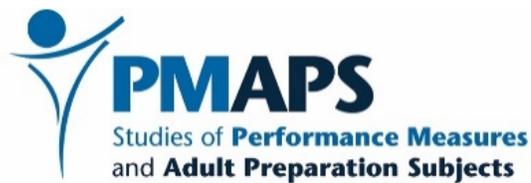


# CONCEPTUAL MODELS FOR ADULTHOOD PREPARATION SUBJECTS WITHIN THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY EDUCATION PROGRAM (PREP)



PREP: Studies of Performance Measures and Adulthood Preparation Subjects  
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## **X. CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING CONCEPTUAL MODELS TO SELECT AND IMPLEMENT APS TOPICS IN PREP**

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## X. CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING CONCEPTUAL MODELS TO SELECT AND IMPLEMENT APS TOPICS IN PREP

PREP grantees have requested guidance on expectations for the design and implementation of their APS programming. The APS models—that is, the schematics and the supporting narratives—and the unified framework presented in this report begin to provide this guidance. The models and framework can help current and future PREP grantees, and other PREP stakeholders, to understand, choose, and develop APS content to target specific outcomes.

However, there are limitations to the guidance these models can provide. This is due in part to the variety of populations, settings, and potential approaches used by PREP grantees. No models could cover all possibilities or provide guidance for all situations that PREP grantees and providers will need to consider. Therefore, these models are not intended to serve as detailed implementation guides. Also, the study team did not (1) conduct a systematic review of intervention literature that would support drawing conclusions about the causality of specific interventions relative to the outcomes identified in each model, or (2) identify the exact amount of programming that should be provided to achieve those outcomes. Therefore, grantees will continue to have discretion over how to design and implement their APS programming.

The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), both within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), contracted with Mathematica and its partner, Child Trends, to develop conceptual models for the adulthood preparation subjects (APSs) and to determine how they fit within PREP programming.

PREP grantees must adhere to four program requirements: (1) implement evidence-based or evidence-informed curricula; (2) provide education on both abstinence and contraception for the prevention of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV; (3) educate youth on at least three of six APSs; and (4) focus on high-risk populations, such as youth residing in geographic areas with high teen birth rates, adjudicated youth, youth in foster care, minority youth, and pregnant or parenting teens. PREP grantees are also required to implement a positive youth development (PYD) approach in their programs. Grantees have discretion in how to meet these requirements. This discretion allows them to tailor their programs to fit the needs of the targeted population and their priorities.

The intention of supplementing pregnancy prevention programs with APS content is to further prepare youth for the transition to adulthood. It is hypothesized that incorporating APS content will strengthen the ability of programs to reduce sexual risk behaviors and expand the range of outcomes that programs affect.

This report is a first step toward helping PREP grantees understand issues of integrating and implementing APSs into their programming. The information presented herein reflects grantee perspectives and published literature on the APSs. The primary aim of this report is to provide grantees with a framework to support the implementation of APSs in their projects.

This chapter discusses how grantees can use the conceptual models and unified framework to support the design and implementation of their programs. The chapter ends by proposing future directions for the development of additional resources and guidance to supplement the models, as well as future directions for research.

### A. Potential uses of the APS conceptual models and unified framework

Chapters III through VIII present the content of the six APS conceptual models. The study team developed and refined these models through an extensive process that involved a literature

review, interviews with PREP grantees, and reviews and input from PREP grantees, stakeholders, and experts. The models provide expanded definitions for the APSs and present theories of change for how grantees can use APS programming to help youth. They also contain several other components: precursors that influence youth; topics for inclusion in the APS; design and implementation features to use for PREP programming; and outcomes that might be affected by including programming on the APSs. Each model contains both a schematic that presents a high-level overview of the model and a supporting narrative with detailed discussions of each component. Previously, there was little information or guidance about APSs and incorporating them into PREP. The models make a substantial contribution to the PREP program and its grantees by filling in this gap with rich, extensive information in one source tailored for PREP grantees.

