



Reference Guide for Native American Family Preservation Programs: *Additional Resources*

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Operational Issues for Marriage Education Programs

Many practitioners put great effort into preparing to deliver healthy marriage content and recruitment activities.

For those who are new to workshop delivery, the logistics can demand equal time and preparation. A potential participant's first impression of your program can be the deciding factor in their involvement. Regardless of how helpful your program may be; neglecting factors like comfort, convenience and environment can negatively impact perceptions of and participation in your program. Remember that participants in your program have numerous demands on

Streamline your operation to increase the likelihood of maintaining the participants' interest.

their time. Streamline your operation to increase the likelihood of maintaining the participants' interest.

Below are some operational issues that you may want to consider:

Scheduling

People are generally busy! They may work long hours, care for children or have other commitments. Be conscious of the time commitment you are expecting.

- Schedule program activities at times that are convenient. Those times are often going to be evenings or weekends. Most participants will be against giving up an entire weekend day and attending more than one activity per week.

- Ask potential participants to indicate their schedule preferences during workshop sign up. Although you can not please all of the people all the time try to create a schedule that reflects the needs of the majority.
- Be aware of potential scheduling conflicts like holidays, religious celebrations and other events. Be flexible and willing to reschedule workshops as needed.
- Make sure that participants have enough time to arrive to your program. Keep in mind that they may be coming from work or other prior commitments. For example starting a weekday evening workshop at 6 or 6:30p may be better than 5 or 5:30pm.
- Be aware of the length of your activities. Two to three hours is about the longest that many people can devote to your program on a given day.



Transportation

Some of your participants will have vehicles and others will rely on other means of transportation. Make sure that participants have clear directions to your location. Make sure those without vehicles are clear about other convenient modes of transportation.

- **For drivers:** Make sure there is sufficient parking available nearby.
- **For public transportation users:** Make sure they have detailed information on bus and train stops/routes. Be sure that whoever answers your phone can provide good directions and information. You can keep schedules on hand for attendees.
- **For low-income participants:** Consider subsidizing transportation expenses by providing bus tickets, train tickets or gas vouchers for each session. Remember this when planning your budget.

Childcare

Providing childcare on-site may be the most convenient option for participants. This can however raise budgetary and liability issues. If you decide to pursue this option, think about some of the following points:

- Consider partnering with agencies in your community that already offer children's programs. A few options are the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, faith-based groups and non-profit childcare providers. These partners may allow you to use their facility to host your workshop, or if they are nearby, can offer drop-off childcare services.
- Think about what ages you will include and make sure that your programming is appropriate for that group. For example, programs for older

children and teens require very different staffing needs and resources than those serving infants.

- You can also provide childcare vouchers or reimbursement so that participants can secure their own childcare. This is particularly important if you are working with disadvantaged couples or individuals.
- When planning your program operations, identify childcare providers in your community that offer high-quality services, extended hours or reduced rates and provide that information to participants during registration.

Accessibility to participants during registration

When selecting a location, consider whether the space is welcoming and easy to navigate. Imagine what it would be like to walk through a large building complex where it is difficult to find the workshop space. For some this would signal them to turn around and go back home. If any aspect of the space feels intimidating or inconvenient, it may deter participants from proceeding.

When selecting a location, consider whether the space is welcoming and easy to navigate.

- Operating a secular marriage education program in a house of worship might also discourage participation from individuals or couples that are not of that faith.
- Holding your program activities in a facility that houses substance abuse or mental health or government assistance programs might also carry negative connotations and deter some participants.

- Think about whether the space you are using provides sufficient privacy for participants who may be uneasy attending a marriage education program to begin with.
- Try to locate a space that is accessible to people with disabilities.

Décor and Comfort

Consider whether your space is equally welcoming to men, women and couples.

Consider whether your space is equally welcoming to men, women and couples. You should make sure that any literature, posters and other decorations in your space appeal to both genders and depict both two parent families and single parents. You may need to bring decorations with you to achieve this kind of balance.

Also, consider whether the proposed space will be consistently available at the times you want to offer your program. Abruptly moving your program to a different location partway through a workshop series may confuse and inconvenience participants.

- Find out whether any other groups may be able to reserve the space you are considering or whether any other programs' space needs might take precedence over yours.
- Make sure that you will be able to access the space during evenings or weekends.
- You may want to consider paying at least a nominal fee to the managers of your space. Consider signing a formal contract or agreement guaranteeing your rights to the space at certain times.

Given that participants may be spending extended periods of time in your space, make sure it is comfortable. Sufficient seating, a mild temperature and minimal background noise will go a long way in promoting comfort. If you are working with pregnant women, take extra measures to ensure comfortable seating. Use extra pillows, blankets, plush love seats or other cozy amenities to maximize comfort. The way you configure your room is also important. A traditional classroom setup with desks or chairs in rows may appear academic and not very inviting. A circular setup will allow for a panoramic view. With large furniture though this setup may not be possible. Select your setup based on what is reasonable for the room and furniture size.

Signage

Make sure that your participants can find your program space and that they know when they are in the right place.

- Decide beforehand who will create and post signage before participants arrive.
- Place signs in parking lots and on the appropriate building entrance. Give further directions inside the building directing people to the correct room. You can never have too many signs!
- In addition, signage should clearly point out where your program is located while still being discreet and protecting the privacy of your participants.
- Make sure your signs "match" your registration materials. For example, if your marketing pieces advertised "Couples Workshop" but your signs say "PAIRS" because that is the curriculum you are using participants may be confused.

