Transcript of Evaluating Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Projects Applicant Webinar

Thank you for joining, and welcome to today's webinar on evaluating Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Project. We're going to start off today with some general guidance about the webinar. First, please note that all participants are automatically muted. Only presenters will be on audio and video.

If you have any technical issues hearing the speakers or seeing the slides, please describe the issue in detail in the Q&A box at the bottom right of the screen. Once you've described the issue, click Send. The meeting organizer will contact you directly to help resolve your issue.

Please direct all other questions to the points of contact listed in Section 7 of the applicable Funding Opportunity Announcement. Note that there is a different point of contact for each Funding Opportunity Announcement.

If you would like to access live closed captioning during the webinar, please click on the Closed Captioning link on the bottom right-hand corner of your screen. The closed captioning feature is below the Q&A feature and is labeled Multimedia Viewer.

This webinar is being recorded and will be posted online. When ready, the link to the recording and slides can be accessed from the same website where you registered for the webinar. That is www.hmrfgrantresources.info.

And now I'm going to turn it over to Seth Chamberlain, the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Branch Chief of the Office of Family Assistance.

Thanks so much, Sarah. Could we go to the next slide?

So, as Sarah said, I'm Seth Chamberlain. I'm the Branch Chief for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs within the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

So, I've been speaking with you about the Funding Opportunity Announcements, or FOAs, over the last few days. We talked through the three FOAs on Thursday, Friday, and Monday. On Thursday we talked about the Fatherhood FIRE Funding Opportunity Announcement. On Friday we talked about the FRAMEWORKS Funding Opportunity Announcement. And on Monday we talked about the Ready4Life Funding Opportunity Announcement.

Yesterday we had an exciting webinar about our Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood, or HMRF, performance measures, our management information system called nFORM, or Information Family Outcomes Reporting and Management, and Continuous Quality Improvement, or CQI. Today we're going to have an even more exciting webinar about evaluation, both federal and grantee-led evaluation which, for shorthand, we call local evaluation.

You know, you may have heard a lot about different types of evaluations in our field. For example, you may have heard about the local evaluator who went out on a limb to obtain a nested design. You may have heard about the Responsible Fatherhood evaluation where they tracked fathers and their children in station wagons. Talk about a case of auto-correlation.

Oh, and then there was that Healthy Marriage program at sea, where on a board in the middle of the ship they recorded statistics and tracked trends on the characteristics of people that jumped ship. It was called their MANOVA-board.

Well, we're hoping that you won't jump ship during this webinar.

So, next slide, please.

Also presenting today with me are Sarah Avellar and Christine Ross, both of whom are Senior Researchers at Mathematica. Sarah and Christine have been exceptionally supportive and helpful with the Administration for Children and Families and the Office of Family Assistance to support the current cohort of grantees that were awarded grants beginning in 2015 and ending this year.

Let’s go to the next slide, please.

So, today’s webinar is going to focus on evaluation. We will start by clarifying how performance measures and continuous quality improvement, or CQI, are different from evaluation.

Then we will give an overview of local and federal evaluations. Grantees and their local evaluators will conduct local evaluations. The federal government will oversee the federal evaluations that will be conducted by contractors.

The rest of the webinar will focus on local evaluations, which is what I think you will be most interested in. We will describe types of evaluations and evaluation fundamentals. We will also talk about working with a local evaluator and an institutional review board, or IRB.

I want to start with a general note, though, a note on the why. Not the Y-intercept, you’ll all get there. But I want to talk about why we are continuing to conduct evaluations. You know, many of you are aware of past Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood evaluations. We have evidence that Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage programs can create positive change. That’s fantastic, and I’m delighted to be working on a program where we do have evidence of effectiveness.

But we can always grow. We can always do better – even better. Let me give you an example. So, the Parents and Children Together evaluation of Healthy Marriage programs for couples, that found positive effects, but the positive effects were concentrated, not solely, but they were concentrated among married couples and not among married and unmarried couples. Why is that? We should find out. We should learn what kind of services can be impactful for unmarried couples.

Let me give you another example. In the PACT – the Parents and Children Together -- study of Responsible Fatherhood programs, there were definitely effects on responsible parenting. But there were limited effects on economic stability, and no effects on healthy romantic relationships.

What could we do to grow the impacts in those other areas while still creating positive change for responsible parenting?

We had a learning agenda. The emphasis is on learning. It’s not thumbs up, thumbs down. It’s on growing. On getting better. We never stop. And this isn’t because we want to get published, or to have a bigger research base than that next program over there. It’s because we want to increase the effectiveness of our programs for the families we serve. Period.

