07–9/27/08 plus 4 option years.
- **Exploration of Low-Income Couples' Decision-Making Processes, 2007-2009.** While much has been documented about the interactions and decision processes among higher income couples, there has been little research on the dynamics of low-income couple decision making. Specifically, the project will explore, through observational methods, the mechanisms and factors which influence the couple as a unit (as well as the individual partners in low-income couples) in a number of areas, including (a) seeking, obtaining, and advancing in employment; (b) living arrangements and relationship status (e.g. marriage/cohabitation); (c) bearing children; (d) arranging child care; and (e) negotiating and determining parental roles and responsibilities. Contractor: Mathematica Policy Research. Project period: Sept 30, 2007 to Sept. 30, 2009.
- **The Marriage Calculator.** This project supports the maintenance of the Marriage Calculator which is an interactive system that allows a user to input information about a family's income and assets, the number, sex, age, and parentage of the children, and their decisions to participate (if eligible) in a variety of public assistance programs and computes the net income of the family under four potential living arrangements for the man and woman: (1) living apart; (2) cohabiting, but not reporting their cohabitation; (3) cohabiting and reporting their cohabitation to government benefit programs; or (4) married. The calculator applies the tax and transfer rules that were in place during 2003, capturing the detailed state-specific variations in rules and the complex interactions across programs and tax policies. The calculator displays the net income of the family (after taxes and including benefits and subsidies) under each living arrangement and in each state. Contractor: The Urban Institute. Project Period: September 30, 2007 to September 30, 2008.
- **Marriage, Employment, and Family Functioning: Conceptual Framework for Interventions.** This exploratory study synthesizes research relevant to decision-making and behavior about marriage, family formation, employment and earnings and family time use with a focus on low-income populations. It also develops a conceptual framework for further research on these interrelated aspects of family and work life.
Contractor: The Urban Institute. Project Period: September 30, 2005 to March 31, 2008.
- **Options for Collecting Marriage and Divorce Statistics.** This project is jointly sponsored by ACF and

the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), with cooperation from the National Center for Health Statistics and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. The study analyzes options for improving the collection of marriage and divorce statistics at the federal, state, and local levels.

Contractor: The Lewin Group. Project Period: September 30, 2003 to February 28, 2008.

OPRE HMI Research Grants

- **Ethnographic and Survey Studies of the Determinants of Healthy Marriage.** This project explores four areas of marriage and family formation for rural and urban, low-income mothers: 1) the relationship between abuse and marriage/cohabitation patterns, 2) the ways that multiple-partner fertility complicates couple relations, 3) fears of divorce and timing of childbirth in relation to marriage and 4) trust within low-income couple relationships.

Grantee: Johns Hopkins University (Baltimore, MD). Project Period: September 30, 2005 to March 31, 2008.

- **Researching Recruitment Challenges in Low-Income Marriage Education Programs.** This project identifies recruitment barriers of low income couples to marriage education both from couple and marriage education practitioner samples. It synthesizes current recruitment practices of marriage education programs, and measures communication, problem solving abilities and stress levels among low-income and middle-income couples to test the hypothesis that low-income couples have fewer communication skills and, thus, are less able to agree about marriage education participation.

Grantee: Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK). Project Period: September 30, 2005 to September 29, 2008.

- **Efficacy of Program for Strong African American Marriage.** This impact study will examine the strength of Pro SAAM, a marriage education program designed for poor, rural African American couples on such outcomes as marital satisfaction and stability, examining forgiveness, commitment and intentions are mediators of program effects.

Grantee: Florida State University (Tallahassee, FL). Project Period: September 30, 2005 to September 29, 2009.

- **A Longitudinal Study of the Impact of Marriage Education among Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth.** This impact study examines the effects of a youth marriage and relationship educational course taught in high schools in Alabama on such outcomes as healthy dating patterns, knowledge about the importance of healthy marriage and dangers of unhealthy and abusive relationships, levels of self-efficacy, use of active identity processing style, increases in future orientation, lower levels of acceptance and prevalence of risky sexual behaviors, and lower rates of teen pregnancy.

Grantee: Auburn University (Auburn, AL). Project Period: September 30, 2005 to September 29, 2010.

- **Gendered Parenting and Its Implications for Child Wellbeing and Couple Relationships, 2006-2008.** The focus of this research is to assess the state of social and natural sciences on gender differences in parenting and their consequences for child well-being and marital, as well as non-marital, relationships. Determining where fathers and mothers have strengths and weaknesses as parents should help identify where single mothers or fathers might be particularly challenged as parents, how couples can build on gender differences, and suggest possible programmatic strategies for strengthening marriage or helping single parents overcome those challenges. Project outcomes for the grant will include commissioned papers, a conference and an edited volume.

