Developing a Strong Program Model: Planning for Successful Services Transcript

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Welcome

Hello everyone and thank you for attending today's webinar, Developing a Strong Program Model: Planning for Successful Services.

Before we begin we wanted to cover a few housekeeping items. At the bottom of your audience console are multiple application widgets that you can use. You can expand each widget by clicking on the maximize icon on the top right of the widget or by dragging the bottom right corner of the widget panel.

If you have any questions for the presenters during the webcast, you can click on the question-and-answer widget at the bottom and submit your question there -- tap at the bottom of the screen. We will try to address as many questions as possible during this event, but if a fuller answer is required or we run out of time, your question will be answered later via an FAQ document that will be posted on the websites for Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage and on the FaMLE Cross-Site website.

A copy of the slide deck and additional materials are available in the resource list widget which looks like a green folder on the bottom of the screen.

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Now I would like to introduce Robin Dion, Senior Fellow at Mathematica Policy Research. Robin, you now have the floor.

Thanks Brice. Welcome everyone to the first in a series of webinars presented by the Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site Project, also known as the FaMLE cross-site. Sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation at the Administration for Children and Families, this webinar like the others that will follow, is specifically intended to provide assistance to organizations interested in applying for a new federal healthy marriage or responsible fatherhood grant: the marriage and relationship education grant, the new pathways for fathers and families grant, and the responsible fatherhood opportunities for re-entry and mobility grant.

As you consider or prepare to develop your grant proposal, one of the key areas you will be thinking about is the design approach to the healthy marriage or responsible fatherhood services that your program will take.

So the main purpose of this first webinar is to discuss strategies for developing and proposing a strong program model that meets the requirements of the relevant funding opportunity announcement.

Further FaMLE cross-site webinars which I will discuss later, will cover the performance measures required to be collected by the new grantees, the web-based system which will be used to collect the data which we call “nFORM” and the local program evaluation component of the program.

So there will be five main components to today's webinar, first I'm going to provide an introduction to the FaMLE cross-site project, and describe the purpose and major activities. Second I will highlight some of the key requirements of the funding opportunity announcements related to program services and activities.

Third, I'll review a strategy that others have found helpful in developing or refining a program design that is likely to achieve its objective. Fourth, my colleague is going to cover key two challenges that programs typically face once services are up and running, and describe strategies that you may want to consider in designing or refining your program.

And fifth, my colleague will draw some conclusions and describe further resources that may be useful to you as you develop program design.

So as we move along you may find that you have various questions, and as our moderator noted earlier, please be sure to use the Q&A box on the screen to submit your questions and we will be trying to answer as many of them as we can at the end of the presentation.

My hope is that by the end of today's webinar, you're going to have a better understanding of how the healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grant and the family cross-site project are interconnected, what to consider when developing or refining a strong program model, how to use a logic model to mask the elements of your program, the key components of consistent high-quality program delivery and strategies for recruiting individuals and couples and encouraging their participation and the completion.

Let me introduce today's speakers. As Brice said, my name is Robin Dion and I am the project director for the FaMLE cross-site project. I am joined by Sarah Avellar, the FaMLE cross-site deputy director. At the end of this webinar you will also hear from Seth Chamberlain and Julie Leis at the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation within ACF. They are the federal project officers at OPRE who oversee the FaMLE cross-site project and they will be addressing the questions raised during today's webinar.

What is the FaMLE cross-site project?

Well, the FaMLE cross-site project focuses on providing support for the 2015 Cohort of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees sponsored by OFA. This support will be for collecting performance measure data and assistance for grantees' local evaluations before, during, and after grant award. Ultimately, the project will also conduct analyses of data collected across all of the grantees, hence the cross-site part of the project name.

ACF first engaged Mathematica to conduct the project in the fall of 2013. The first activity was to examine recommended and develop a comprehensive set of research-based performance measures that will help grantees manage their programs and provide high-quality data on program operations and on the outcomes of participants.

We also began development of the nFORM system, which will be provided for free to grantees with all of the performance measures and reports already programmed in. And we developed a website where you can access many resources for developing strong grant proposals. That's "www.famlecross-site.info" and you'll hear me refer to that quite a bit throughout the presentation.

Once the grants are awarded the project will provide training and ongoing support to the grantees, as they use the web-based system to collect and report on performance measure data.

In the second major area of activity, the FaMLE cross-site project will also provide evaluation technical assistance and support for grantees as they conduct their own locally-led evaluation. As you know, these evaluations are separate from the effort to collect and report on performance measures. The local evaluations may be descriptive studies or impact evaluations.

And third, to develop the big picture of the grant's achievement, the FaMLE cross-site project will aggregate the performance measure data across all of the grantees and conduct cross-site analyses in three areas: program design, implementation, and outcome.

>> Now I want to give you a better sense of who is who at ACF and how the organizations are related to one another. This diagram shows how the oversight of the grants will be conducted. The box at the top of the diagram shows how ACF contains two agencies, the Office of Family Assistance, or OFA, in the left-hand box of the second row, and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation or OPRE in the right-hand box of the second row.

You can see on the left that OFA overseas the grant funding for the responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage grantees. On the right you can see that OPRE oversees Mathematica's work on the FaMLE cross-site project which, as you now know, will provide support to OFA's grantees in collecting and reporting on data and collecting local evaluations.

Notice the double-headed arrow in the center of the diagram between OFA and OPRE, this represents the close collaboration that these two agencies have developed to facilitate high-quality data collection and other research activities among the grantees.

For example, OFA has been highly involved with OPRE and Mathematica over the past 18 months in development and refinement of performance measures, developing the data collection modalities, and designing the report format.

Now that you know a little bit about what the FaMLE cross-site project is, let's turn to the overview of the requirements in the funding opportunity announcement related to the type of program services and activity that will be supported.