If you’re in this game because you want to use your research skills to support stronger families, then we look forward to learning with you, even with those of you who propose nested designs. Which, to be fair, would be absolutely necessary in some cases.

All right. Let’s go to the next slide.

So, let’s start with what this webinar will and will not cover.

So, this webinar will cover Funding Opportunity Announcement, or FOA, requirements for evaluation. Questions that can be answered by an evaluation. Key components of high-quality evaluations.

The webinar will not cover or address anything beyond the language contained in the Funding Opportunity Announcements. It will not cover how or what to write for proposals. It won’t make any recommendations on whether your proposal will be competitive or will be funded.

It won’t cover the programmatic elements of the FOA or details on performance measures and continuous quality improvement. There were separate webinars that addressed those issues, and all of the webinars are being archived at the same webpage where you found the link to register for this webinar. In fact, the slides are already there for the first two webinars. The slides will be posted as soon as they are 508 – as soon as they are compliant with certain legal regulations. And then once the recordings are available, we will post those, too.

All right. Next slide.

So, the Administration for Children and Families, or ACF, is continuing to implement a learning agenda. To increase understanding of what works and why in Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programming. The learning agenda activities will also provide valuable information to grantees on performance and outcomes that will facilitate continuous quality improvement. Activities include performance measure collection and reporting, continuous quality improvement efforts, and local and federal evaluations for a subset of grantees.

So, I'm going to start with a quick description of performance measures, continuous quality improvement, and evaluations. These activities are complementary ways of learning about Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs for ACF, for grantees, and for the field.

Next slide, please.

Performance measures help ACF, the Administration for Children and Families, and grantees monitor the services provided and who they are serving. All grantees are required to collect, store, and report data on standardized performance measures in three areas. Services provided through the grant, which grantee staff will report on an ongoing basis. Client characteristics and outcomes. This information is reported by clients themselves through three surveys that they complete as they progress through the program. And program operations reported through a quarterly survey that a staff member form each grantee completes.

Performance measures will be collected and stored in the nFORM Management Information System, and the acronym is spelled out for you there. This is a system that was designed specifically for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees.

Can we go to the next slide?

Continuous quality improvement is the process of identifying, describing, and analyzing program strengths and problems. Followed by testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions. Continuous quality improvement goes beyond program monitoring, which documents what's happening. CQI helps us figure out how to improve what's happening.

CQI requires data. In fact, there is no CQI without data. The performance measures in nFORM will be a key CQI data point for HMRF grantees. How you will use it depends on the questions you are trying to answer.

Next slide, please.

Now, all grantees must develop, implement, and regularly update their CQI plans that use the data to improve program performance and identify areas for further analysis and improvement.

The initial plan must be developed within three months of grant award. And ACF will review the plan for approval.

Grantees are also expected to show evidence of ongoing execution of the plan and updates and refinements to the plan.

So, what I just talked about with regard to continuous quality improvement and performance measures, those were discussed much more in-depth in the webinar that was held yesterday. The slides for that webinar and the recording will be posted soon.

Let's go to the next slide, and let's talk about evaluation.

Now, evaluation is a systematic way to determine and document whether a program is achieving its goals. Now goals can cover many areas, so it's important to note that only an impact evaluation can determine whether the program caused the changes such as changes in client outcomes.

Evaluation also helps individual grantees and the broader field. It helps program staff identify weaknesses to strengthen and successes to replicate.

For the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood fields, evaluation can inform and improve the next generation of programs. Evaluation builds the evidence base to identify effective programs, which then can help funders know where to invest.

A subset of grantees will conduct evaluations, which we'll discuss in the next section.

So, next slide, please.

Let's compare what we can learn from each process.

If we want to know what is happening in the program, we can use all three of these. By analyzing performance measure data, undertaking continuous quality improvement, and conducting an evaluation.

If we want to know how we can improve the program, we turn to CQI or to evaluation.

If we want to know did the program cause a change, such as whether the program improved clients' parenting, we need an evaluation. And not just any evaluation, but an impact evaluation. And we're going to be very specific about what an impact evaluation is.

Lastly, if we want to know how we can improve future programming, we use evaluation. For evaluation, we use a broader lens than with continuous quality improvement. CQI is focused on a very specific issue and looking for a very specific solution. For evaluation, we are usually looking for answers more broadly for that specific program and for the field. Such as, is the approach effective? Or, what are the best practices for recruitment? Sometimes you'll hear the word "generalizability" when you talk about evaluation because with an evaluation, the findings should be more generalizable than just what's happening in this specific program.