Program materials and equipment

It can be very frustrating to participate in a program or activity where the facilitator is not prepared. Participants should not have to wait for their facilitator to get ready.

- Set up equipment before participants arrive and understand how to operate it in advance.
- Test equipment. If you are using anything that plugs in to an electrical outlet (speakers, laptops, LCD Projectors, overhead projectors, DVD players, etc.) Test it before participants arrive.
- Have extra light bulbs, batteries, extension cords, power strips, ink pens, paper, workshop materials and other supplies on hand. Having a portable supply closet or bin on hand will be very handy if anything unexpected happens.
- Pre-determine who will be responsible for copying materials. Also delegate who will pick up and transport equipment and materials.

Breaks and refreshments

Breaks and refreshments are two simple ways to create a welcoming environment. The budgetary requirements of providing food are minimal but the benefits are countless.

- Be sure to include breaks if the program is longer than one hour. Studies on how adult learning show that it is difficult for most people to focus on content for longer than this. Remaining stationary may become physically uncomfortable for some participants.
- Providing refreshments will certainly add to the comfort of the participants in your program. Many

will be coming directly from work and will appreciate a meal.

- Try to offer a vegetarian food option. Also, avoid foods that contain, or are prepared with, wheat, gluten, peanuts and other common problem/allergy causing foods.
- If you don't have a refreshment budget, contact local businesses that may be willing to donate refreshments. Local businesses are often eager to be associated with positive community efforts. For example, there is a National bakery chain that has a policy to give away food at the end of the day. Identifying these types of programs will be helpful.

In order to stretch your resources, think about purchasing food in bulk from discount "big box stores."

- In order to stretch your resources, think about purchasing food in bulk from discount "big box stores." Purchase non-perishable items such as chips, crackers or snack packs so that you can use them for a future workshop and not waste them.
- Designate someone to purchase, deliver and set out refreshments at the program location. This can be a single staff person's responsibility or can rotate between staff and will allow you to focus on welcoming your participants and setting up program materials.

Preventing Staff Turnover Within Healthy Marriage Programs

Staff turnover is one of the leading concerns among employers.

Staff turnover is one of the leading concerns among employers. Losing experienced staff can affect the ability to meet program and organizational goals. The cost of turnover rises depending on the level of the position with the organization. These costs can range from 30 to 50% of yearly salaries for entry level jobs, up to 150% for mid-level, and as much as 400% for senior. This includes marriage education programs where up front training costs can be high, and good staff is needed for program success.

Good hiring habits, workers liking their jobs, and helpful ways to rate job outputs are key to keeping staff (this is true for full time staff, contractors and volunteers).

Good hiring habits, workers liking their jobs, and helpful ways to rate job outputs are key to keeping staff (this is true for full time staff, contractors and volunteers). Letting all staff members know that the organization believes these to be important is a priority. This is especially key within marriage education where services are voluntary and recruitment can be a challenge. Keeping staff inspired and feeling valued can help improve their performance as well as hang on to them as employees.

Many marriage education programs use a volunteer model where “staff” may be paid a stipend or receive

free training. To keep good volunteers performing well, they should be treated as staff. Volunteers play a critical role in complementing the work of full time employees. This is especially true in the marriage education field. Good volunteers will often express a passion for the work they are being asked to do. To have a volunteer feel like he/she is a key part of the organization is important. Many of the tips below apply to a volunteer workforce.

How this can begin to be carried out is described below.

1. Matching the right person to the job is half the battle; giving an **aptitude test and/or a personality profile** can help with this task. While this adds costs up-front it can save organization money later. When pairing marriage educators, these tools can be very helpful so you balance those who are fun and engaging with those who ensure curriculum loyalty.



2. Often what can make a difference in the interview process for a healthy marriage staff person is the **“passion” factor** – what life experience makes this job important to the staff person you are hiring. Often their own life experiences will help them with the difficult issues that come up in marriage education workshops.
3. It is important that anyone interested in the job understand if it is a **“non-traditional” position**. Not all jobs are set hours. Will this eight to five job need the staff person to come in earlier, work later, or work some weekends? If you are recruiting and delivering services to couples, staff will likely have to work weekends and/or evenings to meet the needs of your clients. These needs must be dealt with when selecting staff.
4. The use of **performance-based work agreements** can help make certain that goals and results are clear to everyone (this is especially true if you use contracted employees). This helps the staff person and supervisor identify strengths and weaknesses in order to reach expected outcomes and allow for more effective supervision. It also helps to keep everyone responsible and keeps both parties familiar with what is needed to succeed. Remember, the couples you serve can be a great source of feedback on your staff’s performance.

Supervision must be a priority that is supported by the whole chain of command.

5. Supervision must be a priority that is supported by the whole chain of command. Too often the need for regularly **scheduled supervision** can be pushed to the side. This can lead to a reac-

tion or crisis response to an issue that could have been treated in a prevention-like manner. Supervising the supervisor is also critical. Regularly scheduled supervision times can keep staff turnover low and makes bottom up communication easier.

The annual review is another way to give rewards and strengthen positive attitudes.

6. Regular supervision makes the **yearly performance reviews** easier and less threatening, but it is important to keep in mind this is what usually triggers **yearly merit increases** (not to be confused with cost of living increases). The reliability of this review process can be improved by getting feedback from peer staff, community-based agency staff, and consumers of services, creating a “360 degree” review. The annual review is another way to give rewards and strengthen positive attitudes.
7. Job performance goals and results, when applied consistently, can be good team building. Closely beside accountability are rewards **for performance**. While verbal praise and certificates can often work as rewards, cash bonuses to units or departments within an organization for outstanding performance can aid working together as a team, and raise performance levels. This can also fill in for wages and/or benefits.