>> For the healthy marriage and relation education grant, the legislation authorizes eight specific activities, just as it has in previous years. These include public advertising campaigns, relationship education in high schools, marriage and relationship education skills, and the others that are listed on the slide here.

In previous healthy marriage grants, these eight activities were independent and funding did not allow them to the combined. Also in previous rounds there were four specific elements that could be included but only under one of the authorized activities (number 3). Those elements were parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution and job and career advancement activities.

One of the things that is different in this year's funding announcement is that OFA is interested in programs that combine any of these eight activities and any of the four elements. In this round of grant funding ACF is seeking healthy marriage programs that may offer an array of services that fall under these activities and elements.

This will provide more flexibility in designing your programs, allowing you to perhaps better match your program services to the needs of your community and target populations.

The funding opportunity announcement also indicates that ACF is particularly interested in healthy marriage programs that ALSO offer services in one of three key areas: First, ACF is particularly interested in programs that may promote participants' employability and financial literacy. This may include job and career advancement activities, activities to help participants secure employment, or financial literacy activities like financial planning, asset development, and budgeting.

As I mentioned, job and career advancement activities previously could only be provided in conjunction with one of the Authorized Activities. And for this new round of grants, they can be offered with ANY of the 8 authorized healthy marriage activities. However, it is important to note that these employment and financial literacy activities still cannot be provided as stand-alone activities.

Besides economic stability services, ACF is also very interested in programs that include case management strategies, especially those that directly provide additional needed services or have strong connections to a broad array of other needed services available in the community.
A third area that ACF is particularly interested in with respect to healthy marriage is programs that focus on and are especially adept at providing services to youth who have multiple issues and are considered at-risk. These include for example, youth aging out of foster care, homeless or runaway youth, and youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

Now let's turn to the Authorized Activities for Responsible Fatherhood programs. This includes both the New Pathways FOA and the Re-entry FOA.

Three areas of activities are authorized for responsible fatherhood grants, including responsible parenting, economic stability, and healthy marriage and relationship education. The FOA specifically states that grantees MUST use the funds to support and integrate activities in all three of these areas.

In addition, they must offer at least one of the elements specified in the FOA under each activity.

For Responsible Parenting, these elements include such things as mentoring, mediation; skills-based parenting education; and encouraging child support payments, among others.

For Economic stability, the elements include work first services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, job retention and enhancement, encouraging education, and coordination with existing employment services.

And for Healthy marriage, the elements include counseling, relationship skills, and education on how to control aggressive behavior,
as well as other elements.

Staying with the responsible fatherhood funding opportunity announcements, it's worth repeating that grantees must support and integrate all three authorized activities and must offer at least one of the elements listed under each activity in the funding opportunity announcement.

The FOAs also indicate a particular interest in programs that plan to serve two target populations: first, low-income adult fathers, and second, young fathers – those between the ages of 16 and 24.

ACF is also particularly interested in well-designed programs that include strategies to determine the appropriate set of activities for each participating father.

With respect to the economic stability component, ACF is particularly interested in programs that include job-driven components, particularly those that…

Build from an understanding of local economic conditions
Include connections to education and training opportunities
Incorporate partnerships with employers
And those that use evidence-based or research-informed programs and practices

Note that the responsible fatherhood FOAs are very specific about the type of economic stability activities that are of particular interest, so be sure to review that section.

Let's turn now to thinking a bit about program design. In this next section, I'll be making some suggestions for designing programs or refining the design of a program that already exists.
The funding opportunity announcements require grant applicants to specify their overall goals and reasons for proposing the program, and the target population that they expect to serve.

To describe or refine your statement of goals, and identify the specific population you want to serve, it is helpful to begin with an in-depth understanding of your community's needs, so that's where we'll begin.

Now, you may have been operating your program in the community for a number of years, or you may have an intuitive sense of what the community needs, but it's important to verify and document that understanding by using facts and figures in your grant application.

First, identify and define the community that you expect to serve, and describe the relevant characteristics of people who live in the community. What are the predominant family structures and residential statuses of parents? To prepare for your grant proposal, look up and document data on the key issues faced by your community, such as poverty, substance abuse, incarceration. What kind of housing is available for low-income families? What type of employers and industries are there? What are the economic conditions? Does the community have good access to public transportation or do residents rely on cars?

Many sources of data exist on the characteristics of communities, for example, the Kids Count Data Center, operated by the Annie E. Casey foundation. You can also go to the Census Bureau's website and look up data from the American Community Survey. A list of sources for this type of data can also be found on the website for the FaMLE cross-site project.

Once you've documented the needs of the community, you need to assess the demand for services. This means finding out whether community members are interested in a responsible fatherhood or healthy marriage program. To do this, you can talk with community leaders, potential organizational partners, and other members of the public. You could, for example, present at community meetings to get feedback on your plans.

A community needs assessment doesn't have to take a lot of time but it can provide important benefits that will help you get your program off the ground: It can confirm your perceptions about the community, or may cause you to revisit your opinions; it may help you build support for your program from important community partners and leaders, who might then spread the word about what you're trying to do, and it may build interest and anticipation among the people you'd like to serve.

The data you document on your community, together with the feedback on the interest of the community for your services, is going to help you clearly identify your target population.

Now if there are similar other programs in the community, you may want to talk with them about who they strive to serve. Your chances of success might be diminished if both organizations are targeting exactly the same population and offer the same services, because there might not be enough participants to go around.

In specifying your target population, you should consider what (if any) eligibility criteria you want to establish. You will likely be serving people with substantial challenges in a community with few services available to them. From that standpoint, it may be important to you to serve all comers.