The rest of today's webinar will focus on evaluation. Like I said before, we described performance measures and continuous quality improvement in more detail in a previous webinar, the one yesterday, and the recording will be available on the webpage where you accessed the link to register for this webinar.

Now I'm going to turn it over to Sarah Avellar to cover what we mean when we talk about local and federal evaluations. Sarah?

Thanks, Seth.

All right. So as Seth said, I'm going to dig into a little bit more of what we mean when we use these terms, local and federal evaluations.

So, let's start with local evaluations. These are designed and executed by a grantee and its evaluator. And we call this a local evaluator.

The evaluation is designed to answer the grantee-specific questions. So, for example, they might – a grantee might want to know -- is my program effective at improving client outcomes? Or, you might want to know which recruitment strategies are most productive for generating eligible clients.

The requirements for a local evaluation depend on the funding level that you are seeking. So, if you are applying for a grant for $1 million to $1.5 million each year, you must propose a rigorous impact local evaluation. This could be a randomized control trial, or RCT, or a high-quality quasi-experimental design, or QED, that includes a comparison group.

You may receive bonus points for your evaluation if you propose an RCT and it is judged to meet ACF standards.

For the other two tiers of funding, you may propose a local evaluation, but you are not required to do so.

If you are applying for a grant of $750,000 to just under a million dollars a year, you may choose to propose a descriptive or impact evaluation. However, you won’t receive bonus points for that evaluation in your application.

If you are applying for $500,000 to just under $750,000 a year, you may choose to propose a descriptive evaluation. But, again, you won’t receive any bonus points in your application.

Sarah, I’m sorry to jump in here.

Sure.

Could you just go back to the last slide? I – sorry, I should have caught this, but with the bonus points for the 2020 Funding Opportunity Announcements, there are no bonus points for proposing specific kinds of evaluations. The bonus points are associated with current grantees. So, there are no bonus points associated with the current set of Funding Opportunity Announcements, at least no bonus points associated with the type of evaluation proposed. I just wanted to clarify that point.

Thanks for correcting that, Seth.

Okay. So, let’s talk about some of the requirements if you are proposing a local evaluation. I just want to note, these are not comprehensive. You will need to look at the Funding Opportunity Announcements to review all of the local evaluation requirements, so these are just some highlights for you to consider. And we’ve grouped them roughly by the stage in which the requirement applies.

So, starting with the application stage. If you are proposing a local evaluation, you will need to include an evaluation plan that describes your research questions and your design.

You’ll also need to include a letter of agreement from an independent evaluator, who is referred to as a local evaluator, who will conduct the evaluation.

If you’re awarding a grant during the planning period, you will need to submit analysis plans that adhere to ACF standards that they will share.

You’ll need to obtain a Federal-Wide Assurance.

And you’ll need to submit your evaluation to an institutional review board, or IRB.

And looking far down the line, at the end of the evaluation, you will need to submit a final report to ACF meeting the standards that they provide. And you might need to submit de-identified data from your evaluation.

So now let’s turn to federal evaluations. Those are sponsored by the federal government, and they typically include multiple grantees whereas the local evaluation includes just one grantee.

The federal evaluation is conducted by independent contractors to the federal government.

As a condition of accepting the award, all grantees that are asked to participate in the federal evaluation are required to do so.

You must fully engage and adhere to all research protocols established by ACF and carried out by its contractors.

ACF has initiated two federal evaluations of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood program that will include selected grantees from the 2020 cohort. Those are the Strengthening the Implementation of Marriage and Relationship programs, or SIMR, and the Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood programs, or SIRF.

As I said, and as with previous cohorts, grantees may be asked to participate in one of these evaluations.

These evaluations are really building on the evidence base that ACF has been generating for many years, typically through large-scale, federally-led impact evaluations. These two new evaluations will be focusing on implementation challenges to HMRF programs. There's going to be an emphasis on improving recruitment, retention, and engagement because these are widespread and extremely difficult challenges that affect almost all grantees.

The goals of both SIMR and SIRF are to identify and test solutions to these implementation challenges. Both to help in the short term and potentially to prepare for a later impact study.

SIMR and SIRF are similar in their goals and their approach, but SIMR will work with Healthy Marriage programs. OPRE has contracted to Mathematica to carry out SIMR, who is also working with Public Strategies. And SIRF will work with Responsible Fatherhood grantees. OPRE has contracted to MDRC for SIRF, who will also be working with NES Associates and Insight Policy Research.

