

RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMMING: TWO APPROACHES TO SERVICE DELIVERY

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Introduction and background

Today, nearly one in three children in the United States—more than 20 million—live in a home without their biological father (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Although there is strong consensus on the important role of fathers in children's development, some fathers face significant barriers to positive involvement with their children. These barriers include an inability to provide financial support due to low earnings or lack of employment, dissolution of relationships with the children's mothers, incarceration, and unstable housing (Cabrera et al. 2007; Marsiglio et al. 2000; Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2004; Carlson 2006; Hofferth 2006).

Since 2005, Congress has funded the Responsible Fatherhood (RF) grant program, which supports service interventions to alleviate these barriers. In accord with the legislation, the 2011 Funding Opportunity Announcement required that RF grantees promote fathers' development of parenting and relationship skills as well as economic stability.¹ While all grantees offer this content, their programs vary in design and structure, including the amount and focus on each element, the sequence and duration of services, and the frequency and mode of service delivery. These can all affect the type of content and amount of services received by fathers.

This brief describes four RF grantees and how their different approaches to service delivery may address the needs of fathers, influence their engagement and participation in services, and affect the program content to which they are exposed. The research reported here is part of the Administration for Children and Families' multicomponent Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation of selected grantees from the 2011 cohort. Recognizing that RF programs are continuing to grow and develop, the PACT evaluation is intended to provide foundational information that can be used to guide ongoing and future program design, implementation, and evaluation efforts, and to serve as an initial building block in the evidence base for programming in this area. It approaches research questions from several angles in order to tell a more complete story about the programs and participants. PACT includes three research components related to these RF programs:

- Program design and operations (process study)
- Fathers' perceptions of their roles as parents, partners, and providers (qualitative study)
- Effects of the program on fathers' lives (impact study)

¹ The legislation requires that grantees offer content in these areas, but because participation in all programs is voluntary, fathers cannot be required to participate in all three areas.

While all grantees offer content in parenting, relationship skills, and economic stability, their programs vary substantially in design and service delivery approach. These implementation factors can affect the type of content and amount of services received by fathers.



Table 1. Two approaches to service delivery

	Integrated cohort	Open-entry workshop
Core services	Workshops with integrated content and a prescribed sequence	Separate workshops for each content area, fathers have flexibility to choose workshops
Emphasis and sequence of content	Early content emphasizes personal development as a foundation for building employment, parenting, and relationship skills	Fathers encouraged to complete a parenting workshop first, followed by a relationship workshop and/or employment services
Intensity/duration	Higher intensity/daily participation	Lower intensity/weekly participation
	84–240 hours	24–72 hours
	22–32 sessions	20–28 sessions
	2.5–6 weeks	20–28 weeks
Attendance	Fathers progress as a cohort at a set pace	Self-paced, open-entry, open-exit workshops

Source: Site visits and program documents.

(such as for a job interview, court or parole meeting), and at the Family Formation Program, fathers who aren't attending regularly in the first week must restart with the next group.

The structure and sequence of integrated cohort workshops emphasize that personal growth is fundamental to building the skills needed for stable employment, responsible, nurturing parenting, and healthy adult relationships. At the outset, staff at the Family Formation Program challenge fathers to confront and take responsibility for their problems, while providing support from staff and peers who have overcome similar challenges. As men adjust their mindsets, workshop leaders begin engaging them in content on parenting, relationships, and workforce preparation, only adding active job search in the final two weeks of the workshop. At Successful STEPS, staff begin by addressing fathers' socio-emotional development, for example focusing on topics such as emotion regulation. Job readiness topics, such as

Two grantees in PACT take an open-entry workshop approach that provides a menu of lower intensity services that fathers can join at any time.