Now that the APS conceptual models and unified framework are available, PREP grantees can use them (1) to understand APSs, (2) to choose APSs, (3) to develop APS content, and (4) to target specific outcomes. These models can also help other PREP stakeholders understand the APSs and support grantees' APS programming. Because the models can inform grantees at any stage of development and implementation of such programming, they should be useful to all grantees, regardless of the status of their APS programming. This section discusses considerations for each potential use; grantees participating in the stakeholder review mentioned several of these.

**Understand APSs.** Each model—which includes a high-level schematic and a detailed supporting narrative—is designed to help PREP grantees and stakeholders understand the topics that fall under each APS and how to design and implement programming for the APSs. The models contain other useful information, such as the contextual factors that affect youth in PREP and the theory of change for how incorporating the APSs into PREP programming can help improve youth outcomes. Although the models should be useful for anyone involved with PREP, they might be especially useful for people new to PREP, such as new program staff or future grantees who might not be familiar with the APSs. The models introduce individual APSs and present terminology and other information needed to understand each subject. For example, grantees can have new staff learn about APSs from the models. Grantees or facilitators can also use the models with staff in implementation settings or with other partners. Grantees providing PREP in schools, for example, could use the model schematics to give a high-level overview of the APSs to school and district staff. Finally, grantees could use the information in the models to help develop grant applications, to help ensure that their proposed activities align with the topics identified for the APS, or to illustrate hypothesized linkages between activities and intended outcomes.

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**Choose APSs.** Grantees may also use the APS conceptual models and unified framework to determine which APSs to include in their programming. Grantees can do this by first identifying potential curricula or by reviewing the models to see which protective factors, risk factors, or specific topics are of interest to them. If grantees select their curricula first, they should review the content to identify which if any APS topics are adequately and appropriately covered. Conversely, grantees can first review the topics in each model and then choose which APSs to include based on the topics on which they want to focus.

When selecting APSs, grantees need to consider the number of APS topics they will cover and the depth of coverage in their programming. Grantees do not need to address every topic identified in the model for the subject. Instead, they can select the topics of greatest interest or relevance for their population. However, to achieve desired outcomes related to the APSs, grantees should ensure that they thoroughly cover the subjects they select. That is, programs need to include enough topics identified for the subject in their PREP programming. Grantees should also cover selected topics thoroughly so that youth understand them and benefit from the activity or material. While additional research is needed to identify how much programming is sufficient, grantees need to ensure they intentionally cover their selected APSs for the programming to be meaningful to the youth.

**Develop APS content.** Once grantees know which APSs and related topics they will deliver, they can use the conceptual models to help refine and/or develop their APS programming. Grantees can search for curricula, activities, or other resources that focus exclusively on APS content; curricula are more likely to cover the topics broadly across an APS, and other resources might be more targeted to a specific topic or subgroup of topics within the APS. The design and implementation sections of the APS conceptual models can help grantees determine how to deliver that content within their PREP programs. The unified framework also describes how to broadly incorporate positive youth development principles in PREP programming for any APS.

In some cases, grantees' existing curricula and activities may omit a specific APS topic that the grantee elects to include. In this case, grantees can use the models to guide development of supplemental programming for that topic. First, grantees would need to identify gaps between the topics they will to cover and what is already covered by their existing curriculum or programming. Grantees can then identify (or develop) supplemental materials that address these topics, incorporating recommendations from the models' sections on program design and implementation. Grantees can add this supplemental programming to existing lessons or offer them as supplemental activities not connected to the main program (as after-school activities, parent nights, or community education).