So both SIRF and SIMR are going to use what we call rapid learning. And the idea is they'll be implementing a strategy to one of these implementation problems. And then seeing very quickly how well it works. The idea is to do a series of short learning cycles where the strategy, the implementation solution, is implemented. They collect data on it. They analyze it. They see what's working and what isn't. They refine the solution. And then they test it again.

Partnership and collaboration are key to both of these evaluations. They are working with program partners now and will continue to work with those partners throughout the evaluation to ensure that the solutions that they devise are relevant for HMRF grantees, and they're adapted to the HMRF context.

The projects are working with stakeholders and experts right now through phone calls and interactive webinars. They're also reviewing the research literature and previous grantee performance data to really figure out what the challenges are and help inform potential solutions.

They are brainstorming solutions to these challenges, and, again, they're going to be testing them with these rapid-learning methods.

Next steps for the federal evaluations are continuing to engage experts and stakeholders.

They'll be holding webinars in early August to provide more information for interested parties.

They'll be engaging directly with HMRF programs for planning in fall 2020.

They'll be inviting programs to participate in the evaluations in early 2021. And the plan is that they will be starting the rapid-learning evaluations in spring of 2021.

To learn more, you can visit OPRE's website. They have links to the project-specific pages. And as I said, they'll be doing a webinar during the week of August 3. So, stay tuned for more information on that.

Those projects have federal and contractor points of contact who you can reach out to for more information.

And let me just go back to sort of this comparison of local and federal evaluations at the high level.

So, again, a local evaluation is grantee specific, and it's designed to answer the grantee's questions.

The federal evaluation can be both small or large scale. It could be descriptive or impact, but it typically includes multiple grantees.

A local evaluation is led by a local evaluator who works for the grantee.

The federal evaluation is led by independent contractors to the federal government.

In terms of funding, as I mentioned, the requirements for whether you have to do a local evaluation depend on the grant level that you are seeking, but there are also requirements on how much of the grant can be spent on the evaluation, and that's included in the FOA. The funding for the evaluation will be reserved from the total grant funding.

For the federal evaluation, grantees that are asked to participate may receive additional funds for their program services and for participating in the study. They may offer the grantees that are participating technical assistance.

For process, after the local evaluation research plans have been approved by ACF, grantees and their local evaluators will implement the evaluations throughout the grant period.

For the federal evaluation, the federal government may incorporate the local evaluation into the federal evaluation for grantees that are selected, or they may replace the local evaluation with the federal evaluation.

And now I am going to turn it over to Chris who is going to talk about the strengths and qualities of a good local evaluation.

Thanks, Sarah.

In this section of the presentation, I'll talk about the types of research questions you might want to examine in an evaluation. The various approaches to an evaluation, and what types of research questions that each can address. Key elements in the design for an evaluation corresponding to each of the evaluation approaches. And finally, data that you can use for these evaluations.

The next slide.

So, evaluation planning starts with your research questions. What do you want to learn from your evaluation? What can your evaluation contribute to the field of Healthy Marriage or Responsible Fatherhood programming? For example, research questions could be – could sound like this. What is the impact of this innovative healthy relationship program on the coparenting behavior of pregnant and parenting teens in high school? Or, what level and types of staff training, and what staff characteristics were most associated with higher rates of participant engagement and participation in our Responsible Fatherhood program?

Research questions should be important for the field. Ultimately the evaluations can produce new evidence on how to implement programs well or about the effects of innovative programs on participants.

If you are proposing an innovative program approach, or serving an innovative population, consider evaluating the impacts of your program.

Talk to your staff and partners in planning the evaluation. What information could an evaluation provide that would be useful to them or provide critical lessons for practice?

Talk to your local evaluator who can help you shape the research questions to reflect what you and others want to learn.

And finally, keep in mind that if you and your colleagues don't care about the research questions, it can be hard to invest funding and time into an evaluation. So this is really an important first step.

Next slide.

So, what can you examine with an evaluation?

Several – several kinds of outcomes or processes listed on the slide are good candidates. For example, recruitment and program participation. Does the program attract and engage participants? How were participants recruited? What messages were helpful?

In the area of program content, does this curriculum or content change attitudes and behavior of participants after the program is finished?

In the area of program implementation, what staff training and support was needed to present the curriculum faithfully? What kinds of training and support was needed to engage participants? What changes in program implementation were associated with improvement in participant engagement?

In the area of program support, what kinds of support helped to engage participants in the full program?