Connections to Success

Program Name	Successful STEPS
Location	Kansas City, Kansas Kansas City, Missouri
Approach	Integrated cohort
Core Services	Daily workshop for two and a half weeks; integrates content in personal development, employment, and parenting Separate weekly workshop on healthy relationships for graduates of the integrated workshop
Workshop Curricula	
Parenting	Quenching the Father Thirst
Employment	Developed by Connections to Success
Relationships	Ready for Love

Fathers' Support Center

Program Name	The Family Formation Program
Location	St. Louis, Missouri
Approach	Integrated cohort
Core Services	Six-week daily workshop; integrates content in personal development, parenting, employment, and healthy relationships
Workshop Curricula	
Parenting	Father Development for Young Fathers
Employment	Developed by Fathers' Support Center
Relationships	Within My Reach

resume development, are covered after fathers have had an opportunity to address their personal barriers.

Open-entry workshop programs offer fathers support in the three required content areas through a menu of separate workshops, with programming that meets less frequently than the integrated programs. Both the Center for Fathering and the FATHER Project offer stand-alone workshops in parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability, typically during weekly one- to two-hour sessions. The Center for Fathering offers each of its workshops in an eight-topic sequence, whereas the FATHER Project's parenting and relationship workshops are offered in 12-week cycles. Workshop sessions do not build on one another, so fathers may begin attending a workshop at any point and take as long as they need to complete the series. Although fathers may choose to participate in any or all of the services, program staff generally encourage fathers to complete the parenting workshop first. These programs also prioritize the assessment of fathers' needs. The FATHER Project, for example, assesses fathers and develops a "fatherhood plan" with each participant which specifies the sequence and type of services he should receive.

Programs serve low-income, nonresidential fathers

Fathers in the RF programs participating in PACT typically have low incomes, live apart from their children, and face an array of challenges (Table 2). The majority are African American and, on average, in their mid-30s. Most have low levels of education, employment, and earnings; a history of incarceration; and unstable housing. On average, they have fathered multiple children, often with more than one woman, and frequently are no longer romantically involved with the mother of their children.

Service delivery approach linked to fathers' characteristics

Despite the similarities among fathers in these programs, some differences emerge by the type of program they attend and its approach to service delivery. Fathers in the two integrated cohort programs face more challenges than those in the two open-entry workshop programs (Table 2). More than one-third of fathers in the integrated cohort programs lack a high school diploma or GED, compared with only about one-quarter of fathers in the open-entry workshop programs. Although a larger share of fathers in the open-entry workshop programs have been convicted of a crime, fathers in the two integrated cohort programs have served more time in prison and are more likely

Fathers in the two integrated cohort programs face more challenges than those in the two open-entry workshop programs.



Table 2. Baseline characteristics of enrolled fathers			
	Integrated cohort programs	Open-entry workshop programs	Total PACT RF sample
Age (years)*	34.9	35.8	35.3
Black, non-Hispanic (%)*	89	73	81
Hispanic (%)*	2	9	5
Have high school diploma or GED (%)*	65	72	69
Earnings in last 30 days (%)			
No earnings	50	51	50
\$1–\$500*	32	22	27
More than \$500*	18	27	23
Unstable housing (%)*	56	52	54
Ever convicted of a crime (%)*	69	76	73
Longest time in correctional institution (years)*	1.9	1.4	1.7
On parole (%)*	37	30	34
Number of children*	2.7	2.5	2.6
Have children with multiple mothers (%)*	51	43	47
Live with at least one child (%)	22	22	22
Have legal child support arrangement (%)*	65	52	58
In romantic relationship with mother of at least one child (%)	35	33	34
Spent time with at least one child in the prior month (%)	83	77	80
Sample size	2,333	2,401	4,734

Source: PACT baseline survey. Includes all fathers enrolled in the PACT evaluation between December 9, 2012 and August 22, 2014. Some programs served additional fathers who were not eligible for the evaluation and thus were not included in this report.

*Differences between fathers in integrated cohort programs versus open-entry workshop programs are significant at .01 p-value.

to be on parole, suggesting that they have been incarcerated more recently. In all four programs, about half of fathers are unemployed, but those in the two integrated cohort programs have significantly lower earnings and are significantly more likely to have fathered children with multiple women. Fathers in integrated cohort programs are also more likely to have child support arrangements.