But it's also important to recognize your limits—that some individuals will have problems that you may not be able to adequately address with your services. Some programs, for example, choose to screen out those with untreated substance abuse or severe mental illness. Your limited resources may be better spent, with greater impact, on those who are able to fully engage in your services.

The flip side to the eligibility criteria question, is to make sure that your target population is not so narrowly defined that you will have difficulty meeting enrollment targets. When making this calculation, it's very important to remember that many people who are eligible may be unable or unwilling to participate. So you may want to plan to reach out to many more people than you can actually serve.

Once you have documented your community's needs and clearly specified the target population, you'll want to identify the services your program will provide and how they will help you achieve your goals.

In a broad sense, what you want to do is consider how your program will lead to the desired changes in your clients. This is your theory of change. A great tool for developing the building blocks of your theory of change is a Logic Model.

The funding opportunity announcements actually state that applicants must submit a logic model for designing and managing their project. A logic model is a one-page diagram that presents the conceptual framework for a proposed program and explains the links among the different program elements. The funding opportunity announcements identify the specific elements that grant applicants should discuss, they include: Goals, assumptions, inputs, target population, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

OFA developed two examples of logic models for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs, which you can find on the FaMLE cross-site website. Look for them under the Program Design tab.

In this webinar, we're going to discuss the basic building blocks of a logic model: Inputs, Activities, Outputs, and Outcomes.

You can think about a logic model as a map to results. Think about, for example, how you use your GPS to plan a road trip. What's the first thing you enter?

That's right, it's the destination. In this case, the destination – or outcome – is what you hope to achieve. So we're first going to get clear on what the outcomes are of your program before we talk about how to get there.

Outcomes should correspond to the most prevalent issues and needs of your community and target population that your program intends to address. You can see some examples here: increasing fathers' involvement with their children, decreasing unemployment and poverty, strengthening marriages and relationships. These are all great starting points for good outcomes.

A well-thought outcome is SMART, to borrow an acronym. Using the first example of father involvement, you want your outcome to be Specific—for example, try to be clear about whose father involvement you mean—the involvement of fathers who don't live with their children? Or the involvement of fathers who do live with both of their kids in a 2-parent family? Your outcomes should be Measurable – and note here that the FOA already specifies a set of outcome measures that will be required. Outcomes should be Attainable – that is something you can actually achieve. It's not realistic for example to expect that you could achieve a goal of getting joint custody for all of the fathers in your program. Outcomes should be Relevant, and directly tie in with program activities. And last, outcomes should be Time Bound. Some goals may take longer than others to achieve, and that's why the FOAs list a set of both short and long-term outcomes.

Now once you're clear on your outcomes, look at what program activities are needed to achieve them. The Activities element encompasses your program services, with respect to Content, Structure, Service Delivery Approach, and Duration and Intensity.

Content is the focus of your program. It consists of the information, knowledge, attitudes, and skills that you seek to instill in your clients. The content should be designed to affect the outcomes that you've selected.

Many of the decisions that you make about content will be dictated by the curriculum that you choose. The curriculum—or curricula because you may have more than one—is one of the most important decisions that you'll make about the program.

You should consider whether there is research evidence of its ability to effect change in participants. Do be careful here—some developers make claims of effectiveness based on research that is unfortunately not methodologically rigorous or scientifically sound. Or, a curriculum has been shown to be effective, but has not been tested with your target population.

OPRE has supported several reviews of program curricula that will help you with this decision. The Strengthening Families Curriculum Resource Guide is available at the ACF website (www.hmrfcurriculum.acf.hhs.gov) and also you can access it from the FaMLE cross-site website.

Of course, the best content in the world will ultimately not prove to be effective unless the clients actually receive it. The way that you structure service delivery, that is the frequency and the format, should be designed to maximize the chances that clients will be likely to complete most if not all of the program.

To do this, you should carefully consider your clients' circumstances and needs. For example, unemployed individuals may be able to attend all-day workshops and complete the program within a few weeks, while employed individuals may only be able to attend at certain times and may need a lot of flexibility in scheduling. If you want to serve both, you may need to offer multiple formats.

Integration and sequence are two concepts to also consider when designing your service delivery structure. Low-income populations can be difficult to retain in services over a long period of time because they are frequently mobile and have unstable schedules. They may often change jobs, housing, child care arrangements, and other issues for example.

Because attendance always declines over time, your clients may not be likely to receive content that comes later in a sequence of services. You should seriously consider weaving content related to all of the authorized activities that you are focusing on throughout your programming. For example, some responsible fatherhood programs integrate content on parenting, economic stability, and healthy relationships into a single workshop. Or the first half of a session maybe on parenting and the second half on relationships and so on.

You should also be aware that the overall approach to service delivery can be a factor in how much your clients will participate. Two types of models that have been studied are the cohort-based model and the open-entry model. Each of them has their advantages and drawbacks with respect to client participation.

In the cohort model, a group of clients begins a structured set of services together, so that the same participants are expected to come to each session. Cohort models are thought to promote peer bonding; clients often come to know and support one another over time. Clients in these programs have reported in research that this support motivates them to continue participating. One caveat, though: if clients have to wait a long time for services to start after they enroll, fewer clients may begin participating in the first place, because they lose motivation during the wait. So you may need to build in a strategy to engage and keep them interested until services begin.

An open-entry model, in contrast, allows clients to begin receiving services almost immediately and often allows clients to complete the program at their own pace. Because there is typically little waiting time between enrollment and when a client can begin workshop attendance, the initial participation may be high. But the flexibility of the open-entry model comes with its own downside: because services are "always available", clients may not attend as frequently as programs would like. And sporadic attendance is likely to be associated with a lower completion rates. So here, building in some sort of incentive for consistent steady attendance may be useful.