And finally, in the areas of outcomes, what attitudes, knowledge, or behavior do you expect the program to influence?

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So, your evaluation can take different forms. The research questions you have need to be addressed with an aligned research design. We'll introduce the types of evaluation designs here and then talk about each design in more detail.

So, if the research question asks what outcomes are affected by the program, for example, did the program cause improvements in relationship quality, you'll need to use either a randomized control trial, an RCT, or a quasi-experimental design, a QED.

If the research question asks whether participants' outcomes changed between the start and the end of the program without addressing whether the program caused that change, then a pre/post descriptive study can be used.

If the research question asks whether the program was implemented faithfully and about factors associated with that implementation, such as staffing, training, or support, then an implementation study can be used.

So let's talk about each of these designs in turn.

Next slide.

So we'll start with the two impact designs, the randomized control trial and the quasi-experimental design.

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To start, we wanted to distinguish between a change over time, such as improvements in relationship quality, and an impact on relationship quality. When an outcome changes for participants in a program, how do we know whether the program led to that change? Besides the program, other factors can lead to changes like this, such as personal motivation or broader economic and social changes.

We need to be able to rule these kinds of factors out when we attribute changes to the effects of a program.

So, to rule out other factors, we need to know what happened to participants after they experienced the program and what would have happened to those participants if they had not experienced the program. If they had just lived their lives without the program.

An ideal, but really impossible approach, is to have the same people participate and not participate in the program at the same time, and then compare their outcomes. As a parent, I used to wish I could do that with my kids, do two different things and take the one that turned out better. But you can't.

So, a good alternative that is feasible is to find a comparison group that is as similar as possible to the program group, the group that receives services. Then you can compare outcomes for these two groups after the program group has received services.

So next we show an example of the distinction between a change over time in a program impact.

This graph shows how an outcome, the percentage employed, changes over time for the program group. At baseline, before these adults received any services, their employment rate was 20%. After receiving program services, at program exit, their employment rate was 50%. This looks like a substantial increase in employment that might seem like it was caused entirely, or at least in part, by the program services.

But let's add the comparison group to this picture.

The comparison group is shown in the gold bars. This group did not receive the program services. But after starting out at 20% employment, just like the program group at baseline, the comparison group had an employment rate of 55% at the time the program group exited program services. So some other factor must have led to an increase in employment for both groups. The program did not have a positive impact on employment even though the change over time was quite large.

This image is an important one to keep in mind as you think about what you might learn from an impact evaluation compared to a pre/post descriptive study. The impact evaluation can measure whether or not the program affected outcomes that are measured after services end. A pre/post study cannot tell you how the program affected outcomes. Even if the findings might strongly entice you to draw such conclusions.

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So to sum up, an important feature of an impact evaluation design is that two groups are compared. One group that receives the services, and one group that does not. These groups need to be similar at baseline or at the beginning of the study. If the groups are similar at baseline, any later differences in outcomes may be attributed to the program.

Next slide.

So, next we'll compare the two types of impact studies.

Randomized control studies and quasi-experimental studies differ in two key ways. First, there are differences in how the program and comparison groups are formed. In an RCT, the program and comparison groups are formed by chance; that is, by random assignment to either the program group or the comparison group. In a quasi-experimental design, the program and comparison groups are formed in some way other than random assignment. For example, a comparison group might be formed by including people similar to the program group who live outside the service area so they cannot receive the services. Or, they might include people who applied for this program after it was at capacity and could not serve any additional people. Either way, the comparison group is created in a way that is not random chance.

A second difference between the two impact designs is differences in baseline equivalence. In a randomized control trial, on average the program and comparison groups have the same characteristics. Any differences between them come about by chance. But in a quasi-experimental design, the groups can be made so they are equivalent on many characteristics that you can measure at baseline. But for the characteristics that you are not able to measure at baseline, for example, persistence, or motivation, or just some other characteristic that wasn't included in baseline, there's always the potential for the groups to be different. And the differences that may occur could lead to a bias in the estimate of program effect.

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So, when should you use random assignment rather than a quasi-experimental design?

First, random assignment is one of the best ways to measure whether a program is effective. Quasi-experimental design can give the wrong answer since there is always the possibility of bias because of differences in characteristics that are not measured.

Second, if there are more people needing your program's services in the community than you can serve, random assignment is a fair way to allocate those services.

Importantly, you can work with your evaluator to develop positive messages for people who are applying to the program about participating in an evaluation of innovative services rather than having the message be participating in services straightaway.

Positive initial messages and a good understanding up front can improve how program applicants view the random assignment process and the subsequent evaluation activities regardless of how the random assignment works out for them.