The approach to service delivery may reflect the circumstances of the population served. For example, the daily structure embedded in the integrated cohort model may be beneficial



Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota

Program Name	The FATHER Project
Location	Minneapolis, Minnesota St. Paul, Minnesota
Approach	Open-entry workshop
Core Services	Twice monthly, two-day orientation Two-hour weekly parenting workshop Two-hour weekly healthy relationship workshop Stand-alone, single-day employment workshop twice a month Individual fatherhood plan to identify participant goals and program activities
Workshop Curricula	
Parenting	Young Dads/Young Moms and Nueva Familia
Employment	Developed by The FATHER Project
Relationships	Within My Reach

Across all four programs, about 70 percent of fathers attended a workshop one or more times.

to men who are re-entering society after incarceration. In contrast, fathers with relatively more earnings and somewhat fewer life challenges may have already assumed roles and responsibilities that make participation in a daily, intensive program difficult or impossible: for example, those who work may be unable to attend daily classes. These fathers may prefer the less intensive services of the open-entry workshop programs as well as the flexibility to receive only the program content they believe they need.

Service delivery approach linked to participation and retention

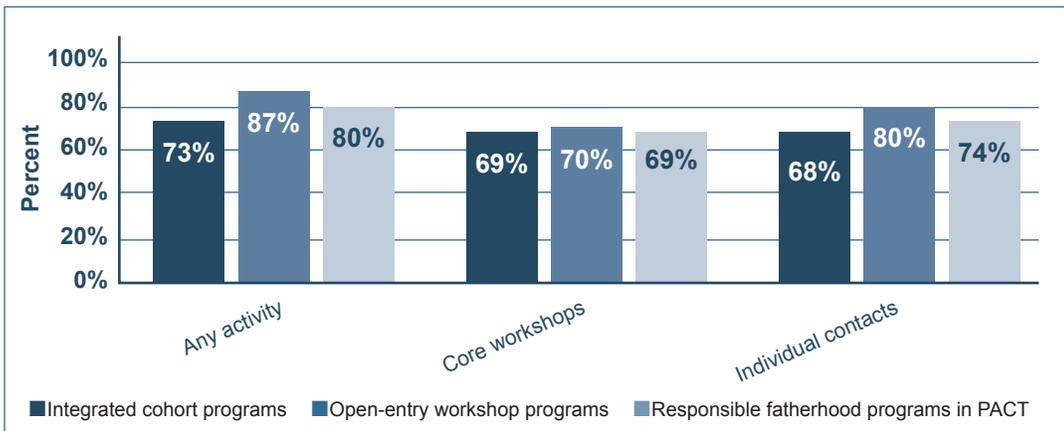
Fathers' initial participation in the programs is important because it provides a measure of how successfully programs engage participants in their core workshops and connect them to program staff. We looked at whether fathers had participated in a workshop of any type provided by the RF program, or whether they had had at least one (non-workshop) contact with an RF program staff member. Across all four programs, about 70 percent of enrolled fathers attended a workshop one or more times (Figure 1). With regard to staff contacts, more fathers in open-entry workshop programs than the integrated programs had at least one individual contact with program staff; these programs emphasized the early assessment of fathers' needs, which was usually completed during an individual meeting with staff (i.e., an individual contact).

Retention is an indicator of the extent to which fathers stay in the program; we measured retention as the percentage of fathers who attended at least half of a workshop's sessions within four months of enrollment. Retention was higher in the integrated cohort programs than in the programs with open-entry workshops.

Of the four participating programs, Successful STEPS achieved the highest retention in its two-and-a-half week integrated workshop: 59 percent of fathers attended at least half of the employment sessions, and 63 percent attended at least half of the parenting sessions (Table 3). However, retention at the relationship skills workshop, which was provided separately, was very low. At the Family Formation Program's six-week work-



Figure 1. Initial program engagement by service delivery approach



Source: Data from PACT Information System (PACTIS)/Site management information system.

Note: The data show fathers enrolled between December 9, 2012, and March 31, 2014, and randomly assigned to receive the program. All participation during the first four months after random assignment was included. Some programs enrolled and served additional fathers who were not eligible for the evaluation and thus were not included in this report. The sample size was 941 fathers from integrated cohort programs and 913 fathers from open-entry workshop programs.

shop, which is longer-term and integrates all parenting, relationships, and employment services, 41 percent of fathers attended half or more of the 30 all-day sessions.