Program length and intensity are two additional important issues to consider in designing your services. Intensity refers to the total number of hours of programming that clients are expected to complete, while length refers to the amount of time over which the full program is offered. There are tradeoffs between program length, intensity, and the rate at which clients participate and complete.

Many programs offer a core set of workshop sessions up front, and then allow the client to continue receiving services such as case management over a long period of time, sometimes over a year or more. This is a reasonable model. But when the CORE workshops are spread out over many many months, people are more likely to drop out. To address this concern, you may want to consider increasing the frequency of services or the length of each session. For example, you could offer all-day workshops over several Saturdays, instead of a 1-hour workshop over 24 weeks.

Now an intensive program that requires all day every day attendance that may actually be needed to address the particularly challenging issues of some clients, such as those with long histories of prior incarceration and unemployment. Nevertheless, even some of them are likely to obtain jobs and be unable to continue daily attendance because of their job schedules. So you may want to offer more options such as evenings or weekends for such clients.

Again, consider your target population, think about what it will take to achieve your outcomes, and make your program just long enough and just intense enough as necessary. And if you're not sure, consider offering multiple formats -- and consider testing them in your local evaluation to determine which is more effective at producing higher levels of participation and completion.

Next, I'm going to touch on outputs. These are measures of the amount of services that are being received by clients, and result directly from the program's activities – both the services that are offered and how they are offered.

Measuring the level of services that are received by clients can provide an indication of the likelihood that your program will achieve its outcomes. They can be thought of like signposts – if the numbers are going in the right direction, you're getting closer to your destination. If the numbers are different from what you expect, it suggests you may want to revisit your service delivery approach to diagnose the problem and see what might be done differently.

The web-based electronic system grantees will use to track service receipt will easily compute key outputs that grantees will be able to review at any time. These include, for example, the number of clients who enroll in a program relative to a target number; the number of sessions received by a client relative to the number offered; and the percentage of clients who enroll but don't show up for any services.

Finally, I want to touch just on the Inputs section of the logic model. These are the resources that you'll need to carry out the program activities. Taking stock of all your inputs is important to make sure you have what you need to get where you're going. Your road trip won't start if you don't have your keys, and it surely will not end well if you don't have enough gas.

Of course, human resources—your staff—may be your most important input. They are the engine that makes your program run. They will spend the most time with your program's clients. So make sure that you have planned for enough staff to carry out program services at the planned intensity.

Also make sure you've carefully considered and identified the appropriate level of education and experience for each staff role. For example, staff who conduct outreach and recruitment may need to have a very different skill set from those who facilitate workshops. Cross-training may be a useful strategy to ensure coverage when there are absences or unexpected changes, but in general, case managers, group facilitators, employment specialists, and outreach staff each have distinct roles to play and typically require specific backgrounds to carry out their jobs well. Also, don't overlook the important role that supervisors and mentors can play in keeping your staff motivated and engaged in performing to the best of their ability.

Inputs aren't just the staff and resources necessary to support them, though. Strong partnerships, physical resources, the curricula, and even more intangible resources like your program's reputation, are important inputs. They all influence your activities and contribute to the success of your program, and all of them should be included as you take an inventory of your inputs.

With that, I'm going to turn the floor over to Sarah Avellar who is now going to talk about two specific challenges often faced by healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs and the strategies that you can build into your plans to address them.

Sarah?

Addressing Challenges

Thanks Robin.

As part of the planning process it's important to consider how you're going to increase the likelihood that your services will be delivered as intended.

To perform their job well, staff need adequate training. Training is crucial to give staff a clear understanding of their roles. And it's important for helping them understand both the big picture of the program and its many parts.

Often you want to plan for both initial training, when a staff person is new to their job or a particular role, and ongoing training for staff who are more established in the positions.

Initial training should focus on what a staff person needs to know to do their job well, and that includes process, practices, and expectations. You might have more flexibility with ongoing training. You could include refreshers of some basics, as well as new topics to help staff continue improving.

Training often covers such topics as: recruiting and enrolling clients; other community resources that clients can use; skills for facilitating groups; the curricula used by the program; and monitoring client's progress, including participation in program services.

So these are obviously key activities and resources for a program.

When developing your program, also think about the best ways to support staff through supervision. For example, consider how many supervisors you will need. Also think about which, and how many, staff they are responsible for overseeing. Lay out the frequency of meetings with staff and their supervisors, and determine how many meetings will be one-on-one or in groups. Setting clear expectations is important for supervisors and the staff they oversee, so everyone has a common understanding of how the process will work.

Although in-depth meetings are a critical part of supervision, other support can also inform staff about their performance. Such support includes written assessments of progress, quick checks-ins on the phone or in person, and performance evaluations. One type of support that staff and supervisors often find particularly informative is having a supervisor observe staff as they perform key roles. The supervisor should then provide constructive feedback on what they did well. For example, a supervisor may attend a workshop session and later provide feedback to a facilitator on how well he or she presented the curriculum material, engaged clients during the session, managed group dynamics, and created a welcoming environment. Periodic observations help both a supervisor and staff person know how well things are going in practice.

Of course it is important not just for supervisors and staff to interact frequently, but to facilitate communication and collaboration between staff at all levels. Open communication helps convey feelings of cohesion or having "one" program even if it's made up of many different parts. One way to support that, is to set aside time for staff with similar responsibilities to meet, discuss their experiences, brainstorm, and collaborate. For example, case reviews are a tool used by many programs. In a case review, staff might meet to review clients' progress, including what is going well and ways the client could use some additional support. As a team, the group develops a plan that can be used to coordinate services and move forward. A case review then has the benefit both of building relationships between staff and developing a strong plan for clients based on input from multiple people.