**Target specific outcomes.** The APSs are related to several potential outcomes, both enhanced (outcomes related to the prevention of pregnancy and STIs among youth targeted by PREP) and expanded (outcomes not related to the prevention of pregnancy and STIs among youth). Grantees who know which outcomes they want to target can use the conceptual models to see whether and how each APS might support the enhanced or expanded outcomes they seek. Alternatively, grantees who have not chosen specific outcomes to target can review the outcomes in all the models, decide which ones are most important to them, and then select APSs based on which subjects target those outcomes. In both cases, grantees can use the unified framework to see how outcomes overlap across APS conceptual models, and then use the individual models to understand how and why each APS might help achieve those outcomes. Grantees can also design evaluation research questions and plans based on the outcomes they hope to achieve.

## **B. Limits of the conceptual models and tailoring APS programs**

There are important limitations on how to use the APS conceptual models. The models are not designed to be prescriptive, for two reasons. First, grantees serve a wide variety of populations and operate in many different settings. They are constrained in the time and resources available to deliver programming on at least three APSs, and there are many different approaches to covering the APSs. Second, the models cannot resolve every question or provide definitive guidance. The study team did not design its review of the literature to support identification of elements that had evidence of effectiveness or to identify optimal amounts of programming. This report provides the research background from known literature to support and guide development of resources and recommendations around the amount of programming. In some areas, it might be possible to provide more guidance after a further, intensive examination of the literature. However, some questions must remain unanswered simply because there is not yet enough evidence, and more research throughout the field is needed. In several areas, the models deliberately provide no guidance. They do not specify how many hours grantees should spend on each APS, how many topics grantees should cover within each APS, or which curricula or resources grantees should use to cover each APS.

Instead, the models provide an overview and a range of possibilities so grantees can adapt them for their own programming. Certain model components will be more or less relevant depending on the grantee's situation. Accordingly, grantees do not need to follow or cover every piece of the model. The study team developed these models with the expectation that grantees could provide APS programming effectively without covering every topic, fully implementing every program design and implementation approach, or targeting every outcome. Instead, grantees should tailor their APS programming based on the circumstances they face, including their population and setting, available resources, and past experiences delivering programming.

At the same time, although grantees should work within their context, they should also ensure that their selected APSs are well covered. Although the models cannot and do not quantify amounts of time to spend on each topic, grantees should cover the APSs with enough breadth and depth, and provide a sufficient level of programming, to plausibly improve youth outcomes. Providing only a light touch on each APS is unlikely to result in the intended outcomes. In addition, research on evidence-based programming more broadly has concluded that sufficient amounts of programming are needed to have an impact, but additional research is needed to quantify what sufficient programming is in the context of PREP and the APSs (Hammond et al. 2007; Lundgren and Amin 2015; Child Trends 2014).

The program design and implementation section in each model recommends strategies grantees should consider, many of which involve tailoring programs. These strategies have different levels of evidence that they are effective, but they present potential ways for programs to prepare and deliver APS programming that fits the settings and needs of their youth. Key points from these sections include:

**Grantees should tailor programming to meet the needs of their target population of youth.** Grantees should consider tailoring their program based on multiple dimensions of their target population. A few examples of when it might be appropriate to tailor programming to a particular youth population include:

- **Age.** Grantees might serve youth of different ages, ranging from middle school to high school to older adolescents. This may be especially challenging for grantees who serve different ages of youth simultaneously, though grantees could try strategies such as combining age groups for some activities so youth can learn from each other.
- **Developmental level.** Grantees should also consider that youth at the same age may be at different developmental stages, and therefore the topics and content may not be appropriate for all youth based on age alone. Programming should consider not only youths' ages but also where youth are developmentally.
- **Gender.** Participants' gender is also an important consideration for grantees, who need to decide whether to provide combined or separate programming to boys versus girls for some or all APSs. For example, grantees may choose to discuss sensitive topics in single-gender groups instead of in integrated gender groups.
- **Living arrangements.** Grantees should be especially careful to adapt their programming to youth who do not live with one or both parents, especially where the APS suggests involving parents, caregivers, or trusted adults.

