

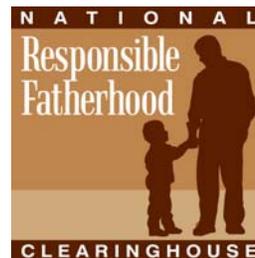


U.S. Department of Health
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Administration for Children
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Office of Family Assistance

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NRFC Tips for Fatherhood Professionals

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STAFF SELECTION

WHAT'S IMPORTANT FOR FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS?

Background

Having the right people in the right positions is critical to the success of any agency or organization. It is even more important in organizations that serve families, where the futures of children and families are at stake. The responsibility for recruitment and selection of new staff belongs to all levels of management within the agency—from the executive director, to supervisors, to frontline staff, who may know best what it takes to be successful on the job.ⁱ All staff are seriously impacted if positions go unfilled or are filled inadequately.ⁱⁱ The recruitment and retention of direct support workers (that is, frontline staff) are among the most challenging issues facing human service agencies today.ⁱⁱⁱ This brief presents research about staff selection and describes effective strategies for selecting staff in fatherhood programs.

What Is Staff Selection?

Staff selection is the process that implies recruiting, interviewing, and hiring new staff or redeploying existing staff within the program.

Why Is Staff Selection Important For Fatherhood Programs?

The move toward implementing evidence-based practices and programs has prompted interest in a suitable workforce and, in particular, the experience, education, credentials, and skills that practitioners need to facilitate high-fidelity implementation of new and innovative services. Indeed, the practitioner is the person who is most responsible for delivering the services effectively to program participants. Therefore, it is becoming imperative to identify successful strategies for recruiting and retaining high-quality staff and to determine core competencies associated with effective practitioners of evidence-based and innovative programs.^{iv}

Research conducted on staff selection in the human services field suggests that both formal qualifications (e.g., education, background, certification, and experience) and less measurable personal and interpersonal characteristics (e.g., commitment and communication skills) may be important when recruiting staff.^v Despite the limited availability of empirical research about the selection of effective practitioners for fatherhood programs, key issues to consider when hiring staff have emerged. These issues include the staff persons' experience, education, skills, readiness for, and commitment to the program, as well as personal characteristics.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

How Can Fatherhood Programs Recruit Appropriate Staff?

There are many different strategies that fatherhood programs can use to promote the selection and retention of appropriate staff.^{vi}

- **Strategy 1: Partner with colleges and universities**
Programs can consider developing partnerships with colleges and universities that have undergraduate and graduate programs in social work and other related fields. Such partners might augment existing program services by sponsoring or co-sponsoring workshops, seminars, and other continuing education programs with agency leaders.
- **Strategy 2: Hire volunteers and promote from within**
Program volunteers and current staff already have a commitment to the program and an understanding of program goals. A first opportunity for recruitment, therefore, might be among unpaid volunteers and/or staff already working with the program in some capacity.
- **Strategy 3: Encourage peer recruitment**
Current high-quality staff members who are committed to the program are often good resources for recruiting new staff. In fact, practitioners who have delivered a service or program successfully may be the best recruiters.
- **Strategy 4: Capitalize on media and technology**
It is important to work in collaboration with the media to enhance the agency's reputation, which will assist in recruiting high-quality staff. For example, develop working relationships with key media persons and try to get positive stories in the news about the good work the agency is doing.^{vii} Media outlets, including community and local newspapers, and internet websites, such as Idealist.org are also good places to post job ads.

How Can Fatherhood Programs Select Appropriate Staff?

Factors To Consider

Given the primary role that staff members play in the delivery of services, it is essential to select people with the capacity to carry out evidence-based and innovative practices. Selecting appropriate staff members has an impact on whether programs are implemented with fidelity and the degree to which the intended target population achieves successful outcomes.^{viii}

Even though limited research exists on staff selection, specifically for fatherhood programs, the available evidence suggests three major factors that should be considered when hiring staff members: 1) skills and abilities to work with fathers; 2) enthusiasm for and commitment to the program and its mission; and 3) experience and credentials.^{ix} Information on these factors is provided below.