Systematically tracking clients' progress helps staff not only know what's happening with a particular client, but about service delivery overall. For example, data may show that there are common drop-off points when many clients disengage for services, or you may find that attendance is much better when a workshop is offered at a particular day or time, or that some types of services are better attended than others.

To make sure that all relevant data are collected, it's important to assign a point person or people who will be responsible for collecting and entering data on a regular basis. You may have different point people depending on the type of data. For example, case managers may be responsible for entering information on their meetings with clients, including their case notes. For group workshops, you might have clients sign in on a roster, and then assign a staff person to enter that information into the computer system within a specified amount of time such as two days. It is important to make sure staff know who is ultimately responsible for all data collection and entry so nothing falls through the cracks. It’s also a good idea to have another staff person review the data periodically to check for accuracy and completeness.

Data are useful at many levels and can be used as part of the regular conversations between supervisors and staff. For example, data could show the average number of times a case manager meets with his or her clients and then the supervisor can determine whether that is about what is expected for the program.

Partners are other agencies that contribute to your program in various ways. Partners may provide referrals to clients for your program or a partner may provide supplemental services directly to your clients.

If your partner is playing a substantial role in your program, you probably want to develop a formal agreement, sometimes known as a memorandum of agreement or MOA. An MOA is useful even if you don’t have a financial arrangement with the partner. You may even want to develop an MOA as part of your proposal for the grant.

In an MOA, you will want to specify responsibilities, such as recruitment or providing services. And the more specific you can be about your expectations, the better. So for example, rather than saying a partner will refer clients each month, you could specify that a partner will provide referrals to 20 eligible potential clients a month. Otherwise, you and the partner agency may be making different assumptions about a reasonable number of monthly referrals. Similarly, rather than just saying that the partner will provide workshops on a regular basis, you could specify in the MOA that the partner will provide a workshop every 4 weeks, on average, recognizing that it’s not always possible to stick exactly to schedule. But then you could also specify a total number of workshops that the partner should provide over a one year period.

You’ll also want to set expectations about whether partner agency staff need to be trained, and if so, who will provide the training and how often the training will be provided. It’s also useful to think ahead to likely staff turnover and what you will do to prepare new staff and what you expect the partner to do.

Communication is key and developing a clear plan is useful, especially because you usually don’t have daily contact with all of your partners. In that plan, you may designate a liaison at your agency and each partner agency who is chiefly responsible for communication. You may want to specify a minimum of how frequently you will communicate, such as monthly check-in calls. If you’re sharing data, plan how that will happen, including what data will be shared, how it will be shared that maintains clients’ privacy, and how often it will be shared. Again being as specific as possible helps you and your partners understand each other’s expectations, so you’ll be on the same page.

Often the toughest tasks for programs are identifying clients interested in the program, getting them in the door, and keeping them coming. So let’s talk about this next.

How are you going to inform and engage potential clients? One of the most common methods is having grantee staff reach out to people directly. This is usually face-to-face and can be done through activities through street outreach, such as knocking on doors or going to places where potential clients gather, such as laundromats or parks. Or you may put staff in other agencies that clients use, such as waiting rooms of health clinics or social services.

Street outreach can be particularly useful if your potential clients are not connected to other agencies. And this may be more likely for male clients. Charismatic staff can strike up informal conversations with people in all sorts of places, like parks, barber shops, and other locations.

It does take a certain personality and skill set for this type of engagement, obviously someone needs to be comfortable approaching strangers. Recruiters often get more no's than yeses, so being persistent and upbeat are also key traits. In addition, some potential clients may respond better to recruiters who are similar to themselves in some way, for example, men may respond better to men or couples may respond better to a married recruiter.

In addition to direct recruitment, working with referral partners is another common method. Other organizations can refer clients to your program verbally or they may provide clients written referrals. They also may send you contact information about potential clients if the clients have consented to share their information.

Using referral partners has a number of advantages. If a potential client is receiving their services, it's a relatively easy way to access that client. Often these agencies have an established relationship with potential clients and so having them tell someone about the program may go a long way in conveying the legitimacy of it. That type of support can be particularly helpful if you're new to providing these types of services.

However, working with referral partners also requires maintenance. Staff at referral agencies sometimes need to be reminded of your program, and if they turnover, you may have to train their replacements. You should plan on regularly checking in with your liaison at the agency to hear about such things as the number of potential clients they see and whether they are meeting your targets. You'll also want to frequently remind referral staff about your program otherwise it can be easy for referrals to gradually slip.

If there are any restrictions to sharing data, you and the referral agency need to be clear from the onset so potential clients' privacy is protected.

There are many advantages to working with referral partners, and so most agencies use them as part of their recruitment tool box. But also remember that your staff are often the best salespeople for your program. They know the most about it and they are usually the most enthusiastic about the program and of course those are big selling points when reaching out to potential clients.

After identifying clients, the next hurdle is getting them in the door. So let's briefly just talk about a few challenges and some possible solutions.

The first challenge is that people lose interest or their availability changes between intake and start of services. This problem tends to be more pronounced the longer the lag between intake and start of services. So think about ways to reduce that lag. One way might be to increase the start of services, such as offering the workshops every other week instead of once a month. Or you could move the intake to the time right before services start, for example, only doing recruitment two weeks before you are about to start a workshop. However, a risk is that you may not recruit enough clients in that time, so you'll need to think carefully about the flow of clients when considering this option. A third solution is to provide supplemental services to tide people over until the core services start, but you're still keeping them interested and engaged in the program. For example, you could offer peer discussion groups before the workshops begin.

A second common challenge which Robin mentioned is faced by programs that offer "drop in" services. For example, clients can start a workshop at any time rather than on a set schedule and clients may also be able to select from a menu of services, which offers flexibility but may increase procrastination because the services always seem available.