**Grantees should tailor their programs to the settings in which they provide programming.**

Grantees might work in school systems, where they provide in-school or after-school programming, or in other community settings, such as YMCAs or homeless shelters. Logistical aspects of APS programming, such as the schedule and length of sessions, might have to be adjusted to fit the setting. For example, grantees providing in-school programming have to fit sessions within the school's class period time, which might be as short as 50 minutes. Grantees might also need the partners with authority over these settings to approve APS content before grantees can deliver it. For example, in many school settings, district leaders or the school board must approve programming ahead of time, and sensitive topics may be controversial.

Other grantees might work in specialized settings, including alternative schools, residential or transitional-living settings, and juvenile justice settings, or serve a specialized population not specific to a setting, such as pregnant and parenting youth. These youth might need APS programming specifically tailored to the challenging circumstances of their lives; they might also need more intensive programming or supplemental services, compared to other youth. These settings also present logistical issues. For example, grantees delivering PREP in juvenile justice facilities might not be able to use the same technology or equipment they could elsewhere. Because many youth have short stays and quick transitions in and out of alternative schools or residential settings, grantees might need to condense programming into a smaller number of longer sessions that can be delivered within a brief time frame.

**APS programming should actively engage youth.** For APS programming to be effective, it should be interactive and participatory, and involve building skills and providing opportunities to practice those skills safely in real-life situations and experiences. As described in the unified framework, a key principle of the PYD approach required of PREP grantees is engaging youth in their communities. There are multiple opportunities for actively engaging youth in APS programming. Grantees can offer role-playing opportunities, use social media and technology to engage youth in a variety of formats, or turn activities into games to help youth have fun while reinforcing APS lessons. Grantees have developed an array of APS-tailored strategies for

engaging youth, such as a “date night” event on how to have a fun and safe date (healthy relationships); a board game activity on how to budget needs and wants (financial literacy); and college fairs and visits (educational and career success). Grantees should think creatively about how to actively engage youth in ways that reinforce the lessons being taught, and thereby improve youth outcomes.

**Grantees should carefully consider the feasibility of engaging parents, caregivers, and other trusted adults.** Parents and caregivers are uniquely influential in youths’ lives, and along with other trusted adults, they can support and protect youth during their transition to adulthood. Grantees can use a number of strategies to engage these important adults, such as assigning youth to discuss APS-related topics with them at home or outside of PREP programming, involving them directly in the APS programming provided to youth, or providing separate APS activities through education for parents, caregivers, and trusted adults. This is most relevant for the parent-child communication APS but also applies to the other APSs. For example, for the educational and career success APS, grantees could engage parents in their child’s postsecondary planning, or for the healthy life skills APS, grantees could encourage parents to model the skills discussed during programming.

These approaches can have several advantages for parents and youth. Gaining parental buy-in and engagement can help parents communicate their values and expectations to youth, give parents more knowledge and confidence to reinforce values and lessons from the APS topics, and help parents continue supporting youth. However, grantees face several challenges and barriers to engaging parents, caregivers, and trusted adults. First, not all youth live with their parents (for example, youth in foster care or incarcerated youth). Other caregivers serving in a parental role or other trusted adults could get involved, and grantees should take an inclusive view of which adults to engage. However, other adults might not be able to play the same role that a parent or another caregiver in a parental role would. It also might not be advisable to engage some parents or caregivers. For example, parents might have their own discomfort with money or be involved in an unhealthy relationship, and feel unable to help their children with those subjects. Some youth might not feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics with their parents, such as their decisions in dating relationships.

Logistically, getting parents and other adults to attend PREP activities can be difficult given parents’ work schedules and other demands on their time. Grantees also might not have sufficient resources to provide additional activities for parents and other adults. For example, a grantee that provides APS programming during the school day would probably need to add evening activities that parents could attend. However, they might not have enough staff time or funding or have space to provide those additional activities.