8. Policies can be designed so that when a job becomes open, a search within the organization will be done first. **Internal mobility** can include a move from one job to another without

a promotion or a job upgrade. An upgrade in a job is always seen as a reward for outstanding performance, and a message that the organization values its workers.

A reward for staff also comes in the form of professional staff development and is not always on an as needed basis.

9. A reward for staff also comes in the form of **professional staff development** and is not always on an as-needed basis. Again, this is a way for an organization to show how a staff person is valued, but at the same time can be seen as a win-win situation where the staff person's (or volunteer's) skills are bettered. This, in turn, strengthens the organization.

A staff person's feelings about his/her work environment will have many effects on job results and desire to work for the organization.

10. A staff person's feelings about his/her **work environment** will have many effects on job results and desire to work for the organization. This has a lot to do with good connections between co-workers. This is shown by an attitude of shared caring and support between and among staff members of all levels in the organization. When these connections are made at the top they become common throughout the whole organization. Make sure staff members are "practicing what they preach" by using the same skills your program teaches couples. While staff may be thinking about other workplaces this kind of work environment will be missed.

11. Turnover of a facilitator or case manager can negatively affect the couple/family and result in poorer outcomes reports say. Efforts should be made to receive **advanced notice of turn-**

overs and allow for the chance to shift from the current case manager to the other thoroughly.

12. In marriage education workshops, it is common to have male/female **co-facilitators**. In some cases, people like to deliver workshops with their spouse. This is a management challenge because you then risk losing two staff members, instead of just one. Discourage the practice of hiring spouses to teach together. Pair them with another facilitator.

Using Volunteers Effectively in Delivering Marriage Education Workshops

In 2007, over 60 million citizens volunteered in their community.

In 2007, over 60 million citizens—about 26 percent of the U.S. population—volunteered in their community. People volunteer for organizations that support causes they believe in, have a good reputation and because these organizations ask them to volunteer. Recruiting the right people and putting them in the right positions can increase your organization's ability to reach more couples and families without the added expenses of hiring more staff. This tip sheet provides volunteer management techniques to assist your organization in more effectively managing volunteers for the benefit of your organization, your volunteers, and the couples and families you serve.

Volunteers need clear roles, accountability and structure. Since volunteers do not receive a paycheck, practitioners need to identify and respond to each volunteer's individual motivation.

Volunteers are, basically, unpaid staff. To manage them, you need to apply the same basic human resource concepts as you do for paid staff. Volunteers need clear roles, accountability and structure. Since volunteers do not receive a paycheck, practitioners need to identify and respond to each volunteer's individual motivation. They cannot be taken for granted; they must feel the work they do is of value.

Volunteer Recruitment:

According to *Independent Sector*, a leadership forum for foundations, charities, and corporate giving programs, 44 percent of those who volunteered in 2007 did so not because they were looking for the chance, but because they were asked. When looking for volunteers, don't overlook the people in your church, neighborhood or professional networks.

Volunteer recruitment strategies may be different depending on the position you are trying to fill. Remember, just like hiring someone, you want to recruit for a specific "position" or skill set. Consider the following position-specific recruiting ideas:

- ✓ *Couples Marriage Educators or Mentors* are couples who can teach or lead a group. Mentor couples must have a strong relationship and be able to set boundaries. A challenge here can be if one member of the couple is more outspoken or dominating over the other.



- Reach out to couples who have completed your program. Those who were very active in participating may want to give back to the program.
- Post volunteer openings on the bulletin boards of organizations with which you already have relationships (e.g., churches, neighborhood community centers, etc.).
- Contact local faith leaders for recommendations.

✓ *Teen and Young Adult Relationship Facilitators* have a good understanding of young people and are able to hold their attention and interest. Again, people with experience teaching or leading groups will be best prepared.

- Recruit through local colleges and universities. Students often need community service hours. Post requests for volunteers on dormitory or student cafeteria bulletin boards. Career services or student life offices may also be able to help.
- Call or email local fraternity or sorority chapters. Most chapters require their members to volunteer in the community.
- Contact social service degree program chairs and ask if they have any student recommendations. Many Master degree programs in child and family studies require students to do internships or volunteer.

✓ *Marriage/Relationship Educators* are the face and glue of your program. Great educators/group leaders are important for the success, strength

and operation of a program. Make sure you are looking for skilled workshop leaders, not just anyone interested in helping. It is difficult to teach someone to be a good marriage educator if they don't have some natural talent or experience.

- Contact neighborhood associations, churches, civic groups and other organizations that issue newsletters to their network of contacts. Ask if you could post your request for volunteers in their newsletters or list serves.
- If your program targets a specific community, recruit from that community when possible.

Finding the right volunteer for the job requires knowing what the job is and what knowledge, skills, and abilities a volunteer needs to do the job.

Picking Volunteers:

Finding the right volunteer for the job requires knowing what the job is and what knowledge, skills, and abilities a volunteer needs to do the job. Just like hiring paid staff, you would have different expectations for an event greeter than you would for a marriage education leader.

Develop Volunteer Position Descriptions – Develop a written job description that defines the duties assigned to the position and the training, education and experience that is needed to successfully perform the duties outlined. Be sure to include in the job description how many classes the volunteer will be expected to teach (see section on MOUs below). If the volunteer is expected to lead workshops for teens, set minimum experience requirements around leadership and working with youth. If a volunteer will be entering workshop data into a computer, require computer skills.

