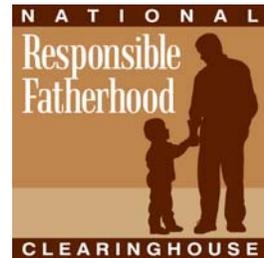




U.S. Department of Health
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and Families
Office of Family Assistance

NRFC Tips for Fatherhood Professionals

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RECRUITING MEN INTO FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS TIPS FOR PROGRAM PROFESSIONALS

Background

Involvement in fatherhood programs has been found to be associated with increases in fathers' empathy, improvements in family relationships, and increases in fathers' involvement with their children.^{i,ii,iii} In addition, fatherhood programs can improve fathers' self-confidence and involvement in work, as well as encourage them to build social relationships.^{iv,v} However, if fathers are not effectively *recruited* into programs, then they cannot reap these program benefits.^{vi} This brief presents several strategies that can be used by program practitioners to recruit fathers into programs.

What is Recruitment?

Recruitment refers to the process of attracting people to a program and enrolling them in it. Fatherhood program recruitment may include *mandatory* or *voluntary* referrals.

- *Mandatory* referrals may come from courts, jail diversion programs, or criminal justice agencies.
- *Voluntary* referrals may come from social service agencies or other community outreach programs, or may reflect a decision by participants themselves to get involved in the program.^{1,1}

In their recruitment processes, most programs include eligibility requirements or criteria for identifying specific groups of fathers to receive program services.¹

Remember the 7 Tips for Recruiting Fathers Into Programs

Tip 1: Be creative with advertising.

Tip 2: Host a "Bring a Friend" event during a program session.

Tip 3: Co-sponsor a highly visible event.

Tip 4: Offer recruitment incentives.

Tip 5: Once fathers express an interest, follow up with them immediately.

Tip 6: Share a program curriculum that is highly relevant to potential participants.

Tip 7: If targeting young fathers, teach a class at a local high school.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Strategies for Recruiting Fathers Into Fatherhood Programs

It is often difficult for fatherhood programs to recruit participants.^{vii} On the basis of the wisdom of the field, the following strategies have been found to be useful in attracting fathers to programs:

Tip 1: Be creative with advertising.

An important recruitment activity is to use advertising to share program information with potential participants. Before advertising your program, however, it is helpful to have established the following:

- *A mission statement for your program.* Mission statements help establish clear program goals and can be used to attract participants and staff. For example, a mission statement might read: “Our mission is to increase the number of children raised with involved and responsible fathers.”^{viii,ix}
- *Measurable program objectives.* Measurable program objectives identify what fathers can expect from program participation. Some possible objectives could be to: increase fathers’ employment or education; reduce father’s alcohol abuse and drug use; strengthen participants’ fathering skills; increase fathers’ involvement with their children; and improve fathers’ interactions with family members and others.^{x,xi}
- *Determination of target groups that you want to attract to your program.*^{xii} Identifying potential program participants helps program staff focus on specific and appropriate ways to attract fathers. The Georgia Fatherhood Program, for example, targets noncustodial fathers who have been ordered by the courts to pay child support.^{xiii} Working with the Office of Child Support Enforcement, the program uses referrals from child support agents, judges, and friends to recruit fathers.^{xiv} Considering your target fathers can also help inform how and where to advertise your program. For example, some programs have found that Latino fathers are often recruited through churches with Spanish-language services and Samoan and Native American fathers are often recruited by their friends.^{xv}

Knowing the program’s mission statement, objectives, and target participants enables program leaders and staff to brainstorm and target advertising strategies that best meet the program’s aims and can best attract its target population.^{xvi} The following are some advertising strategies that may be considered:

- *Advertise program information with brochures, fliers, or posters.* Printed advertisements should be colorful, attractive, and include basic program information, such as the program’s location and any incentives being offered (e.g., child care or stipends).^{xvii} An advertisement might read: “It’s fun, it’s free, it’s local, and there’s child care.”^{xviii} Programs can also use door hangers (i.e., advertisements hung on the door of homes) or billboard advertisements.^{xix} All advertisements should be posted in highly visible areas that fathers frequent,

such as community centers, churches, grocery stores, barbershops, bus or subway stops, and housing complexes.^{xx, xxi}

- *Advertise information about the program by word of mouth and by using existing program participants as recruiters.* Program information can also be shared by going door to door in the program neighborhood or by sharing information at school, community, and social events and venues (e.g., Super Bowl parties, birthday parties, coffee hours, community fairs, courts, churches, union meetings, human service agencies, school parent-nights).^{xxii, xxiii, xxiv} For example, program information can be shared during church announcements or school parent-nights. Studies show that fathers are more likely to join a program when they are approached by someone who is culturally, racially, or linguistically similar to themselves.^{xxv} Thus, it is important to use recruiters whose ethnic backgrounds are similar to those of potential participants. Some programs have also had success using past participants, other community members, and fathers' partners or spouses as program recruiters.^{xxvi} The Fatherhood & Families Program, for example, pays current participants to recruit for the program in their own communities.^{xxvii}
- *Advertise through community or media outlets.* Fatherhood programs can build relationships with welfare agencies, hospitals, courts, or other community organizations.^{xxviii} These organizations can refer or encourage fathers to participate in programs. Fatherhood program referrals could come from courts, jail diversion programs, criminal justice agencies, public health departments, Head Start programs, and through community outreach initiatives.^{xxix, xxx, xxxi, xxxii} For example, the Georgia Fatherhood Program uses referrals from the State Board of Pardons and Paroles and the Department of Corrections to identify potential participants.^{xxxiii} Radio and television media can also broadcast information about fatherhood programs to a wider audience.^{xxxiv}

Tip 2: Host a “Bring a Friend” event during a program session.

Current participants in fatherhood programs can be the most compelling recruiters for a program. Whereas current or past program participants can share the benefits of the program informally with a friend, it is sometimes easier if the program hosts an event to spur this interest. An example would be a “Bring a Friend” program session. Programs may even want to offer an incentive (e.g., a T-shirt, mug, or meal gift certificate) to fathers who bring a friend to the event.^{xxxv} During the event, a program could have an icebreaker, a brief program introduction, and refreshments.^{xxxvi}

- *Try phoning fathers to invite them to attend.* Fatherhood programs may also be able to access school or community organizations' call lists, or programs may consider asking existing participants if they have a friend who would not mind being contacted.^{xxxvii, xxxviii} Although promotional calls can be made by program staff members or volunteers who do not have an existing relationship with

potential participants, again, fathers tend to respond more positively to recruitment efforts waged by people who are culturally similar to themselves.^{xxxix}

Tip 3: Co-sponsor a highly visible event.

Your program may want to consider partnering with a community center, church, housing complex, or other community organization to put on a highly visible event.^{xi} This event can raise awareness about your fatherhood program and its activities.^{xli} Typical events that can result from such partnerships might include a block party, cook-out/barbecue, Fourth of July celebration (e.g., parade, fireworks, or picnic), or basketball tournament.

Tip 4: Offer recruitment incentives.

Participants in fatherhood programs often report that incentives are attractive motivators for them to get involved in a program.^{xlii} Therefore, providing fathers with incentives for joining a fatherhood program may inspire them to participate. Local businesses may be approached for prize donations, such as gift certificates (e.g., to restaurants, electronic equipment stores, or sporting events), mugs, or hats. Incentives could also include program offerings, such as transportation assistance, and subsidies for work-related fees, or social services.^{xliii} Some fatherhood programs may also work with government agencies to lift sanctions if fathers participate in program activities.^{xliiv} For example, a certain level of fathers' attendance could earn back a revoked driver's license.^{xliv}

Tip 5: Once fathers express an interest, follow up with them immediately.