Solutions include asking participants to sign an agreement indicating what services they will use and their choice about when they will start those services. This maintains the flexibility for clients, but asking them to make a formal commitment may increase their follow-through.

A grantee can also offer incentives to participate. These may include supports to reduce barriers to participation such as meals, bus fare, or financial incentives, such as gift cards.

Once you've gotten somebody in the door, how do you keep them?

The first challenge is changing circumstances that interfere with participation. Someone may intend to participate, but changes in work schedule or transportation problems may thwart them. Solutions include providing services at different times and days to accommodate various work, family, and personal schedules.

Many programs offer make-up sessions for those who miss a service. Make-up sessions can be offered one-on-one or in a group. For example, a case manager trained in the curriculum could do a make-up session with individual clients or there may be drop-in make-up session led by the regular facilitators.

The second challenge is clients losing motivation or becoming less committed over time. Think of ways to re-energize them. For example, you could schedule fun events that also offer a chance for clients to try out some of the skills the program is teaching. These might include date nights for couples or father-child outings.

You may also publically celebrate clients' accomplishments, by hosting a graduation party for those who complete the program, or a special acknowledgment of a client who just got a job.

Financial incentives are another tool to reward participation. Some programs have offered a weekly stipend or hold a lottery that everyone who attends can enter. With a stipend, everyone who attends will benefit. And with a lottery there's typically a bigger incentive for one lucky client, plus the build-up and anticipation until the winner is announced. Another creative incentive is a reduction in child support arrearages or debt for attending program services. Obviously this sort of incentive would need to be granted through an arrangement with the local child support office, so it does require some additional steps. But it may be a strong motivation to attend for some populations, particularly fathers who don't live with all of their children and may have child support debt.

So in sum, we've described some important aspects to consider when developing or modifying a program. Keep in mind there's no "right" answer—the best option for your program will depend on a host of factors including resources, target population, and community context. But we have tried to highlight some best practices.

With a good understanding of key issues, the decisions you make will be informed by your knowledge of the target population and what you think works best for them.

And we do have some resources to help.

Here I'm going to highlight resources that we created specifically for responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage grant applicants.

As Robin mentioned we do want to encourage you to check out the FaMLE cross-site website. The website was designed entirely for grant applicants. We have a tab on program design with many of the topics we discussed today, questions to consider, tips, and links to other free resources. In addition, we also have information on evaluation design; performance measures; and the nFORM prototype, a management information system designed solely for responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage grantees.

This is the first webinar in a series of four FaMLE cross-site webinars that are intended for grant applicants. Next Tuesday, we will be holding a webinar on performance measures; on Wednesday, we're holding a webinar on the nFORM system, which as I just mentioned is the management information system that grantees are required to use; and on Thursday, we are having a webinar on designing a local evaluation.

All of the webinars will be at 2pm Eastern, which is 11am Pacific time. If you can't attend, or if you want to hear any of the information again, we will be posting a recording of the webinar, a transcript, and a copy of the slides for each of the four webinars on the FaMLE Cross-Site website.

So once again here is the FaMLE cross-site website URL: www.famlecross-site.info. It's a little easier to read than to say.

And now we have time for questions and answers. We can't answer questions outside of the webinar because the grant application process is competitive and all applicants must have access to the answers. So we will answer questions next, and archive the questions and answers as part of the transcripts and webinar recordings that as I just mentioned will be posted on the FaMLE cross-site website. If you do have a question, remember all participants are muted, so please type the question into the chat feature.

And with that, I'm going to hand it over to Julie Leis and Seth Chamberlain with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation to answer questions.

Question and Answer

Good afternoon. Thank you Robin and Sarah for that wonderful presentation. My name is Seth Chamberlain. I will take a moment to respond to some of the questions that have come in during the webinar.

First question to which I'm going to respond is: please provide an example of a short-term outcome. Should the SMART objectives specify targets? 80% of non-custodial fathers will increase the frequency of spending time with the child by the last workshop session.

The funding opportunity announcement gives examples of short-term outcomes. The FOA says, in section 1 program description, under program purpose and scope, under programmatic outcomes that the following examples are designed to assist applicants in developing short-term outcomes that will be incorporated in their overall program design and logic model. Examples include: increased frequency of talking with a child about things she or he is interested in. That is an example of a parenting short-term outcome. Increased proportion of participants who use a written budget to plan their spending. That is an example of an economic stability short-term outcome. And increasing the proportion of participants who are satisfied in the way they handle conflict with her partner or spouse would be an example of relationship or marriage short-term outcome. Outcomes can be taken from the pre-and post-surveys which can be found at the FaMLE cross-site website, www.famlecross-site.info.

The next question says: I understand what an impact evaluation is, however could you explain the basic concept of descriptive evaluation?

To answer this question, I am going to talk about two different sections of the funding opportunity announcement. This is in all three funding opportunity announcements, the healthy marriage, the new pathways to responsible fatherhood and the ReFORM funding opportunity announcement. First, in section 4.2 of the FOAs, under project description, underfunded activities evaluation plan, the FOA states, applicants that propose to conduct descriptive evaluations must use data and analysis to describe and explain the importance and implications of the program's processes. Such as a process or program implementation study. And/or the program's population such as the pre-and post-study. The FOAs also give an example of the difference between a descriptive and an impact evaluation. This description can be found in section 1 of the funding opportunity announcement under the post-award performance measure data and evaluation requirement, local evaluation. It gives examples of topics for local evaluations and says for the topic areas listed here, descriptive studies would not have a control or comparison group. Impact studies would have a control or comparison group. For example, a program offering three types of services could look for associations between participant's use of those services and outcomes. This would be a descriptive study. On the other hand, the program could randomly assign participants to be eligible to use 1, 2, or all 3 services and then analyze whether the groups had different outcomes. This would be an impact study. I hope that gives some further direction as to what a descriptive study is.