- ✓ *Create a Selection Process* – A clear selection process shows that your organization values this position. Requiring volunteers to complete an application and participate in a panel interview allows you to review written and verbal communication skills. An interview panel should include leadership, board representation, and at least one current workshop leader. This will allow for different opinions and increase the likelihood of selecting a volunteer who will fit well in your organization. If volunteers will be leading a group or teaching, the interview should include an opportunity for them to demonstrate these skills. Use the interview time to assess their availability to teach in the long-term, especially if you are investing in their training.

Volunteers, especially those who teach your classes, are often the main contact for your program participants. They have the power to make or break your organization's name.

Volunteer Support and Infrastructure:

Volunteers, especially those who teach your classes, are often the main contact for your program participants. They have the power to make or break your organization's name. A solid system for volunteers that is both supportive and holds the volunteer accountable is needed for success. The following elements are key to developing a supportive infrastructure:

- ✓ *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)* – A written MOU provides clear expectations, responsibilities and shows the system for accountability. It also serves as a reference point if there are questions. It should be detailed but user friendly.

A written MOU should define the organization's expectations of the volunteer, as well as what the volunteer can expect from the organization. Involving the volunteer in the development of the document leads to greater buy-in.

- ✓ *Written Policies and Procedures* – Like new employees, new volunteers need to know what the rules are and how the organization is run. Provide copies of written policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs). If your organization doesn't have them in writing, consider writing them to give consistency. Written SOPs allow your organization to run smoothly even when key staff members are gone. SOP's need to be clear. They do not have to be long.
- ✓ *Open Communication* – Regular meetings, emails and "touching base" phone calls can help keep communication lines open and prevent any problems. Open communication also helps volunteers feel that what they think is valuable. Listen to their feedback and look for ways to use their ideas.
- ✓ *Ongoing Training* – In addition to any necessary certification or curriculum training, ongoing training supports workshop expectations. Training may be offered on organizational policies such as handling domestic violence or child abuse, working with faith based providers or even CPR or emergency procedures. Look for other free professional development opportunities for your volunteers.
- ✓ *A Single Point of Contact* – If possible, one person in your organization should be responsible for volunteers; this helps better manage the process. Your volunteer will also feel more connected to your program if they know who to call if they cannot make it to an event, or who to go to if

they have questions.

- ✓ *Performance Review* - Even though volunteers are unpaid staff, they should still have performance targets. As with your paid staff, build in a performance review process for your volunteers. This will show the volunteer the importance you place on their position and give the volunteer feedback on what they are doing for your program.

Recognition doesn't have to be expensive, just sincere. Look for small ways to recognize your volunteers throughout the year.

Keeping your Volunteers:

Thanking your volunteers is important. They are not there for a paycheck, so volunteers deserve credit for their work and commitment to your program. Yearly appreciation events are helpful but not enough. Recognition doesn't have to be expensive, just sincere. Look for small ways to recognize your volunteers throughout the year. Consider the following:

- ✓ Highlighting them in your newsletter or on your website.
- ✓ Offering token appreciation gifts like coffee mugs or tote bags.
- ✓ Providing service pins for volunteer hours.
- ✓ Creating a "Wall of Fame" bulletin board in your lobby.

Volunteers want to make a difference. Creating a setting with the right balance of management and appreciation can increase their ability to help your organization meet its goals.

For more resources on volunteer management, please see these websites:

www.pointsoflight.org (for ideas on promoting volunteerism in your community)

www.volunteerresource.org (for books on volunteerism and appreciation gifts)

www.independentsector.org (for research and statistics on volunteerism)

The NHMRC would like to thank Robyn Cenizal for her contributions to this tip sheet. Robyn is currently serving as the Executive Administrator for the Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families Initiative, a program she co-developed and implemented in 2002. The program's objectives include increasing the number of prepared marriages, reducing divorce rates and encouraging financial and emotional support for children.

Characteristics of Successful Marriage Educators

Good marriage educators or workshop facilitators are essential to program success.

Although a strong curriculum is important, talented facilitators can make or break a healthy marriage program. Effective marriage educators are people with great facilitation skills and a passion about what they are doing.

It is difficult to discern personality characteristics in a resumé. However, it is not cost effective to invest in training for marriage educators who may not be the

It is difficult to discern personality characteristics in a resumé. However, it is not cost effective to invest in training for marriage educators who may not be the right fit for your program.

right fit for your program. Remember that there are some things you can teach (such as a curriculum, how to use a LCD projector, how to administer a pre/post test) and some things that are innate, such as a sense of humor, charisma, self-awareness and the ability to connect with a group. Below is a list of characteristics you may want to consider in hiring workshop facilitators:

Able to manage group dynamics

Group dynamics are a key to productive experiences for the couple in healthy marriage programs. You want a facilitator who can keep one person/couple from monopolizing the workshop or handle an individual with negative energy.

Support your mission

Good facilitators don't need to be marriage experts, but a strong marriage educator must believe in the mission of your program. They should "walk the talk" and apply the skills they are teaching in their own lives.

Committed and dependable

You want people who will be on time and prepared. People who are responsible, prepare for workshops, and come equipped with materials for the delivery of interactive workshops, for the entire length of your program.

Creative

Many curricula benefit from the creativity of facilitators who can enhance the materials through activities which illustrate the core curriculum messages.

Energetic and engaging

Working with couples/individuals over a multi-session series of workshops is hard work! Good facilitators



should be able to keep their energy level up and continue to engage the audience. (Having co-facilitators can help with this.)