Next slide.

If random assignment is not an option, there are other ways to form a comparison group for a quasi-experimental evaluation. One way is to draw a comparison group from a geographic area with a similar population but where no similar services are available. It's important both to rule out whether or not there are similar services in that area, and also to consider how you'll reach out to these individuals for consent and data collection. But this is one approach that could be used.

A second approach is to partner with a program that works with a similar population to the one that you're serving, one that could serve as a comparison group. But, again, you need to be sure the partner services are different enough from those in your program so that you can detect a difference or an impact of the services that you're providing.

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A couple of other ways to form comparison groups. You can create a comparison group from those who cannot be served because the program is at capacity or full. If program capacity is the only reason that you cannot serve an individual or a couple, this makes a good impact design. The program can serve those in the comparison group after data collection is complete, which is sometimes referred to as a wait list design.

And finally, you can use administrative data. Consider whether other agencies are collecting data that could be useful in your evaluation. For example, the agency might have information on a broader population that's very similar to those in your program but who did not receive services. For example, a broader child support group of fathers or some other group that could be used as a comparison to your population.

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We need to point out that there are some approaches you should not use when constructing comparison groups.

First, do not create a comparison group from people who agreed to the program but never showed up or who dropped out after only a few sessions. There are likely to be important underlying differences between these individuals and those who complete the program. These differences are likely to create a bias, that is to erroneously shift the results of the evaluation in one direction or another.

A second approach that should not be used is to create a comparison group from those who are ineligible for the program or are not a good fit. Again, there could be underlying differences between these groups that explain why some were ineligible or not a good fit for the program versus who – who did fall into your target group. And these differences could create bias.

Comparison groups in quasi-experimental design need to be constructed carefully to ensure, first, that the groups are equivalent at baseline, and second, that the comparison group did not receive similar services as the program group during the study.

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Next we'll talk about possible data sources you can use to measure outcomes in your impact evaluation study.

During an evaluation, you'll need to collect data at the start so you can measure how well the program and comparison groups are equivalent at baseline as well as the follow up after services so that you can measure the impacts of the program.

Potential data sources include grantee-specific surveys. These can answer questions specific to the local evaluation reflecting outcomes that are expected for your particular program or for the population that you're serving.

These surveys should be balanced with the burden on your clients, who also must complete the performance measure surveys. So, consider the sort of total survey burden when you're developing these grantee-specific surveys.

But, these grantee-specific surveys can also provide measures at additional follow-up time points that could be useful beyond the post-program follow-up point.

A second possible data source are the performance measures that are administered to the program group. You can administer these surveys to the comparison group.

As part of the required performance measures, the people that you serve in your program are asked to take up to three surveys as they progress through the program. If you administer these surveys to the comparison group as well, they could be used as a data source for the impact study.

These are, however, not tailored to the local evaluation, so that's why grantee-specific surveys could be useful to round out these surveys.

And finally, administrative data, such as child support enforcement data, could also provide a source of baseline and outcome data. Note, however, that these can be difficult to obtain. You need permission of the agency. And often they can answer only a limited range of questions because you need to live with the – the data that's collected in these data systems.

The next slide.

Next we'll discuss descriptive pre/post research designs that examine outcomes just for the program participants without a comparison group.

Next slide.

In pre/post descriptive evaluation design, clients' characteristics are measured before they receive program services, pre-program, and after they receive program services, post-program. As we mentioned, there is no comparison group, so pre/post descriptive designs cannot tell you whether any changes in the participants' outcomes from before to after the program were caused by the program. But, these evaluations can indicate whether clients' outcomes changes over time. For example, did relationship quality improve? Did earnings increase?

This can be a good first step if a more rigorous evaluation design is not feasible for your program or for the community populations that you serve.

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So, for a pre/post descriptive evaluation, there are two types of potential data sources to be used. First you could use the performance measure surveys. Client surveys are administered at the first and last workshop session providing pre and post measures of relationship quality and other outcomes.

Or, you could use surveys that are developed yourself, by the grantee and evaluator, that may include additional measures of outcomes particularly of interest to your program or that reflect innovative features of your program or key outcomes for the population that you serve.

Remember, again, if you add grantee-specific surveys, to consider the overall survey burden on program participants because this can affect the likelihood that they'll be willing to complete all the surveys and answer and provide data on all the outcomes of interest.

Next we'll discuss implementation evaluation designs.