Retention at the two programs implementing open-entry workshops was lower compared to the integrated cohort programs, ranging from 2 to 38 percent (Table 3). Of the three workshop types at the open-entry programs, the parenting workshop was the most highly attended. At the Center for Fathering, 38 percent of fathers attended at least half of the parenting sessions, and at the FATHER Project, 21 percent of fathers attended at least half of these sessions. Few fathers attended open-entry employment sessions. Slightly more than 20 percent of fathers at the FATHER Project attended the employment workshop, and because it was offered as a single session, most fathers attended the full workshop. At the Center for Fathering, just over 30 percent of fathers attended at least one employment session, but only 7 percent attended at least half of the sessions.

Relationship skills education that was provided as a standalone workshop had the lowest retention.

Urban Ventures	
Program Name	The Center for Fathering
Location	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Approach	Open-entry workshop
Core Services	1.5-hour weekly parenting workshops 1.5-hour weekly healthy relationship workshops Weekly employment services workshop
Workshop Curricula	
Parenting	Effective Black Parenting HighScope Early Childhood Curriculum
Employment	Developed by Urban Ventures
Relationships	Nurturing Skills of Families

Table 3. Attendance at core workshops			
Core workshop	Sample size	Attended workshop at least once	Attended half or more of sessions
Integrated Cohort Programs			
Successful STEPS			
Parenting¹	222	72%	59%
Employment¹	222	74%	63%
Relationships	222	37%	15%
The Family Formation Program			
Integrated content: parenting, employment, relationships	719	65%	41%
Open-Entry Workshop Programs			
The FATHER Project			
Parenting	312	58%	21%
Employment	312	21%	21%
Relationships	312	17%	2%
The Center for Fathering			
Parenting	601	57%	38%
Employment	601	32%	7%
Relationships	601	22%	14%

Source: Data from PACTIS/Site management information system.

Note: The data show fathers enrolled between December 9, 2012, and March 31, 2014, and randomly assigned to receive the program for PACT. All participation during the first four months after random assignment was included. Some programs enrolled and served additional fathers who were not eligible for the evaluation and thus were not included in this report.

¹Successful STEPS integrates employment and parenting content into a single workshop but tracks attendance separately.

Relationship skills education that was provided as a standalone workshop had the lowest retention. Between 2 and 15 percent of fathers attended at least half of the relationship skills education workshop sessions at the programs that provided this content as a separate component. Typically, fathers were expected to complete the parenting or employment workshop first, which may have led to lower retention compared with other workshops. Of these four programs, the Family Formation Program was the only one not to offer a standalone relationship workshop. The Family Formation Program included this content in the single core workshop.³

Three features of the integrated cohort programs may explain their greater rates of retention. First, fathers in integrated cohort programs were more likely to be on parole. Although not mandated to attend, these fathers may have been strongly encouraged to look for employment in some way as a condition of their parole, and the integrated cohort programs emphasized job readiness and supported job searches more strongly than the programs using open-entry work-

³ For the Family Formation Program, we could not calculate retention at relationship workshops, since the content was offered as part of its integrated workshop.

shops. Also, Successful Steps served as a reporting station for parolees, which might have encouraged fathers' attendance. Second, having men progress through the workshop in a group, as in the integrated cohort programs, may have enabled them to develop and build close relationships with staff and peers that motivated them to continue attending. Third, the two integrated cohort programs offered fathers substantial financial incentives for participation, while only one of the two grantees using open-entry workshops offered incentives. To encourage enrollment in PACT, the Family Formation Program paid fathers \$100 for each successfully completed week—a change from their previous practices. Through a partnership with the child support office in Kansas, Successful STEPS arranged for reductions in child support arrearages up to \$1,625 based on the father's participation.⁴ The FATHER Project offered up to 35% reductions in public assistance child support arrearages after fathers attended 12 parenting workshops through a partnership with the child support office in Ramsey County.⁵ The Center for Fathering did not offer incentives based on participation.