Focus on education and empowerment

Marriage educators are teaching skills, not fixing people's problems. A good facilitator provides tools with practical examples that allow participants to create solutions for their own problems.

Hopeful

Believing in the couples/individuals they are working with and their ability to accomplish healthy relationships is essential.

A good facilitator will connect and empathize with the audience.

Know the audience

A good facilitator will connect and empathize with the audience. The ability to explain concepts and terminology through relevant examples will support learning.

Knowledgeable about community resources

Workshop participants may approach your facilitators about challenges they are currently facing. Although it is not essential, it is beneficial if your facilitators are aware of what supports exist in the community.

Non-judgmental

People in the marriage education workshop may share experiences or stories that your facilitator may not "approve" of and he/she needs to be prepared to respond in a non-judgmental manner and keep the group on track.

Successful workshop leaders will understand that adults learn in different ways and they will incorporate different teaching styles into the delivery of your program.

Respect boundaries

Facilitators must be comfortable setting ground rules in a workshop and keeping the couples/individuals focused on skill building, not problem sharing/solving.

Self aware

Even talented facilitators may not do justice to your program if they are freshly wounded by failed relationships or not in the "right place" emotionally to effectively lead healthy marriage workshops. A successful marriage educator must be aware of his/her own issues.

Understand adult learning models

Successful workshop leaders will understand that adults learn in different ways and they will incorporate different teaching styles into the delivery of your program.

Exemplify humility

Successful workshop leaders admit that their own acquisition of the skills is a work in progress and that they continue to grow daily.

Effective Facilitation: Tips for improving skills and engaging audiences

Having an effective facilitator is the key to a successful program.

Getting the most out of marriage and family skill building classes requires more than a good curriculum. Having an effective facilitator is the key to a successful program. A good facilitator is the leader of the class, is invested in the outcomes and the mission of the class, and is knowledgeable about process and course content. It takes time, effort, and practice to become a great facilitator. In addition to knowing the curriculum, there are a number of skills a facilitator can use in a variety of settings and situations.

A good facilitator is the leader of the class, is invested in the outcomes and the mission of the class, and is knowledgeable about process and course content.

There are three basic principles for becoming an effective facilitator.

- 1) A facilitator is a guide, who helps people become engaged in the classes and ultimately learn and use new skills.
- 2) A facilitator focuses on how people participate in the process of learning, not just the content of the class. This requires the facilitator to understand the needs of the group and keep the group on task while at the same time being flexible. A great facilitator encourages all members to participate appropriately and manages difficult people.

- 3) The final principle is that good facilitators are very competent in the subject matter, but also recognize that they are not the only expert in the room. Effective facilitators understand that the participants have a wide variety of life experiences and collective knowledge they can draw upon. Effective facilitators establish credibility with the group as they share their expert knowledge while encouraging participants to share their own experiences, creating an engaging learning environment.

Some curricula provide strategies for facilitation. Some people learn to facilitate over years of trial and error. Other people have taken courses on public speaking and facilitation. In other words, being an effective facilitator takes training and preparation. Below are some tips to help you become the best facilitator you can be:

- **First impressions count** - Dress appropriately and smile. Portray self-confidence. Greet each member as they come into class and make a personal connection. This creates a welcoming environment.



- **Be a good listener** - You can't expect participants to develop good listening skills without modeling the behavior yourself. When communicating with participants, facilitators should model turn-taking and reflective listening skills.
- **Encourage an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual respect for group members** - Demonstrate acceptance and respect as you interact with participants. Collaborate with class members to create "ground rules" that govern participation. Encourage them to include rules that ensure everyone is treated with acceptance and respect. When necessary, don't hesitate to enforce those rules. Participants learn best in an environment where they feel emotionally safe and are unafraid to ask questions and share their opinions.
- **Know your audience** - Good facilitators provide information that is relevant to their audience and share personal experiences when appropriate. An effective facilitator is culturally competent and will augment or adapt material if some parts of the curricula aren't culturally appropriate.
- **Be prepared and organized** - Plan to spend time preparing for your workshop and make sure you have all of your materials ready. Be sure that you have a backup plan if you rely on technology. Ensure that your plan is flexible enough to allow for participant comments and questions. Identify places in the curriculum where you can ask people to comment on what they have just heard. You will not want to cut off an interactive discussion because your plan did not allow time for participant engagement.
- **Ensure that the physical environment is conducive to participation** - Having a group set up in a semi-circle is an ideal way to facilitate com-

munication and connection. If tables are needed, be sure they are set up in a way to encourage group participation. Avoid rows. Avoid podiums at all costs!

- **Be yourself** - Use jokes and humor if that comes naturally to you or use examples or stories that you have heard/read that touched you. Personalizing the information in your own way can be effective at building a relationship with your group.
- **Use "icebreakers" to help participants get to know each other and to create a fun atmosphere** - It is a good idea to have a couple of simple "get to know you" icebreakers. Simple

It's a good idea to have a couple of simple "get to know you" icebreakers.

icebreakers not only help people to learn names and some basic information but also allow the group to feel comfortable with each other. While a basic icebreaker is not likely to be directly linked to the educational goals of the curriculum, they are important in setting the tone of the group. Icebreakers are a prelude to building group cohesion and emotional safety.

- **Use specific experiential exercises to build group cohesion and to illustrate important ideas and concepts** - For example, if the curriculum includes topics such as communication, trust building or conflict management; be sure to have a variety of activities that will help reinforce these concepts in a meaningful way. Be sure that the exercises are culturally, age and gender appropriate. Most icebreakers and activities can be easily adapted to the specific characteristics of the group.