Implementation designs can describe how the program was implemented or it can test out alternative ways of delivering program services with the goal of better engaging program participants. Therefore, implementation designs could use a descriptive or an impact approach.

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So, key features of implementation evaluations include that implementation evaluations examine factors that lead up to program output such as program participation. For example, what factors explain why some people participate at greater levels than others. Or why do some people leave after a couple of sessions.

They could look at staff turnover. For example, what leads staff to leave your program? And what policies reduce turnover among staff?

And finally, they can measure fidelity to the curriculum and look at what aspects are provided with fidelity and which aspects of the program are not provided with fidelity, and what explains the differences.

These types of studies can help identify better ways to operate a program. They can answer broader questions than continuous quality improvement, or CQI, can for the program in the field. For example, they can look at participation over a longer period and examine more factors consistently over time. As well as identifying a range of lessons learned about implementing the program.

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The design of an implementation study can either be a descriptive or an impact design, as we've mentioned. So first of all, an implementation can be studied – for example, it's possible to randomly assign clients to different approaches to workshops offered in, say, one format of 12 one-hour sessions, or a different format of four three-hour sessions. And then compare hours of participation in an impact study.

A second approach to an implementation study would be to conduct focus groups with participants and non-participants to learn what features of the program were most useful to them, why they participated, and to talk to non-participants about what features of the program were less interesting or what factors led them to stop attending. And this would be a descriptive study.

Several types of data could be used for an implementation study. And these kinds of data should really align closely to the research questions that you have.

It's possible to use performance measure data combined with other types of data. Qualitative data, such as interviews, or focus groups, or observations of services, could be used.

And finally, quantitative data, such as staff surveys, client surveys, stakeholder feedback surveys, and other kinds of surveys can provide you with insights about how the program was implemented.

And next, Sarah will talk about the requirements for the local evaluation plan. Sarah?

Thanks, Chris.

All right. So, if you are proposing a local evaluation, you must include a plan in your application. So I'm going to talk about those requirements.

Your local evaluation application plan must describe your research questions. What are you trying to learn and answer in your local evaluation?

You have to describe your research design. Descriptive evaluations must use data and analysis to describe the program model's processes or population.

If you are proposing an impact evaluation, you must include a comparison group that does not receive the services of interest and that is comparable at baseline to those who are participating in the services of interest.

Your plan must also describe how you'll be recruiting participants into the evaluation.

You'll need to talk about the planned sample size. That includes the size of each study condition. So, if you are proposing a program in comparison groups, you would need to indicate the size of each of those conditions.

You will need to describe when you plan for sample enrollment to start and to end.

And you have to talk about your sample enrollment targets, both on a monthly level and on an annual basis.

Your plan should describe the measures you plan to use in your local evaluation. And that may include some of the required performance measures.

You'll need to describe how you will be collecting data for the evaluation. And the analysis method that you will use.

You also need to describe how you're going to be carrying out the plan. That is, how are you going to be implementing the research? It's a work plan for executing your proposed design.

So we've mentioned a number of times and other players in the evaluation, and I just want to touch a little more deeply on what we mean when we use these terms.

So, we talk about a local evaluator. And the FOA does require that grantees who are doing a local evaluation to work with an external evaluator. By external evaluator, we mean someone who does not have a conflict of interest with the program or the agency that holds the grant. You might find such a person from an evaluation or research firm or from a local university.

When thinking about who would be a good fit with your program, it's helpful to think about their qualifications and experience. Particularly, have they worked on similar evaluations in the past? And do they have a background working evaluating programs that are similar to yours?

You'll need to divide up the roles and responsibilities for the local evaluation. So, for example, your team might decide that the evaluator will conduct random assignment, but the program staff will tell clients whether they were assigned to the program or comparison group.

Of course, the roles and responsibilities should fit each person's expertise and capacity. So, for example, we know that follow-up data collection is often very difficult, and the local evaluator might have more experience and capacity to collect the follow-up data than program staff who are much more focused on services.

Evaluators can help with performance measure data collection and CQI as well as the local evaluation, but this is not required.

We've also mentioned several times the institutional review board, or IRB. This is an independent committee that reviews and approves research. They're responsible for ensuring that the research poses minimal risk to clients. Universities typically have IRBs, but you can also find independent IRBs who will review research for a fee.

The FOA indicates that most grantees will either need IRB approval to collect data for performance measures and the local evaluation, or they will need to receive a waiver from the IRB.

A really important component of your design that the IRB will be reviewing is the consent process. They need to review and approve how you will be collecting consent. Fully informed consent is needed before someone can participate in an impact evaluation. They need to fully understand any risks to participating in the study before they agree to do so.