Grantee: Rutgers University, The Marriage Project. Project Period: July 1, 2006 to March 31, 2008.

Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Research Initiative Grants, 2006-2011

Overview

The purpose of this initiative is to evaluate services to promote responsible fatherhood through encouraging and supporting healthy marriages between low-income parents. The studies use an experimental research design to test the effectiveness of approaches to helping interested low-income fathers and couples understand the importance of two-parent families for child well-being, helping couples achieve their desire for a healthy marriage and sustain those marriages, and helping fathers develop the skills to be responsible parents.

- **Using Marriage Education to Foster Investment in Fatherhood: A Long-Term Comparison of Individual vs. Couple Level Treatment.** This project will assess the effectiveness of an 8-week marriage education curriculum designed for low-income individuals and couples in promoting investment in relationships by fathers and positive parenting outcomes. The evaluation will assess whether efficacy of the treatment depends on whether couples or individuals participate

Grantee: University of Denver. Project period: Sept 30, 2006 to Sept. 29, 2011.

- **Couples Together Against Violence: An Innovative Program to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships, Increase Father Involvement, and Reduce Violence among Lower-Income, Low-Level Situationally Violent Couples.** This project will assess the effectiveness of the marriage education curriculum entitled Couples Together Against Violence in reducing low-level situational violence, strengthening marriage/relationships, and increasing father involvement. The evaluation will aim to identify the mechanisms responsible for decreases in low-level situational violence.

Grantee: Relationship Research Institute, Seattle. Project period: Sept 30, 2006 to Sept. 29, 2011.

- **Strong African American Fathers in Healthy Marriages: A Randomized Controlled Trial with Rural Families.** This project will assess the effectiveness of the curriculum entitled Program for Strong African American Fathers, a course of 6 in-home sessions for couples focused on marriage and parenting. The evaluation will assess the program's effect on African American fathers living in rural Georgia in

strengthening marriage and increasing father involvement. Grantee: University of Georgia. Project period: Sept 30, 2006 to Sept. 29, 2011.

Healthy Marriage Related Research funded by Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation 2003--2007

National Center for Marriage Research: (Award)

Organization: Bowling Green University, Ohio

The National Center for Marriage Research is an academic based research center funded for five years through a cooperative agreement with Bowling Green State University. The Center will play a leadership role in building the research base on marriage and family structure. It will improve our understanding of how marriage and family structure affect the health and well-being of individuals, families, children and communities, and will inform policy development and programmatic responses. In addition, building research capacity and networks—supporting faculty research and faculty training; improving research methods and data; and supporting and mentoring students in careers related to marriage and family research and policy—is a central purpose of the Center. The Center will actively disseminate research findings through a variety of media.

The Effects of Marriage on Health: (Report)

A Synthesis of the Research Evidence

Authors: Robert G. Wood, Brian Goesling, Sarah Avellar

Organization: Mathematica Policy Research

This report synthesizes current research on the relationship between marital status and healthy behaviors, health status and longevity, mental health and substance use, health care access and utilization, and intergenerational health effects. It focuses on relevant U.S. studies that carefully address selection and causality and were published in peer-reviewed journals since 1990.

Published: June, 2007

Evaluation of ACF Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and their Partners (Project)

Organizations: RTI International

This project will evaluate grants funded through the ACF Responsible Fatherhood grant program priority area Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Re-entering Fathers and their Partners. The evaluation would improve future marriage and corrections interventions by identifying how best to design interventions for couples involved with the criminal justice system and determining what kinds of marriage education programs ultimately lead to stronger families and safer communities. The evaluation has two components, a process evaluation and an impact

evaluation. Research briefs on the grantee programs and the evaluation will be released as well as final reports on the process and impact evaluations.

Ongoing; Year Funded: 2006

Information for Healthy Marriage Interventions (Project)

Project Officers: Jennifer Burnszynski & Linda Mellgren

Organization: Mathematica Policy Research

This project uses existing national survey and administrative data to identify the characteristics of various target populations for healthy marriage programs at the state level to help put future results from local marriage initiatives into appropriate geographic and socio-demographic context. This will be reported in a user-friendly "Marriage Measures" Guide. A separate analysis of the relationship histories, attitudes, and family structure characteristics of high-school-aged youth is also being conducted.