- **Learning takes place on two levels: cognitive and affective**

- What does this mean? When a person learns how to work through a complicated algebraic equation that is an example of cognitive learning, it has to do with how a person thinks. How a person feels when they read the statement “complicated algebraic equation” is what is referred to as “affective” learning. Participants need cognitive information to make choices about significant life changes, while affective or emotional learning motivates people to maintain these changes.

- **Be knowledgeable about adult learning styles**

- Primary learning styles are visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Visual learners tend to learn best when concepts or ideas are conveyed graphically or are reinforced with images or video. Auditory learners tend to learn well when information is delivered orally, such as in a lecture or speech. Kinesthetic learners tend to learn by doing, rather than by just listening or observing. Great facilitators make sure they present their curricula using a variety of methods that will engage all participants, regardless of their learning style.

- **Have an array of video-clips from movies and TV to illustrate concepts (and to give facilitators a break!)**

- Develop a library of clips on topics such as commitment, conflict, gender differences and other relevant topics. Some suggestions include clips from “The Story of Us”, “Parenthood”, “City Slickers”, “Everyone Loves Raymond” and “War of the Roses”.

- **Understand the importance of nonverbal communication**

- Be sure that the way you sit or stand, your tone of voice, and your facial expressions match your message. Participants will only mirror back the level of enthusiasm for the topic they see expressed by the facilitator. Make sure

to position yourself in a way that you can easily engage and work with the group. Strong facilitators also pay close attention to the nonverbal communication of participants. Are participants engaged? Are they looking at and listening to you? Or, are they confused, distracted, or uninterested? Learn to read the nonverbal communication of the group and be responsive to what you see. You may need to adjust the pace of the presentation, change the sequence of some of the activities you have planned, take a break, or clarify some of the concepts you are teaching. Be sure to walk around and make eye contact with participants.

- **Be prepared to deal with difficult people**

- Difficult people can be “challengers”, “know-it-alls”, “off-task”, “negative”, “disruptors” or “distracters.” The facilitator needs to be comfortable re-directing these people and needs to be prepared to gently confront their behavior outside of the class or in the class if necessary.

- **Start and end each session with an opportunity for people to share what they learned or how they have used the skills**

- A ritual of sharing can encourage group cohesion and give people something to look forward to at the start of each workshop. Similarly, by summarizing key learning concepts at the end of each class and wrap up the session with a homework assignment that will continue the learning process until the next session. These skills are only effective if people use them at home, and “homework” assignments support that goal. Be sure to thank each person for their participation and time and to encourage them to return.

The NHMRC would like to thank Katherine Robredo, an independent consultant and expert in workshop facilitation, for contributing to this tip sheet.

Selecting Partner Referral Organizations

How can you effectively partner with referral organizations?

This tip sheet will provide guidance on 1) what a partner referral organization is, 2) why partner referral organizations are important, and 3) what you should look for in selecting partner referral organizations.

What is a “partner referral organization?”

A partner referral organization is another community organization or program that agrees to refer or send their clients to your healthy marriage (HM) program for services. Oftentimes, the referral arrangement works in both directions. In this manner, the partner

Partner referral organizations don't deliver the services, but deliver clients by referring them to your program.

referral organization does not deliver your HM services. Instead, the partner referral organization agrees to identify clients in their programs who would benefit or are interested in HM services, and refer these clients to your HM program, and vice versa, you would refer HM clients who need or would benefit from their services.

Why do I need partner referral organizations?

No program is an island, relying entirely on itself for success. Successful programs know that other community organizations are necessary to support

No Healthy Marriage program is an island particularly when it comes to recruitment.

and enhance their services and better meet the needs of their clients. In fact, successful programs know how to select and develop relationships with other community organizations. Community partners can strengthen HM programs by offering additional resources and facilities, providing input on improving the quality of services, leveraging organizational assets, and extending the reach of their program deeper into the community.

This is particularly true for recruiting potential clients into the program. No matter how well developed your program is, or how capable your staff and facilitators are, recruitment is an ongoing challenge for programs. Recruitment will become increasingly harder, more resource intensive, and time consuming



because you have to find more new participants within the target population. This may lead to burn out among staff as they feel that they have exhausted

The information and quotes in this tip sheet were informed by participants of a Moderated Audio Forum (MAF) hosted on August 22, 2007.

Participants were identified as experts on the topic by their Federal Project Officer. The participants of the MAF included:

- **Jennifer Baker**—Forest Institute of Professional Psychology
- **Cosette Bowles**—Alliance for North Texas Healthy Effective Marriages
- **Deborah Cave** Colorado Coalition for Adoptive Families
- **Carolyn Curtis** Healthy Marriage Project of Sacramento
- **Andrew Daire** University of Central Florida
- **Colleen Ellingson**—Adoption Resources of Wisconsin
- **Alicia La Hoz** Meier Clinics Foundation/Family Bridges
- **Dennis Stoica** California Healthy Marriages Coalition
- **Carolyn Wisenheart**—Texas/San Angelo

The MAF was moderated by Umi Chong and Patrick Patterson of the NHMRC.

their outreach opportunities. One way to avoid this is to set up productive referral partnerships with other organizations to facilitate referrals and the longevity of your HM Program.

What should I look for in selecting referral partner organizations?

Don't jump in too fast and partner with any or every organization in your community. It's better to do your homework and identify the right organizations with which to partner. While some experts recommend you go to the largest organizations in your community to get the "biggest bang for your time and resource investment," other experts argue that going to smaller organizations that have a "closer pulse on the community" pays off and yields an equal number of referrals.