We have also mentioned briefly the Protection of Human Subject Assurance. So, all applicants must complete the Protection of Human Subject Assurance Identification, Certification, Declaration of Exemption form. It's a mouthful.

So, the FOA has instructions for how to do this, but I'm just going to briefly illustrate it to make it a little more concrete.

So, most applicants will need to check the third option in box six of this form. There will be more steps after the grants are awarded, but right now we're just focusing on the application stage.

So, there is a link on this page to where you would find this form. You would go to www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms.html. You then click on the SF-424 Family link. And you can see that highlighted in a red oval on the upper left-hand part of the screen.

That will take you to a page that looks like the screenshot I have there, but it's a partial screenshot. And then you'll scroll down until you find the form labeled Protection of Human Subjects.

You will open that form. You can open it as a pdf. And then, as I said, most applicants will check the third box in option six. So it's highlighted here. Option six is Assurance Status of This Project, and most of you will likely say, No assurance has been filed for this institution. It's that third box that's included in the red oval.

And so now I'm going to turn it back to Seth to talk about the resources that are available to you.

Thanks, so much, Sarah, and thank you, Chris. Thank you so much Sarah and Chris for bringing us through this. Chris, I appreciate your interest in conducting a study where we have your children or my children participate and not participate in specific activities, you know, for example, reward protocols associated with picking up their rooms. We should get working on that.

But, until we can get that done, I'd like to conclude today's webinar by describing resources that we've compiled for grant applicants.

Can we go to the next slide, please?

So, the Administration for Children and Families has developed a website specifically for the 2020 cohort of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grant applicants. This website, at hmrfgrantresources.info, this is the link right here in the bottom right, contains a wide range of resources including links to the Funding Opportunity Announcements, tips, questions to consider, and links to resources on program design, evaluation design, and continuous quality improvement. A glossary of key terms and other useful tips. Information about each of the five applicant webinars, and like I said before, we'll be posting recordings of each webinar to the webinar page on this site as soon as they are available.

So, next slide, please.

nFORM, the Management Information System for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees, includes a publicly accessible Help page with a wide variety of resources about nFORM and performance measures. The URL for this site is on this slide, again it's in the bottom right of the slide. You can also access the nFORM site from the quick links on the applicant resource site.

So, the nFORM Help page has a number of resources that are available to you. There are training videos and a comprehensive User Manual detailing how nFORM is used by the current cohort of grantees.

There are also several tip sheets and an archive of email tips that focus on particular nFORM functions.

The public Help page includes the Data Dictionary which specifies all the data elements in the current performance measures.

The current performance measure surveys are also posted on this site along with the quarterly reports to ACF.

And a little later this summer, the proposed surveys for the 2020 cohort will be posted to the applicant resource website.

Next slide, please.

So as we mentioned at the beginning of this webinar, you can email any question about the Funding Opportunity Announcements to the points of contact in Section Seven of the relevant Funding Opportunity Announcement. Please note that the OFA contacts are different in each Funding Opportunity Announcement, so, if you are interested in submitting an application under the Fatherhood FIRE Funding Opportunity Announcement, and you have a programmatic question, you can reach out to Tanya Howell in my office, the Office of Family Assistance, or you can reach out to the Grants Management Officer, Bridget Shea Westfall. If you have a question on the FRAMEWORKS FOA, you can reach out to Jacqueline Proctor, Jackie Proctor, in my office, or to Bridget Shea Westfall. And if you are interested in and have a question about the Ready4Life Funding Opportunity Announcement, you can send that question to Meghan Heffron or to Bridget Shea Westfall.

Next slide, please.

So, to conclude today's webinar, let me tell you a little bit about what we hope to get from these evaluations.

We want descriptive evaluations to be fair descriptions of programs or program components. We want impact evaluations to be fair tests of programs or program components. Many of you who have read the Funding Opportunity Announcements know that evaluations must be proposed for those requesting funding from $1 million to $1.5 million. And may be proposed, but are not required to be proposed, for applicants requesting funding under $1 million.

Why are we offering this opportunity, including offering it to people requesting funding under $1 million? Because we want people who are committed to evaluation, who are committed to improving services for the fathers, families, and youth that we serve. We want these to be better-than-average evaluations. Let's face it, if we called these average evaluations, that would be mean, right? Average evaluations, mean, yeah.

Anyway, here's to strong evaluations that can move our field forward so that together we can improve programming and create healthier families.

That concludes today's webinar. Thanks for attending.