



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

NHMRC April 2007 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions

Recruitment and Marketing to Couples and Individuals

April 18, 2007

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center broadcasted a webinar entitled “**Marketing and Recruiting to Couples and Individuals,**” on April 18, 2007. During the course of the webinar, we received more questions than we were able to answer. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is a follow-up to many of the questions posed during the webinar.

1. Can you discuss some strategies for recruiting Hispanic or Latino participants, especially with respect to Spanish-only speakers and immigration status?

An important first step towards recruiting and serving Latino participants is lowering the language and communication barrier by having program staff that speaks and understands Spanish. Even if the program’s target population (e.g., Latina teenagers) speaks fluent English, their parents or partners may not, or they may prefer to communicate in Spanish.

Programs should recognize that some Latino families are more likely to attend if they feel the program will benefit their whole family, particularly the children. Keeping this in mind, it is important for programs to communicate a marketing message that highlights the benefits of marriage education to the whole family, rather than the just the couple (i.e., this class will help you to be better parents, will help strengthen your family, and will help you communicate with your children better). As such, program goals will need to be framed in a way that emphasizes the benefits to children *and* parents.

One important way for programs to demonstrate their commitment to the entire family is to provide on-site child care for children of all ages. Given the strong cultural emphasis on the family as a whole, programs need to be prepared for the likelihood that the whole family will arrive at the program, even if you make it clear that the event is for couples only. Programs should plan to provide alternate activities to keep these other family members engaged. For example, some programs have provided tutoring for children while their parents are in class, while others have looked for ways children can be involved in parts of the marriage education classes.

While Latinos are often lumped together into a single demographic category, it is important for programs to recognize the diversity within the Latino population in the US. Some people are third generation, while others are first (i.e. they were born in another country). Latinos come from many different lands, cultures and socioeconomic statuses so differences along these lines should be taken into consideration when implementing your marketing and recruitment strategies.

Given the sensitive issue of immigration status, healthy marriage programs will need to make some assurances in marketing their program that information will be kept confidential and that participation in classes is not dependent on immigration status. You would probably not want to even ask potential participants about their immigration status. This may overcome some barriers and address the fears that some participants may that programs, possibly due to their government funding, would collect and report on immigration status.

Programs should also be able to provide information and referrals to the social services that are available to people regardless of their immigration status. Creating relationships with these organizations provides the opportunity to build productive partnerships. These organizations may be able to provide insights that will help your program better structure your services, serve as important resources for your participants, and could become important referral partners.

Finally, you may also find resources from the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative to be helpful. Please visit http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/about/hispanic_hm_initiative.html for more information.

2. My program is supposed to serve low income participants? How do I target my recruitment efforts towards this population without labeling or offending them?

Although you may be bound to your requirements to serve a select population, that doesn’t mean that you need to describe them as such. You should never explicitly put on your website or other marketing materials that your program is for “low-income people.” Instead, focus on marketing where your target population is likely to be receiving services or purchasing

goods, and make sure that your marketing message or “hook” relays how the program is relevant to their lives and what skills they may learn. For example, you may want to market in such places as laundry mats, Walmart, WIC offices, TANF offices, child support offices, affordable rental apartment buildings, Section 8 and public housing offices, Medicaid offices, job training centers and Head Start programs. Be sure that your marketing includes information that signals to potential participants that your program recognizes the difficulties and barriers that families face in participating in events – e.g. that your program is free, provides a meal and child care, is close to public transportation or provides transportation subsidies or that you can help families find other supports they may need, such as financial counseling or low-cost housing.

3. If your staff is having difficulty with recruitment efforts, how do you keep them motivated and redirect them to more effective recruitment techniques?

It is important to recognize that virtually all programs encounter difficulties recruiting participants at some point in time, particularly in the initial stages of a program. In spite of this challenge, program staff needs to be able to recognize and celebrate small successes, remembering that everyone has to start somewhere. Staff will need ongoing encouragement and acknowledgement of their efforts.

In addition to having a positive attitude and realistic expectations, there are steps programs can take to overcome recruitment challenges. First, programs should attempt to accurately diagnose the problem they have encountered. This will entail not only an examination of the overall recruitment process, but also an examination of each of the components that make up this process. These components include, but are not limited to: the marketing message(s); the methods and mediums being used to communicate with potential participants; the interaction between program staff and potential participants who express an interest in the program; and the amount and type of contact that occurs with participants between the time they enroll in the program and the actual start of the program.

With staff input, programs should brainstorm new strategies that might be more effective. For example, is the program being offered at a date/time/location that works for your participants? Does the staff feel comfortable talking about marriage education with potential participants? Ultimately, the best way to identify the most effective recruitment strategies requires tracking who comes in the door from each strategy. Programs need to ask participants, “Where did you hear about us?,” during phone inquiries and on intake forms during enrollment. Programs can then utilize this information to identify key formal and informal referral mechanisms (e.g., PSAs, word of mouth, brochures –including where the brochure was posted, grocery stores, other community organizations, etc.).