Slow down and think strategically. What organizations share your passion and would give you the most referrals for your time and resource investment?

In any event, most experts agree that it's better to invest time upfront to identify community organizations that share the same passion for serving your target population and value healthy marriage. These partners can be productive because they understand what you offer and feel that your program will benefit their clients.

Criteria and Tips for Selecting Referral Partner Organizations

As one expert noted, "potential partners are initially very enthusiastic ... [however], good intentions are not [always] sufficient." Here are some criteria and tips experts highlighted to consider in selecting your referral partner organizations.

- Look for organizations that share your passion to serve the community but are not necessarily equipped with the capacity to do so. Alternatively, identify organizations that offer relationship education services but do not have the capacity to expand and serve new segments of the community.

Tip: When approaching these organizations, demonstrate how HM services add to the services they offer. HM services may fill a gap in their service offerings or complement their work. Identifying how your HM program meets their goals may be a way to pique their interest and build the relationship.

- Look for organizations with a proven history of successfully serving your target population and community. Proven history means looking beyond the glossy brochures and asking other community-based providers about their experience working with and delivering services in the community. For example, one grantee noted that they have encountered a few referral partners where “their materials looked nice and everything about them looks nice,” but upon further interaction, the partner really did not possess real substantive experience working with the community.

Tip: Ask members of your target population because reputations travel by word of mouth and they will know who the trusted organizations are.

- Look for organizations that have an established level of trust with your target population. This means the organization is welcoming and has provided positive experiences for your target population.

Tip: Don't discount less established organizations. Keep the door open and look for win win opportunities to work together. The following is a creative example. One HM program asked its existing referral partners to mentor less established organizations so that they can learn the ins and outs of organizational development. The mentor organization shared strategies on how to make referrals to outside programs, such as making referrals to the HM program.

- Look for organizations that are administratively and financially stable, as this can be an indicator of good business practices. Organized providers that have processes and procedures in place will have channels that make it easier for you to gain access to their staff and introduce your HM program or integrate your HM program into their referral system.
- Get an accurate sense of the number of referrals the organization can provide monthly or annually. This will allow you to have realistic expectations and hold your referral partner accountable. For example, one HM program found that roughly 25 percent of referrals translated into actual client enrollments into their HM program. Based on this finding, the HM program was able to work backwards to figure out the number of referrals

needed to meet their target enrollment numbers. The HM program then used this information as the basis for seeking additional referral partners so that they would generate their target enrollment numbers.

Tip: Think about stratifying referral sources according to the number of referrals that they are going to generate. For example, one program categorized their referral sources into tier 1 and tier 2 where tier 1 provides 75% of their referrals and tier 2 provides 25% of their referrals. Based on the productivity of referrals, this program stratified their level of effort and resources to devote to the referral partner.

- Look for organizations that are sensitive to your target population. For example, one HM program that serves ex-offenders knew that any organizations it partnered with would have to serve their clients whole heartedly without reservation or judgment.

Tip: If at first you don't succeed try, try again! In developing partner organizations as in recruiting participants into HM programs timing is everything, and persistence is key. A partner organization may not see the value of partnering when first approached, but may eventually see how their clients could benefit from your services.

- Know that there is variation among the same types of programs. For example, not every Head Start or Healthy Start is the same, so don't limit and determine your approach to them based on past positive or negative experiences.

For current information and strategies to help your healthy marriage program, visit the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) website at www.healthymarriageinfo.org.

Preparing for the Future: Ensuring Program Sustainability

Preparing for the future is a necessity for healthy marriage and relationship programs interested in program sustainability.

Managing the daily activities of a healthy marriage and relationship education (HMR) program can leave little time for thinking about the future. However, preparing for the future is a necessity for HMR programs interested in program sustainability. This tip sheet will: 1) define program sustainability 2) address important factors for achieving program sustainability and 3) provide guidance on how HMR programs can position themselves to carry on beyond the life of their grant.

What is program sustainability?

Program sustainability refers to the ability to maintain your program after your current funding stream expires. However, it may not be feasible to maintain your program exactly as it operates currently. Our panel of experts recommended that before delving into the details of how to achieve program sustainability, you and your stakeholders should brainstorm about the components of your program you want to maintain. You may choose to keep the core curriculum but reduce the number of ancillary events. Or, you might decide to work with additional partners or organizations to deliver some components that were previously delivered “in house.” Consider what elements are

The information in this tip sheet was informed by participants of a Moderated Audio Forum (MAF) hosted by the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center on August 6, 2008.

Participants were identified by their Federal Project Officer as running programs that have experienced success in sustainability efforts. The participants of the MAF included:

- ✓ **Francesca Adler Baeder**—Alabama Community Healthy Marriage Initiative (OFA)
- ✓ **Julie Baumgardner**—First Things First, Inc. (OFA)
- ✓ **Joan Butler**—Starkville Marriage Bureau (CB)
- ✓ **Robyn Cenizal**—Jacksonville Network for Strengthening Families (OCSE)
- ✓ **Leo Godzich**—National Association of Marriage Enhancement (OFA)
- ✓ **Pam James and Jillene Joseph**—Native Wellness Institute (ANA)

crucial to the mission of your program – those must be included in your definition of sustainability.

What are the most important factors to sustaining HMR programs?