Factor 1: Consider Staff's Skills and Abilities to Work With Fathers

Staff's ability to connect with and work with fathers is a critical ingredient for successful fatherhood programs. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that staff's ability to support positive interactions and relationship building among fathers in the program is related to achieving positive outcomes for fathers. Research shows that managing one's own feelings and

using relationship-building skills effectively are large part of the process, however, this work can be challenging.^x In an evaluation of the Detroit Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, for example, staff discussed the challenges associated with forging relationship with fathers.^{xi} One staff member reported that the tendency to be judgmental or overcritical of fathers can disengage fathers and hinder staff from holding them accountable. Additionally, some participating fathers felt that staff-participant relationships could have been stronger.^{xii}

"I had been going for about six or seven times, and they [program staff] couldn't remember who I was. I ended up having the same speech, the same conversation again."

Source: Bronte-Tinkew, J., Burkhauser, M., Bowie, L., Mbwana, K., Lilja, E., Collins, A., et al. (2007). Detroit Workforce Development Department (DWDD) and the Detroit Development Board (DWDB), 2007-2008 Evaluation Report.

Factor 2: Consider Staff's Enthusiasm for and Commitment to the Program and Fathers

Assessing potential staff members' commitment to implement evidence-based and innovative services can ensure that newly hired staff members have the motivation to implement program services with integrity. Key areas to assess when selecting staff members include their attitudes toward the services and program guidelines, their openness to learning a new skill, and their willingness (or unwillingness) to buy into the program's mission and goals. Other research on staff in fatherhood programs indicates that a staff person's experience with and enthusiasm for working with fathers are vital characteristics.^{xiii} Specifically, empathy, compassion, strong interpersonal and communications skills, and an understanding of the target population have been cited as critical for successful program implementation in evaluations of fatherhood programs conducted by Child Trends. Staff working across a number programs shared the following:^{xiv}

"I had been going for about six or seven times, and they [program staff] couldn't remember who I was. I ended up having the same speech, the same conversation again."

Source: Bronte-Tinkew, J., Burkhauser, M., Bowie, L., Mbwana, K., Lilja, E., Collins, A., et al. (2007). Detroit Workforce Development Department (DWDD) and the Detroit Development Board (DWDB), 2007-2008 Evaluation Report.

Factor 3: Consider Staff's Prior Work Experience and Credentials

In addition to a potential staff member's enthusiasm for and commitment to working with fathers, education and prior work experiences are critical. Individuals with formal training are more likely to understand the demands of the job and are less surprised by them. Working with fathers and helping them navigate a wide range of public agencies is complicated, and staff that have prior experience working with fathers have an easier time. In one evaluation of a fatherhood program, a staff member noted that having staff with previous child support and agency referral experience is especially helpful because these are two areas for which fathers most often seek support.^{xv}

In addition, program directors of effective fatherhood programs have called attention to the value of having college-educated staff.^{xvi} Research indicates that individuals with social work

training are likely to stay longer and be more successful in human service delivery positions than individuals without degrees in social work.^{xvii} A number of states and local jurisdictions have developed partnerships with universities to better prepare the candidate pool. For example, in the state of Michigan there is a program involving the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) and the accredited graduate social work programs.^{xviii}

Conclusions And Action Steps

Despite the need for additional research, a growing consensus is emerging about what should be done to ensure that fatherhood programs hire the most appropriate staff to implement practices effectively and achieve positive outcomes. On the basis of the available evidence, the following recommendations and action steps are provided support the use of effective staff selection strategies:

Action Steps for Staff Selection

Action Step 1: Recruitment practices should be comprehensive.

Using a comprehensive approach increases the likelihood of finding appropriate staff to implement program practices effectively.

Action Step 2: Recruitment and selection practices should include multiple factors, such as education, interpersonal skills, and abilities.

Research findings suggest that while education and experience are important criteria to consider when hiring staff, personal characteristics such as the ability to connect with fathers are equally, if not more, important for achieving positive outcomes.

Action Step 3: Fatherhood programs should apply consistent standards to evaluate applicants to facilitate the decision-making process.

Using core competencies to assess staff and make hiring decisions can ensure that appropriate staff members are consistently selected.

Action Step 4: Fatherhood programs should assess staff readiness, motivation, and openness.

Key areas to weigh when selecting staff members include their attitudes toward the services and program guidelines, their openness to learning a new skill or skills, and their willingness to buy into the program's mission and goals.

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