**Staffing PREP programs should account for APS programming.** Currently, the same staff often deliver both sexual health and APS content under PREP. This can be advantageous because staff can cover overlapping topics, connect topics across APSs, and have more time to get to know and connect with the youth they serve. Many skills necessary for this work, such as those related to facilitation and classroom management, are relevant to both PREP programming and the APSs. However, staff will also need content knowledge about the APS and in some cases APS-specific skills, such as in modeling healthy relationships. Grantees should not assume that training required for the PREP/curriculum for the prevention of pregnancy and STIs is sufficient

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for delivering APS programming. Instead, staff who deliver APS programming should have training so they have the skills and knowledge to teach the relevant APS materials and to answer participants' questions about the topics. Grantees can also bring in guest speakers to cover specific topics or provide supplemental activities. Using guest speakers can be especially helpful for topics or activities that require specialized expertise, such as discussing credit and debt for the financial literacy APS or covering mental health topics for the adolescent development APS.

### **C. Future steps**

This multi-year study was funded to develop and refine conceptual models for all six APSs and a unified framework. During interviews and stakeholder reviews, current PREP grantees and providers requested guidance and support beyond what the models are intended to address. They wanted to know how much programming to provide for each APS—that is, how many hours of content to devote to each APS; how many of the topics listed under each APS to provide; and how much detail to cover for each topic within an APS. Grantees and providers also wanted to know where to find evidence-based or evidence-informed curricula to use for their APS programming, and how to adapt those materials to their target populations and program settings. Some asked how to integrate APS programming into their evidence-based curriculum for the prevention of pregnancy and STI prevention among youth without affecting fidelity. Others wanted to know how to provide enough programming on both pregnancy and STI prevention and APSs given the time constraints in many of their program settings. Others requested resources on training facilitators and other staff. Some grantees also sought guidance on assessing the quality of their APS programming.

Although the present study was not designed to answer these questions, additional steps, described below, could provide further support to grantees about implementation of APSs in PREP.

**Develop resources to help grantees deliver APS programming.** Part of this step would be to develop resources related to the guidance grantees requested. This could involve additional research to develop recommendations related to the amount of programming on each APS needed to achieve the intended youth outcomes. It could also include guidance on how to adapt materials or integrate them into existing programming without affecting fidelity.

As suggested by stakeholders, another part of this step could involve providing additional resources to support grantees' implementation of the APSs, including guides and lists of evidence-based curricula for the prevention of pregnancy and STIs; lessons or other resources relevant to each APS; case studies and other detailed examples of how PREP grantees include APSs in their programming; and simulations and tools to help them walk through decisions about APS programming. If few APS-focused curricula exist, one step could be to develop new ones aligned with the models. These resources could be informed by additional research on APS programming in PREP, as discussed below.

**Conduct additional research on how grantees cover the APSs in PREP programming and on the needed amount of programming.** At this time, there is no centralized information on how grantees teach APSs or what topics they cover under each. Although the grantee interviews and stakeholder review collected some information about grantees' current programs, it was limited in scope. Additional research could learn from all grantees and use multiple methods,

such as surveys, interviews, and on-site observations. This information could then be compared to the models to assess alignment, identify where gaps tend to occur, and describe common strategies and promising practices that grantees use to tailor their programming. This research could also help grantees understand what a sufficient amount of APS programming is.

**Rigorously examine how much APS programming to provide to achieve the intended outcomes.** To address grantee and stakeholder requests for specific guidance on the amount of APS programming to provide, rigorous research could determine the minimum amounts of programming necessary to achieve the intended outcomes. This research should also explore whether or not covering three APSs within PREP is necessary for achieving outcomes, or if more or fewer APSs are needed.

This research could also identify the causal connections between APSs and the enhanced and expanded outcomes. For example, are there causal links between financial literacy programming and enhanced outcomes? What are the impacts of healthy life skills programming on outcomes beyond alcohol and substance abuse, such as adolescent pregnancy and STIs/HIV? Do the identified outcomes still hold true with especially vulnerable populations, such as homeless and runaway youth or pregnant and parenting youth?

While additional research and resources on the APSs would be useful to the field, the models presented in this report represent an important step in refining the definition and delivery of the APSs.