Buy-in from the community is crucial to sustaining your program, according to our experts. To achieve community support, educate the general public and potential funders on the benefits of marriage to fami-

Ensure you have an effective mechanism for recruiting participants with them, you will not have a sustainable program.

lies and children. Panel members explained that in educating the general public, it is important to understand the cultural factors and phrases that resonate with your community. Additionally, couples who have completed the program and are willing to serve as role models or spokespersons for your program can become “marriage ambassadors” to your community. Our panel also reiterated the need to use the media to get the message out about your program. When offered a media interview, one expert suggested that using community leaders to advocate for the program can prove far more effective than having the program director use that same media spot. Panelists agreed that developing standardized organizational procedures and processes, delivering a quality program and ensuring an effective mechanism for recruiting participants are essential to program sustainability.

How can HMR programs position themselves from the outset for sustainability?

Thinking about program sustainability even before your program delivers services may seem like “putting the cart in front of the horse.” Not so, says our panel of experts. Positioning for sustainability early in the life of your project is key to long-term success. Collaborating and networking with community leaders are essential to securing long-term support. It is important to meet with representatives from other community organizations prior to developing your program to gain a sense of the unique needs of your community. Consider performing a formal community needs assessment, developing an initial question-

naire or conducting a baseline survey that measures a wide range of attitudes, knowledge, and skills with respect to relationships. Not only will this help you provide the most relevant

programming for your community, but the results of the survey can be used later to help document the progress your healthy marriage program has made toward key outcome measures. Surveys, along with collecting pre and post-test program questionnaires, can be powerful marketing and fundraising tools to support program sustainability.

What other elements, in addition to obtaining new financing, are important for demonstrating sustainability?

Document your program evaluation efforts. Demonstrate to funders how your project outcomes align with the wider research that has been performed in the healthy marriage field.

Panelists all placed a high value on program evaluation to bolster sustainability efforts. While stressing the importance of evaluation for both program refinement and advancing learning in the field, one expert noted that a limitation most healthy marriage programs encounter with regards

Early in the planning stages, form an advisory group that includes a diverse set of community stakeholders. Encourage your advisory council to share ownership of the program’s sustainability.

to scientific rigor is the lack of a randomly-assigned control or comparison group. Program evaluation data can go a long way toward helping your program achieve sustainability. When your data show positive outcomes, incorporate those outcomes into your public awareness campaign. Share encouraging outcomes with facilitators and partners, so that they get feedback on the fruits of their labor. In targeting additional funding, show how your project outcomes align with the wider research performed in the healthy marriage field.

Panelists also emphasized the importance of keeping in mind the type of program you are running when formulating your sustainability plan. A sustainability strategy for a grassroots public awareness campaign may be different than that of a faith-based organization that provides weekend retreats for married couples. As part of your sustainability plan, decide when and where you want to allocate staff and financial resources. For example, if you spent a lot of effort on marketing at the beginning of the program, you may not need to expend as many resources on marketing after your grant has ended.

Are there special sustainability considerations for HMR programs that are serving a specific target population or geographic location?

Regardless of the target population or area being served, healthy marriage programs need to understand the unique cultural needs of the community and population they intend to serve. Knowing your population well can help you frame your program in ways that resonate with them. For example, if you work with a population that typically values the precept of “family” more than “marriage,” you will want to draw clear linkages between healthy marriages and strong families. As one expert noted, connecting with community leaders and giving them ownership of the

program helps to foster cultural sensitivity – as well as attract additional donors.

For programs that cover multiple counties or large regions, our experts suggested selecting a curriculum for which training is inexpensive and easily attained. A curriculum that allows trained facilitators to train others to teach the curriculum may help ensure sustainability when resources are limited. Consider encouraging communication between communities participating in your initiative so they can share their experiences and learn from one another to make their service delivery more efficient and effective.

How can HMR programs locate additional funding opportunities?

Tip: Consider approaching health and wellness organizations for additional funding. Highlight the recent research findings regarding linkages between marriage and physical well-being.

Below are some criteria and tips experts to consider when targeting additional funding opportunities and potential funders.

- ✓ Maintain a broad view of national, state, and local organizations that could provide additional

resources for your healthy marriage program. Don't put all of your eggs in one basket when it comes to requesting resources. In approaching organizations, clearly communicate your mission statement and core values. Eliminate misconceptions by explaining what your program offers, and what it doesn't.

- ✓ Seek funding from private national foundations with family-friendly missions. When requesting funding, show how your mission aligns with

Tip: Consider approaching health and wellness organizations for additional funding. Highlight the recent research findings regarding linkages between marriage and physical wellbeing.

theirs. Still, stay true to your program's core values. Be wary of adapting your program's mission only to fit the needs of certain stakeholders.

- ✓ Work with policymakers and legislators to set aside TANF funds for marriage education. For more information on states that have used TANF funds to promote marriage and family strengthening activities, read the NHMRC's fact sheet, TANF Funds and Healthy Marriage Activities, at <http://healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/tanffundh-mact.pdf>.

- ✓ Talk with other grantees or organizations in your community about how they have achieved sustained funding. Established community organizations, even if they are not providing healthy marriage and relationship education, may provide a wealth of knowledge about navigating local funding streams.
- ✓ Look for classes in your community that teach organizations how to approach foundations for funding. Writing a grant proposal for a foundation requires a slightly different approach than developing a federal proposal. As well, foundations typically place a high priority on evaluation results, so be sure to include relevant data and evaluation outcomes.

For current information and strategies to help your healthy marriage program, visit the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) website at www.healthymarriageinfo.org.

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The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) is a clearinghouse for high quality, balanced, and timely information and resources on healthy marriage. 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.