



# CQI Tip Sheet: Penny for Your Thoughts?

At the request of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Mathematica visited 17 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grantees in the 2015 cohort in spring and early summer 2019 to learn more about implementation of their grants. We talked to leaders and staff members from grantee and partner organizations about their experiences, successes, and challenges implementing their HMRF services. During the site visits, we learned about ideas and tools several grantees were using to monitor and improve their programs. This continuous quality improvement (CQI) tip sheet describes one such tool.

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Although clients complete exit surveys that ask about their overall HMRF program experiences, they might not have ways to give detailed, action-oriented feedback helpful to the operations of the program. Through a partnership with an external evaluator, one RF grantee held client focus groups on the last day of their workshops to learn about participant experiences and hear ideas for program improvements. Several elements of the approach they used are noteworthy.

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First, instead of program staff leading the focus groups, a research assistant working with the local evaluator organized and moderated them. This arrangement avoided burdening staff and might have encouraged clients to be more candid.

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Second, discussion topics during the focus groups varied over time. For example, one session might focus on the curricula, another on the program setting, and another on whether the balance between program components seemed appropriate (such as learning about being a dad versus learning how to find and keep a job). Each focus group asked participants how they would improve the program.

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Third, the evaluator and research assistant engaged staff in discussions about the feedback from the focus groups. The evaluator and research assistant discussed how understanding client expectations and concerns was important and helpful, even if changes were not feasible or appropriate.

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Feedback gathered from the focus group led to changes including the following:



Clients described wanting help to address barriers to enrollment, such as family situations, lack of housing, or the need to find employment before they could obtain privileges to leave the transitional halfway house to attend the fatherhood program. Although staff could not directly address many of these issues before fathers enrolled in the program, the feedback made staff more sensitive to assessing such barriers. For example, staff found and shared relevant resources with fathers when recruiting.



Clients in one focus group talked about how uncomfortable the chairs were, and how hard it was to sit for several hours during program workshops. So, the program obtained several more comfortable chairs and improved others by purchasing new cushions.



In another group, clients asked if the program could provide healthy snacks instead of giving clients small gift cards to local grocery stores so they could purchase their own snacks. Clients said purchasing their own snacks was time-consuming and they often gave in to temptation and bought snacks that weren't healthy. The program made the switch.



Clients shared that a nonprofit partner organization that provided them with interview suits and job attire usually lacked a selection of sizes, so the grantee was able to work with the partner to improve the selection.



If you have any questions about CQI, including gathering feedback from clients, please do not hesitate to contact the HMRF CQI technical assistance team at [hmrfcqi@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:hmrfcqi@mathematica-mpr.com). We are happy to help!

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