The next question says: I have a question about the independent local evaluator requirement. We are planning a descriptive evaluation of our project, we have in-house evaluation department, can we use this person or do we need somebody completely outside of the agency?

I will mention that, many of these questions are around evaluation. The answers to these questions can be found on the FaMLE cross-site website. And we will also have webinars next week related to the performance measures, nFORM, and the local evaluation expectations. But I'm happy to answer these questions now.

The question is about having a completely external evaluator or having somebody that is in the same organization but in a different department. This is generally not acceptable. The organization may have a vested interest in the results of the study, even the results of a descriptive study. So this is not acceptable unless the grant applicant, and if awarded the grant, demonstrates that there is true independence between the program and the evaluator and if safeguards are put in place to ensure continuing independence of the evaluation. For example, the evaluating group must demonstrate there will be no financial benefit to them or to the organization from results of the study.

The next question is: will you provide support to all grantees or just grantees in the FaMLE cross-site study?

All grantees will submit performance measure information. And all of the performance measure information will be considered in the cross-site analysis. So in that respect, all grantees will be grantees in the FaMLE cross-site study. One of the nice things about the FaMLE cross-site project is that it will provide support to all grantees on performance measures. And it will provide intensive support to a smaller number of grantees on local evaluations. But all grantees will have access at a minimum to performance measure support from the FaMLE cross-site contract.

The next question is: may grantees request to be part of the federally led evaluation as well as conduct their own local evaluation?

In short, the answer is yes. But I'm turning in the funding opportunity announcement to a specific part that I think can address this question. In the funding opportunity announcement, in section 4.2. There is a portion of that called required forms, assurances, and certifications. And under that is a subheading after the long table there's a subheading called federal evaluation. Applicants must include a clear written statement that specifically includes a commitment to accept and fully participate in all aspects of the federal evaluation if selected. And adhere to all protocols established by ACF and its designated contractors. It must also include a clear written statement about the confirmation of the applicant's understanding that the federal government may incorporate the local evaluation into the federally-led evaluation, the federal government may waive the local evaluation requirement, or the local evaluation may continue in parallel to the federal evaluation.

Lastly, applicants must include a clear written statement that is a commitment to ensure that partnering or organizations comply with the federal evaluation award conditions. Now to the first part of the question, the FOAs also say, applicants may include a written statement indicating that they have a particular interest in participating in or being selected for the federal evaluation. Although a local evaluation plan is still required of these applicants. And they may briefly mention specific program enhancements that they would be interested in adding to their program to be included in the federal evaluation. In short, applicants may indicate they are interested in participating in the federal evaluation. And in some instances, grantees' local evaluations may be incorporated into the federally-led evaluation. It may be waived, or the local evaluation may continue in parallel.

The next question is: do we have to use the surveys on the FaMLE website?

The short answer is, yes. The surveys that are on the FaMLE website have gone through a period of public comment and we have incorporated public comment when possible. Right now they are being reviewed by a federal agency called the Office of Management and Budget. These measures, these surveys will constitute the performance measures for the next cohort of responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage grants. And all grantees will be expected to report on them. I should mention that the surveys that are on the FaMLE cross-site website contain the questions that grantees will be asked to ask participants. However, there's going to be a management information system, called nFORM that will make going through the surveys much easier for the participants. To be more specific, we are developing what is called an audio computer-assisted self-interview or ACASI. I am sorry -- let me say this again. Audio computer-assisted self-interview. What this means is that we are programming a method for conducting the survey with your participants where they can use a touchscreen iPad, or some other tablet or a laptop, and complete the survey. That way participants aren't flipping through pages of a survey, rather if they answer a question that makes the next three questions null and void, the computer will skip those automatically. The approach is called audio computer-assisted because participants will also be able to hear the questions as they are being read so if you provide the participants with ear buds to plug into the tablet or into the computer, the participants that may be low literacy can hear the questions as they're being read and select whatever the answers may be. I should mention that this system will protect participant privacy. And so in this way we are trying to make things as easy for the participants and grantees as possible.

The next question is: for the pathways funding opportunity announcement are curricula permitted that are either evidence-informed or evidence-based?

The short answer is, yes. Curricula are permitted that are evidence-informed or evidence-based.

The next question is: is the nFORM prototype a web-based system so it can be remotely accessible?

The prototype is web-based and the eventual nFORM system will be web-based. By being remotely accessible, if that means it will be accessible via the web anywhere, the answer is yes. There are certain browsers that are being tested with it to make sure that they are compatible. We do not have the resources to test it with every web browser out there. But yes, it will be accessible on the web just like many other government and private sector forms. Excuse me a minute. I should mention that the nFORM system will be password protected. So even though the system will be accessible anywhere, not everyone -- in fact most people will not be able to access the nFORM system – and there will be many measures in place to protect participant and program data.

I do want to mention again, I know I've mentioned this before, I am answering a lot of questions related to evaluation and performance measures and related to nFORM and I'm happy to do so but I will also do this on the webinars that occur next week. I encourage everyone to attend the webinars next week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 2 PM Eastern time, 11 AM Pacific time. The Tuesday webinar will be focused on performance measure expectations. The Wednesday webinar will be focused on the nFORM system, that's the management information system, and the Thursday webinar will be focused on the local evaluation expectation.

Again, I am happy to answer these questions now.

The next question is: will grantees have full access to the database to run their own reports on outcomes etc. or will we simply receive reports generated by the system? The answer is yes and yes. At this point nFORM is being developed so that reports can be generated and also so that data can be exported -- so data can be exported and analyzed in another statistical package such as SPSS or SAS or even Excel for that matter. The answer is yes we do expect the data to be exportable. But we also expect some reporting to be available at the click of a button.