Fathers in integrated cohort programs spent more time participating

Fathers in the two integrated cohort programs spent more time in program activities than fathers in the open-entry workshop programs. On average, participants at the integrated cohort programs spent 79 hours in core workshops, individual meetings with contacts, and other program activities, compared with 13 hours for participants at open-entry workshop programs (Table 4). Because the integrated cohort programs are more intensive, they offer more hours of participation than the other programs.

Fathers received most of the integrated cohort content through the workshops rather than through individual contacts. These programs emphasized employment and economic stability; just over half of the content received at the integrated cohort programs—the largest share—focused on economic stability. At open-entry workshop programs, parenting made up the largest share of content, about one-third.

Conclusions and implications

Even when RF programs are required to offer the same type of content, the ways in which programs offer and structure that content is linked to the population reached, fathers' engagement and participation, and the amount and type of information fathers receive. At the two programs in PACT using an integrated cohort approach, fathers with multiple challenges enrolled in intensive services. Despite lower levels of initial engagement in the programs, compared to initial engagement at the open-entry workshop programs, many of these fathers attended at least half of the core workshop sessions and were exposed to several content areas, especially related to economic stability. In comparison, at the programs using open-entry workshops, fathers with fewer challenges enrolled in less intensive and more flexible activities. More of these fathers had at least some contact with the program, but few stayed with the program long term, and on average they spent less time in program activities and covered fewer topic areas.

These differences may, in turn, affect program outcomes (and a future report will look at impacts). Still, higher retention in the integrated cohort programs does not provide evidence that these programs were better than the open-entry programs at meeting fathers' needs or at improving their attitudes, behaviors, or outcomes. These results do suggest, however, that

⁴ Fathers earn reductions in arrearages based on the number of hours of programming attended.

⁵ Fathers with child support cases Ramsey County may earn additional reductions in public assistance child support arrearages for full payment of child support obligations for six months.

The largest share of content at integrated cohort programs focused on economic stability.

Even when RF programs are required to offer the same type of content, the ways in which programs offer and structure that content is linked to the population reached, fathers' engagement and participation, and the amount and type of information fathers receive.



Effective programs require an understanding of the needs and interests of the fathers to be served and implementation of a service delivery approach that is aligned with those needs and interests.

Table 4. Hours of participation by content area

	Integrated cohort programs	Open-entry workshop programs	All PACT RF programs
Number of Fathers	941	913	1,854
Average Hours of Participation	79	13	46
Percentage of Average Hours Spent in Content Areas:			
Parenting	15	36	17
Economic stability	53	11	47
Relationships	11	26	13
Personal development	17	11	16
Other	5	15	6

Source: Data from PACTIS/Site management information system.

Note: Sites began PACT intake between December 9, 2012, and February 13, 2013. The data show all fathers randomly assigned through March 31, 2014, with at least four months since random assignment. Some programs enrolled and served additional fathers who were not eligible for the evaluation and thus were not included in this report. The analysis includes fathers' participation in core workshops, individual contacts that lasted five or more minutes and did not occur by mail or leaving a message, and any other program services. Each attended activity was coded into one content area. Personal development includes such topics as values and roles as "real men," fathers, partners, and providers; problem-solving and decision-making; stress and coping; discrimination; interpersonal skills; self-sufficiency; and goal planning. Other content includes needs assessments and addressing such issues as substance abuse, domestic violence, emergency needs, housing, legal services, clothing, food, utility assistance, health and wellness, medical services, and transportation.

effective programs require an understanding of the needs and interests of the fathers to be served and implementation of a service delivery approach that is aligned with those needs and interests. This study identifies two approaches to service delivery; others may exist or may be developed. When developing such an approach, practitioners may want to:

- Gather data about the fathers to be served and analyze their needs
- Weave content on healthy relationships into other core program components; fathers may be more likely to receive this information if it is combined with or offered alongside other content
- Encourage participation in programs via financial incentives, ongoing peer support, or related practices
- Consider how the sequence of services may affect the topics to which fathers are exposed, given that attendance may decline later in the program
- Reflect on how the amount of content offered is likely to affect the number of hours of services that fathers receive

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