Finally, it is important to document what does and does not work, and how you’ve refined your program as a result. Demonstration projects offer the opportunity to learn from what does not work, in addition to learning from what does.

4. What suggestions do you have for recruiting and marketing to men?

Programs report success using male employees to recruit men. Men may feel that a program is more likely to understand them and be helpful if they see that other men are involved in and support the program. To market to, and to recruit men, programs will need to conduct outreach and marketing efforts that extend to places and activities frequented by men. This might include little league events, high school football games, bowling alleys, recreation centers, job training centers, or GED classes. Also, use a message that appeals to men. This might include asking, “Do you want to understand your wife better and enjoy your family even more?,” or “Do you want to strengthen your conflict management skills?,” rather than, “Do you want to work on your relationship?,” or, “Is your relationship in trouble?”

Men are typically more interested in a program that appeals to them directly, and may be less likely to participate if they feel pressured to do so by their female partner. As such, programs should not rely only on connecting with women; you need to make an effort to reach their partners as well.

It is also important, whenever possible, to use a male/female facilitator team in classes, so that both male and female participants feel that their point of view is likely to be understood.

5. What are some strategies for engaging people that work late/odd hours, shifting schedules and/or weekends?

Recruiting people who work a non-traditional schedule can be done, but you'll need to adjust your efforts to meet them where they are. Try to recruit during the early mornings and later in the day. We suggest having your outreach workers frequent places like the laundry mats, 24 hour grocery stores, diners, coffee shops and fast food or casual restaurants. Since your target population may not be able to call your office during regular business hours, make sure that your answering machine provides substantive information about your program, including a brief description of the program, any participant requirements you may have and the location, dates and times of upcoming classes. Along those same lines, it pays to make sure your website provides current information as well.

In order to accommodate participants' schedules, be sure to offer some of your classes on nights or weekends. That may mean that one or more days a week, your staff have mornings off and work the evening. Develop easy make-up policies (e.g., couples could make up a missed session in an individual meeting with a facilitator) and advertise that option to potential participants. Finally, make sure that your program communicates that participation would be a welcome break from families' hectic schedules, allowing them to connect with their spouse and participate in a friendly, supportive community. Also if you can, provide them a hot meal, child care, and a fun and romantic environment.

6. What are some effective techniques for marketing to and recruiting unmarried couples?

Unmarried couples may be in widely different stages in their relationships from casually dating to officially engaged, from childless, to having children from previous relationship(s) to currently expecting or parenting a shared child. It is important to recognize (and demonstrate in your marketing and recruitment)

that people may be in various levels of commitment and in their opinions about marriage. Our experience with other marriage education programs suggest that you may want to sometimes consider substituting the word "relationship" in the place of the word "marriage." Unmarried couples may be a little leery of marriage or think that your program is for married couples only. Don't banish the word marriage from your program, though. Once you are delivering services, it is important to provide support for, and deliver content on, healthy *marriages*.

Additionally, making sure your marketing message is framed positively will help you to recruit different types of couples, including those who may get defensive if they feel criticized or judged for their relationship status. Most couples will not be attracted to marketing that suggest problems in their relationships. Examples of positive messages include: "You two want what's best for your baby – what's best for you baby is the two of you"; "Learn what makes a relationship last"; "Take your love to a new level"; and "Let's make a good thing even better."

Target your marketing in places where you are likely to find your participant population. Look for engaged couples at bridal fairs, bridal shops, jewelry stores, ceremony and reception sites and wedding websites (e.g., theknot.com, weddingchannel.com). Expecting or parenting couples are frequently found in day care facilities, Medicaid and WIC offices, hospitals, obstetrician offices, birthing and breastfeeding classes, La Leche meetings, stores that carry baby and child items, Head Start programs and parenting education classes. You may have additional success recruiting parents from these formal organizations if you attempt to engage them as community partners. Finally, you may want to consider targeting your outreach efforts to dating couples at places like the movie theaters, romantic restaurants, dating websites, lounges, bowling alleys, concerts and college campuses.

7. How can I encourage both members of a couple to enroll in our program?

It is important to sell the benefits of attending your program as a couple. Participants should feel that attending your program is a "date night" for them – a time together without the children. Also, some couples may be more likely to enroll in your program

if they are first able to attend an informational orientation session to see if they “fit” with the program before committing to several sessions.

In our experience, programs are usually more effective at encouraging women to enroll in their services than men. For suggestions on marketing to and recruiting men, please see the answer to FAQ #4 above.