Studies suggest that immediate follow-up communication with recruited fathers encourages them to actually participate in programs.^{xlvi,xlvii} Once fathers express an interest in participating in the program, it is important to have them registered and involved in the program immediately.^{xlviii} The faster the transition from a father's initial interest in the program to his actual involvement in it, the more likely recruited fathers will become active participants.^{xlix} Follow-up could be conducted verbally, with recruitment staff approaching interested fathers in a respectful and encouraging way.ⁱ To help fathers feel more comfortable, staff members in these conversations could use first names, could chat about topics of mutual interest, and could change their follow-up approach according to fathers' interests or concerns.ⁱⁱ Other programs follow up with fathers by sending out open invitations to program events and personalizing program enrollment forms.ⁱⁱⁱ

Tip 6: Share a program curriculum that is highly relevant to potential participants.

Research shows that fathers are more likely to participate in fatherhood programs that have a curriculum that is relevant to their lives.^{liii} Programs have found greater recruitment success if the curriculum does not focus exclusively on parenting skills. Fathers view that focus as a reflection on their shortcomings, and this perception can thwart their motivation to participate in the program.^{liv,lv} Instead, programs should include a curriculum that addresses fathers' needs, such as employment placement, counseling, housing, and legal aid.^{lvi,lvii,lviii}

Tip 7: If targeting young fathers, teach a class at a local high school.

For programs that target young fathers, teaching a class at a local high school may be a useful recruitment strategy. Such a course may focus on parenting or another related topic of interest to young males (e.g., career preparation).^{lix} In sharing the course information, fatherhood program representatives may introduce their program to young men as an additional resource.^{lx} For example, the San Mateo County Family Services Division has started high school classes on child support and parental responsibility in several of its local schools as a way to introduce teens to its fatherhood resources.^{lxi}

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR YOUR PROGRAMS

The following resources offer tips for recruiting fathers:

- **Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs.** James Levine, Dennis Murphy and Sherrill Wilson, authors. (1993). New York City, NY: Families and Work Institute
- **Fathers and Early Childhood Programs.** Jay Fagen and Glen Palm, authors. (2003). Clifton Park, NY: CENGAGE Delmar Learning.
- **A Guide to Strengthening Fatherhood in Your Community: Moving from Inspiration to Implementation.** National Fatherhood Initiative. (2007). Gaithersburg, MD: National Fatherhood Initiative. Available at:
http://www.fatherhood.org/iwwida.pvx?;products_no_tree?cat=BOOKS?comp=NFI.
- **The importance of fathers in the healthy development of children.** Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox, authors. (2006). Available at:
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/fatherhood.pdf>.

Other online resources include:

- **National Fatherhood Initiative** offers fatherhood program curriculum materials and information on training for fatherhood program staff and strategies for advertising fatherhood programs. Curriculum resources, including those in Spanish, are available at: https://www.fatherhood.org/browse_social_solutions.asp. Staff training information can be found at: <https://www.fatherhood.org/fathercheckup.asp>, and for strategies on advertising fatherhood programs, see: http://www.fatherhood.org/fatherfacts_fwd.asp. The National Fatherhood Initiative also provides television, radio, print, and Internet fatherhood that your program can either use to advertise father involvement or get ideas to advertise your own fatherhood program advertisements (visit: <https://www.fatherhood.org/media/PSAs/index.asp>).
- **Group Games** shares game ideas for fatherhood program icebreakers and getting-to-know-you activities. A variety of game ideas can be found at: <http://www.group-games.com/games-by-type>.
- **Be Proud! Be Responsible! A Safer Sex Curriculum** is a male teen curriculum that would be appropriate for fatherhood program seminars at a high school. Information about the program can be found at: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/programsthatwork/14bpbr.htm>. The program curriculum is available at: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/ScienceSuccess.pdf>.

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