

FED TALK

BUL NO. 4 | OCTOBER 2021



Addressing Participants' Needs Through Case Management and Substantive Individual Service Contacts

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The individual is at the heart of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) programming. While grantees' program models must include one or more curriculum-based workshops, grantees are also expected to provide additional services to individual participants. Addressing critical issues

in an individual participant's life may encourage and enable better participation, learning, and growth during and after HMRF services.

This document describes OFA's expectations for HMRF grantees' support of individuals.

Assessing and Addressing Individual Participants' Needs

All HMRF grants are expected to have processes for assessing individual participants' needs. The Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) state:

ACF is particularly interested in projects that are designed to incorporate rigorous intake and enrollment processes and strategies to assess an individual participant's needs, skills, and interests, as well as a couple's/pair of co-parents'/parenting pair's needs, skills, and interests, where appropriate. Assessment processes or tools help project staff make decisions about the following: (a) the match between the program and the needs of each individual; (b) ways to reduce barriers to participation in the program; (c) any additional strategies for each individual, based on that individual's abilities and need; and (d) the individual's placement in training, education, and employment programs, when applicable (ACF, 2020).

After an assessment, programs are expected to address individual participant needs. The FRAMEWorks and READY4Life FOAs state:

As a follow on to the assessment of needs, well-designed projects will include strategies to address the needs

identified by providing direct services or linking to a broad array of community-centered supportive services. These services may range from regular participant contact in order to facilitate program retention, completion, and access, to needed support services, to more intensive services related to job and career advancement (ACF, 2020).

Fatherhood FIRE projects must include case management as part of their approach to addressing participant needs (see below).

OFA recognizes grantee projects will have different approaches to assessing and addressing individual participant needs, depending on program design, the population, and community contexts in which the project operates. Nevertheless, OFA expects each project to have a reasonable, clearly articulated approach to assessing and addressing individual participant needs.

School-Based Programs

OFA recognizes that some school-based programs may operate differently. The READY4Life FOA states:

Projects that provide services to a broader youth population in a traditional high school setting may determine that the provision of supportive services is unnecessary, given the duration of sessions and the limited interaction or access to the students (ACF, 2020).

READY4Life grantees that determine the provision of supportive services is unnecessary should provide “a clear, sound, and reasonable rationale for its exclusion,” per the READY4Life FOA. If not provided in its application, the grantee may provide it in writing to their Family Assistance Program Specialist (FPS) post-award.

Case Management in Fatherhood Programs

The Fatherhood FIRE FOA discusses case management explicitly:

ACF is particularly interested in funding projects that include robust case management strategies that provide either direct services or link participants

to a broad array of community-centered supportive services. Case management may range from regular participant contact to facilitate program retention, completion, and access to needed support services, to more intensive services related to ... economic stability. Young adult fathers (e.g., ages 18-24) and adult expectant fathers with multiple concerns may particularly benefit from case management (ACF, 2020).

Case management is also an allowable activity in FRAMEWORKS and READY4Life projects. Providing high-quality case management is critical to addressing participants’ needs while it also helps them succeed at completing HMRF programs. OFA recognizes that fathers in Responsible Fatherhood (RF)



programs benefit from the direct support of a case manager.ⁱ In this way, case management “makes it possible for any social workers in the agency, or different agencies, to coordinate their efforts to serve a given client through professional teamwork, thus expanding the range of needed services offered” and “limits problems arising from fragmentation of services, staff turnover, and inadequate coordination among providers” (Barker, 2003). Of course, one of the greatest supports that a case manager provides is being an empathetic person with a listening ear. The best case managers know how to transform participants’ challenges into opportunities for change.

Case management is not delivery of curriculum in a make-up session. Grantees may conduct make-up sessions for participants who miss workshop classes, and some of these make-up sessions may be one-on-one with facilitators, case managers, or others. Make-up sessions should be recorded in nFORM following the steps described in Module VII.C of the [nFORM 2.0 User Manual](#). Grantees also may reach out to the [nFORM Help Desk](#) with questions about recording make-up sessions.

Substantive Individual Service Contracts (ISCs)

Grantees must record all individual service contracts (ISCs) in nFORM. Per the FOA,ⁱⁱ Fatherhood FIRE projects should provide



at least eight substantive interactions per participant. The FOA states:

Well-designed projects are expected to include robust case management services, defined as at least eight individual service contacts per client throughout the course of the program, if not more (unless a lower intensity is proposed with strong justification and submitted for post-award review and approval). Under this FOA, an individual service contact is defined as a substantive interaction between a staff member and a participant, focused on programming (for example, to make-up a missed workshop session) or an issue(s) related to the participant’s needs.

Substantive interactions with HMRF participants will be called “substantive individual service contracts (ISCs),” or substantive ISCs. A substantive ISC is one that involves direct contact with the participant (for example, in-person or by telephone), in which:

- A participant is assessed;
- An assessed need is addressed (e.g., per an individual plan); or
- A participant discusses challenging issues (e.g., a recent job loss or a relationship challenge).

For example, a simple reminder about an upcoming class would not be a substantive ISC, but a conversation about why a participant cannot attend class, along with a search for solutions with the participant, would be. Similarly, if a participant has a referral for outside services, a follow-up call to determine whether the participant attended those outside services would not be a substantive ISC, but a conversation about whether the services addressed the participant's needs and an assessment on whether additional or alternative services are needed would be a substantive ISC.

Since substantive ISCs involve discussion, they likely will be at least 15 minutes long. nFORM has the capacity to record the focus and duration of ISCs.

Thus, OFA is defining substantive ISCs as direct contacts with a client lasting 15 minutes or longer, and which cover client issues and needs beyond just reminder contacts. Grantees should be recording all HMRF-funded activities, including these substantive ISCs, in nFORM.

A range of grantee staff (not just case managers) may have these substantive ISCs with participants.

Recording and Reporting ISCs

Grantees should follow the steps described in Module VII of the [nFORM 2.0 User Manual](#) to record individual services in nFORM.ⁱⁱⁱ

nFORM has several ways to report ISCs. For example, for each client, nFORM can show in the client profile how many ISCs a client has and the date of their most recent service contact within an Operational Report. Grantees also can generate a data export.

At this point, nFORM does not report separately on *substantive* ISCs, and ACF is working to adjust nFORM to make it easier for grantees to review substantive ISCs. In a new Operational Report, nFORM will show the average number of substantive ISCs for clients (as well as other breakouts) across a grantee project. ACF also will make updates in the query tool and in the PPR. We will let you know when these updates are available to grantees.



Until nFORM is updated, OFA will gauge grantee achievement of the previously mentioned Fatherhood FIRE FOA requirement for eight ISCs as, simply, all ISCs.

Through a continued focus on individual participants and an ongoing effort to assess and address participants' needs, grantees help those individuals through the specific issues they are dealing with while also freeing them to better participate, learn, and grow through HMRF classes and other services. In this way, grantees can strengthen individuals and families and make a profound difference in their communities.

References

Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. Funding Opportunity. Family, Relationship, and Marriage Education Works – Adults (FRAMEWorks). HHS-202-ACF-OFA-ZB-1817. [FastTRAC | OFA Notices \(hmrffasttrac.com\)](https://www.hmrffasttrac.com)

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Barker, R. L. (2003). The social work dictionary (5th ed.). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Endnotes

- i The Fatherhood FIRE FOA states, “Well-designed projects will also include strategies to ensure follow-up to participants on referral services outside of the program.”
- ii FRAMEWorks and READY4Life projects may also have substantive interactions, though they are not required.
- iii ISCs cannot be recorded before a client is enrolled.

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