8. How effective are media campaigns in recruiting people early in a program’s implementation?

Media campaigns can be an effective way of recruiting participants, especially when a program is new and unfamiliar to the target population. However, media campaigns are not effective as a stand-alone recruitment strategy and should be used to augment or reinforce other recruitment activities.

Media campaigns can be quite expensive. Experts suggest that people need to be exposed to a message an average of three times before they are likely to take action, and those repeated exposures need to be factored into your media campaign strategy. Additionally, to be more cost effective, you will want to be very specific about the goals of a media campaign. Is it to recruit participants to your program, raise awareness about the importance of a healthy marriage or another purpose?

Experience suggests that programs that use media campaigns for recruitment purposes still report that most of their participants learned about the program through other methods (i.e., word of mouth or organizational referral), suggesting that media campaigns may be best viewed as a reinforcement of these other recruitment tactics. In order to track such outcomes for your own program, you may want to add a question to your intake form to measure where participants learned about your program.

9. Which is a more fruitful recruiting strategy – targeting a single population, or targeting a broad set of individuals?

There is not one definitively better recruiting strategy. Instead, there are pluses and minuses to both targeting strategies. We encourage you to read about their strengths and weaknesses below and develop the mix of the two tactics that will best suit your program, audience, and grant parameters.

Adopting a broad targeting strategy allows you to invite anyone your program comes in contact with to participate, thus increasing the size of your potential participant pool. This strategy works best for programs that have few restrictions on participant criteria, or that tend to come in contact only with people that are eligible for the program. On the flip side, targeting many groups of people may mean that your marketing is spread so thin that you may touch a large number of people, but not give them enough exposure to your program to motivate them to enroll. Additionally, you will have to develop a marketing message that is broad enough to appeal to a wide variety of people.

When you focus on a more narrow population, defining your pool of potential participants may be more straightforward. This means that it may be easier to describe your target population to potential referral partner organizations, to locate your population for marketing purposes and to craft a message that resonates well with your target participants. The drawbacks of a circumscribed targeting strategy include having a limited number of potential participants, which may affect your ability to reach target numbers, and the chance that you will have to turn down an interested, but ineligible, potential participant. You will have to, at some point in the enrollment process, confirm that a potential participant is eligible for your program, and if not, hopefully be able to refer them to programs you have identified for which they are eligible.

10. Can we receive a copy of the personality quiz that Family Expectations uses during their staff interview process?

Family Expectations uses a personality quiz as part of their staff interview process to help ensure that potential applicants are well-suited for the position. For example, a good facilitator would need to be engaging, outgoing and able to speak “off the cuff.”

Family Expectations uses an inventory from the book, "Living Your Colors," by Tom Maddron. The book costs about \$20 and is available at bookstores. While you may want to explore that option, you may be able to achieve the same goal of ensuring that a potential applicant fits the needs of a position in other ways. First, make a list of the kind of attributes you are looking for in a candidate, and remember that those may differ by position (i.e., it may be nice to have an outgoing accountant, but is probably more important that your accountant is meticulous and good at arithmetic). Then think of ways that you can probe for such characteristics. Ask candidates how they have behaved or would behave in certain situations. You may want to consider giving them practice tests, like teaching a session to your staff or balancing a fictitious program's books. Finally, you may want to do an internet search to see if similar personality quizzes are available. For example, Family Expectations uses another personality quiz as an icebreaker in their marriage education program (the Primary Colors Personality Test: 80¢ per copy at www.prepinc.com/Shopping/index.asp). Just remember that the results are not always completely accurate – quizzes are tools for exploration and discussion, not psychological diagnostic evaluations.

11. What strategies do you suggest for working with partner organizations as sources of participant referrals?

Start your outreach with organizations that you have already had contact with in the past. Then think about other organizations that your target population may access for goods and services. To effectively "sell"

your program to other service organizations you need to understand and convey how marriage education will benefit *them and their clients*– will you develop a bi-directional referral system, will referring to you lower their case load, will your services meet their families' needs? You need to meet with people from all levels of the organization – senior staff, supervisors and frontline staff to get buy-in. Meeting with these different levels will help ensure that you get the blessing of supervisory staff and that your program makes an impression on the case workers who will provide the actual referral. Some programs have found that a good way to convey the benefits of marriage education is to offer a session to the organization's staff.

After you've explained what the program is and how it will meet their needs, you need to discuss the referral process. Clearly explain who is and who isn't a candidate for your program. For example, explain that you do not want referrals of couples currently experiencing severe domestic violence. Finally, make the referral process as easy as you can for your partner organization. Streamline or eliminate paperwork so that staff burdens of work and time are minimized. Provide a phone number and contact name that referral partners can use to ask you more information or to provide to their clients for additional information.