I'm going back into my system here.

This question says: we are a coalition of 26 faith and community based organizations. Can we select a representative 45 programs to participate in the research component, all participate in the evaluation, or do all programs have to participate in the research -- is that the end of the question --? I think so.

So local evaluations [Pause] I'm just going to – flip in the funding opportunity announcement. So again I'm going to speak about the funding opportunity announcement, section 4.2. I am looking at section 4.2, called funded activities evaluation plan. Applicants must propose a descriptive local evaluation plan or an impact local evaluation plan which will answer 1 or more grantee-specific research questions. Later on in that section it talks about research design. Let me talk about that sentence again, that sentence that I just said that applicants must propose a descriptive local evaluation plan or an impact local evaluation plan which will answer 1 or more grantee-specific research questions. The expectation is that there is one local evaluation that can answer multiple research questions. And in another part of the FOA, it gives examples of topics that could be addressed. Those topics can be things like recruitment, program activities, program support, overall program effectiveness. So the types of research questions can be quite broad but the expectation is that there is one local evaluation proposed. The design of that local evaluation will be dependent on the research question. Later in the FOA in section 4.2, funded activities evaluation plan. It says, there is a bullet that says, research design. It says applicants must propose a specific research design in their plan. I'm looking on page 31 in the healthy marriage and relationship education grants funding opportunity announcement. I could look in the responsible fatherhood one but I'm not going to take the time to do that right now. I'm looking on page 31 in the healthy marriage and relationship education grants funding opportunity announcement. So there is a bullet that says research design, it says applicants must propose a specific research design in their plan. And the next paragraph says applicants must include a justification for why the proposed research design is best suited to answer the research questions. So to the question from the participant on the webinar, the number of programs included in the research design should be informed by what the research question is. I cannot determine whether there should be 45 or 2 or however many programs involved in that specific research design. What applicants are asked to do, is to include a justification for why the proposed research design is best suited to answer the research question.

The next question is about the language for nFORM: Will nFORM be multilingual? If so, which leverages are in development?

nFORM at present is being developed for English and Spanish.

The next question is: will grantees be allowed -- there is a verb left out of the question – I'm going to assume – will grantees be allowed to design their pre-and post-surveys? Or will they be uniform and provided by OFA? I apologize, I am interpreting that there is a verb that was left out of the question so I apologize if I'm not understanding the verb here. So the question is will grantees be allowed to design their pre-and post-surveys? Or will they be uniform and provided by OFA?

The pre-and post-surveys will be uniform and provided by OFA. It does not mean that grantees are precluded from asking their own questions in addition to these questions, to the pre-and post- surveys that are on the FaMLE cross-site website and that are being reviewed by the federal Office of Management and Budget right now. But yes, they are uniform and will be provided by OFA.

The next question is: do we need to budget for devices needed to collect data using ACASI?

The answer is, yes. So if you look in section 4.2 of the FOA under the project budget and budget justification, there is a subheading called budgeting for evaluation. This is page 35 in the healthy marriage and relationship FOA. Under that section it says, the applicant's overall line item budget and budget justification must also include detailed allocations for the range of required performance measure data and evaluation activity, including the following, and the second bullet says, storage of performance data including desk/laptop computer or tablet purchase for ACASI online applicant characteristics, and pre-and post-tests. Including headphones and maintenance.

Okay. So the next question says: so grantees must wait to be chosen in order to participate in the federally-led evaluation?

The answer is yes. We are planning for a process where successful grant applicants, also known as grantees, their successful applications will be reviewed and discussions will be held between the federal evaluators and a select number of grantees.

I would ask everyone not only to attend the webinars from Tuesday-Thursday next week, but to also attend the webinar on federally-led evaluations which will take place next Friday, May 29, again at 2 PM Eastern, 11 AM Pacific. You can find the link to register for that webinar on the FaMLE cross-site homepage. There is a box on the FaMLE cross-site homepage that links to further information on these performance measure, local evaluation, and federal evaluation webinars. If you want to register for the webinar, I suggest clicking on the homepage for the FaMLE cross-site website and registering for the last webinar listed which is federally-led evaluation.

The next question is: what do you mean by that using internal evaluator from another department in your agency you must not show any economic benefit for your agency? Certainly the agency would receive remuneration for the evaluator's time in doing evaluation.

That is a good point, let me clarify. We want to ensure that local evaluations are independent so that the results of the evaluation would not result in financial benefit for the evaluator. That way the evaluator is demonstrating independence. Of course, if the local evaluator is being paid to conduct the evaluation. That is, remuneration for the evaluation activity. But the concern is around whether there would be real or perceived conflict of interest in the results of the evaluation. This is the last question that I'm going to answer.

I appreciate all the questions that have been submitted. Myself and the folks from ACF's Office of Family Assistance will look at these questions and we expect to post answers even to the ones we did not answer today. I believe the week of June 1st. So stay tuned for that.

The last question that I answered -- I am so sorry [Laughter] – Now I'm finally reading the last question -- If you do not get to all of the questions will you answer all the questions and post the answers and when can we expect to receive these? -- I guess I just answered the question [Laughter]. I apologize.

Thank you again for your active participation. Again I would like to encourage everyone to attend the webinars that will occur next week -- from Tuesday-Friday, May 26-29 occurring at 2 PM Eastern every day and 11 AM Pacific.

The links for the webinars are posted on the FaMLE cross-site homepage. They are also on the responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage website.

We will narratively address all of the questions that have been submitted.

Thank you. I will turn it back to the moderator.

Thanks everyone for attending today. This concludes the webcast for today, have a great weekend.

[Event Concluded]