Ongoing; Year Funded: 2006

Marriage Education, Financial Literacy, and Asset Development (Project)

Organizations: RTI International

This project is designed to improve both efforts to promote financial literacy and asset accumulation in the low-income population and marriage skills programming for low-income couples. Representatives of healthy marriage programs and representatives of financial education programs came together at a Roundtable meeting to review the state of knowledge, discuss programmatic implications and identify topics for further research that could be used to improve the financial components of marriage interventions and to add marriage components to financial education programs. A report on the round table and a research brief will be issued.

Ongoing; Year Funded: 2006

Relationship Strengths in Married Families (Project)

Organizations: NORC with subcontractor Child Trends

This project will help identify the set of family strengths associated with the marital and parent child-relationship that are associated with the successful transition of youth to young adulthood. The project examines educational outcomes, health outcomes including mental health and substance use, risky sexual behavior and religiosity. Specifically, this project will analyze family relationships for two-parent families using the NLSY97, a survey data set that focuses on a group of adolescents who were age 12 to 16 in 1997 and follows them annually as they mature to adulthood. The final product will be a series of research briefs focusing on the different transitions outcomes.

Ongoing; Year Funded: 2006

Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) Process Evaluation (Project)

Organization: Mathematica Policy Research

The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI) aims to promote and strengthen marriage, primarily by providing relationship skills education throughout the state. Funded mostly through TANF, it focuses on serving low-income families but is open to all. The OMI uses existing service delivery infrastructure to provide services and has a growing cadre of volunteer relationship skills instructors trained under the program. This process evaluation will help us understand how states and the federal government can better support healthy marriages, particularly for low income families. Interviews will be conducted with key program stakeholders and other community leaders. Existing secondary data will be analyzed. The process evaluation would provide information on goals and objectives; design, start up and implementation issues; major programmatic components, variance between what was planned and what actually occurred; participant characteristics; and costs. A series of short informational briefs as well as a comprehensive final report documenting the issues and implications around the program design choices made by Oklahoma are planned.

Ongoing; Year Funded: 2005

Related Products: Oklahoma Marriage Initiative: An Overview of the Longest-Running Statewide Marriage Initiative in the U.S. (Research Brief)

Public Assistance Use Among Two Parent Families

Organization: Mathematica Policy Research

This report describes trends in participation of married and two-parent families in TANF and Food Stamps and the factors related to those trends. Data have shown that participation rates in these programs are typically lower for two-parent families than single-parent families. This project used output from the MATH and TRIM simulation models to examine trends in both eligibility and participation among eligibles for both married parent and all two-parent families. The study also incorporated regression analysis to examine the likely importance of state-level program rules and economic variables, as well as family and individual characteristics as they influence both eligibility and participation in TANF and Food Stamps. The study found that neither individual family characteristics or state rules appear to explain the difference in participation rates for those eligible for program services.

Completed, Year Funded: 2003

Advancing Marriage and Health Research

Organization: Mathematica Policy Research

In 2007, ASPE released a synthesis of the current research literature on the relationship between marriage and health. This project will expand the knowledge base on marriage and health through the conduct of three discrete tasks. It will begin a dialogue with the health care experts about the relationship

between marriage and public health, medical practice, and health care to discuss the links between marital status and health. The project will also increase our understanding of marriage and health in the African American community by commissioning a series of original analyses that will be reported in research briefs. In addition, a short brief on marital status and health insurance in families with children will be produced.

Ongoing, Funded: 2007

Funded with ACF

The Hispanic Healthy Marriage Process Evaluation

Organizations: The Lewin Group with Washington University

This project will conduct a comprehensive process and outcome evaluation of up to ten ACF Healthy Marriage grantees that serve Hispanic families wholly or in part. The Hispanic population is both the youngest and the fastest growing in the U.S., yet there has been relatively little practice-based research about their distinct strengths, needs. (For example, researchers hypothesize that Hispanics place a relatively stronger value on family, parenting, and kinship networks—familismo, but there is little guidance on how to operationalize the concept in practice, including within marriage education programs.) The evaluation will systematically identifying opportunities and challenges in working with Hispanic populations; analyze implementation and outcome data across sites; and describe how concepts used in healthy marriage education programs are being defined, adapted and measured for Latino sub-populations and assess appropriateness and relevance. This project is jointly funded and managed by ASPE and ACF.

Ongoing, Funded: 2007

Marriage and Divorce Data

Organization: The Lewin Group

ACF, in partnership with ASPE, is currently engaged in a study to develop options for strengthening data on marriage and divorce. The project has surveyed state and local level vital statistics offices, conducted in-site visits in selected states to gain a more indepth understanding of state activity to transform marriage and divorce administrative data into electronic data bases, and reviewed national surveys to identify the kinds of descriptive information and analysis appropriate for the data collected. The project will issue four reports.

Ongoing, Funded: 2003