

# Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit

## Resources From the Field



This toolkit features information that is based on existing research and qualitative, anecdotal, and secondary data analysis related to field-informed practices. Inclusion of programs, tools, or practices does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance or the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.

***Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit: Resources From the Field*** was prepared by Fathers Incorporated, with support from ICF International, under Contract No. HHSP23320110020YC.

# Note From the NRFC Director

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse is excited to present this valuable resource, *Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit: Resources From the Field*, to those of you who have been supporting fathers for years and those just beginning to develop responsible fatherhood programs.

Before launching a program, it is essential to identify and understand the specific needs of fathers in your community, foster solid partnerships, and determine the scope of services that your program will address. You can use this toolkit to learn directly from the experiences of others who have pioneered successful fatherhood initiatives. Building on the insights and lessons that they've shared, you can customize your approach to best serve fathers in your community.

We will continue to update this and other National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse resources, so please send any suggestions for future topics to **info@fatherhood.gov**. And, in the meantime, continue to visit the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website **fatherhood.gov** for additional resources to enhance your endeavors.


Thank you for your support of fathers and, by extension, families and communities!



Kenneth Braswell  
Director  
National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

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For many years, researchers and policymakers have cited the importance of two-parent families and the vital role of mothers and fathers in child development. The role and impact of fatherhood programs has become clearer.

Although more research is still needed on long-term outcomes of fatherhood programs, evidence indicates that fatherhood programs are helping fathers get past the barriers in their lives that are holding them back from a better relationship with their children.<sup>2</sup> Research clearly indicates the benefits to children who have two actively engaged parents.<sup>3</sup>

*Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit: Resources From the Field* presents a compilation of resources that highlight the challenges and key issues associated with launching and sustaining a successful fatherhood program. This toolkit reflects the commitment of the Office of Family Assistance to improving outcomes for fathers, children, and families by providing strategic guidance to organizations that offer responsible fatherhood services.

, Mbawa, K., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Elements of promising practice for fatherhood programs for fathers*. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/ZpJlRG>

*fatherhood*. Retrieved from <http://www.fatherhood.gov/library/dad-stats>







Fatherhood programs provide services that support fathers in their roles as major influences in their children's lives. These programs are helping fathers create loving, nurturing relationships with their children and be actively involved in their lives. This toolkit draws on lessons learned and resources used by fatherhood programs in diverse locales throughout the nation.



The toolkit draws on existing Office of Family Assistance materials,<sup>4</sup> lessons learned by Office of Family Assistance grantees,<sup>5</sup> research studies,<sup>6</sup> and publications and resources available on the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website, such as *NRFC Tips for Program Professionals: Recruiting Men into Fatherhood Programs*.<sup>7</sup> The toolkit is also based on interviews, site visits, and informal conversations conducted by the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse with experienced practitioners who discussed the challenges faced by fathers and strategies they use to support them.

“Responsible fathering means taking responsibility for a child’s intellectual, emotional, and financial well-being. This requires being present in a child’s life, actively contributing to a child’s healthy development, sharing economic responsibilities, and cooperating with a child’s mother in addressing the full range of a child’s and family’s needs.”

The White House<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, & James Bell Associates. (2010). *Implementation resource guide for social service programs: An introduction to evidence-based programming*. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/XL1fA5>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, & James Bell Associates. (2009). *Emerging findings from the Office of Family Assistance healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood grant programs: A review of select grantee profiles and promising results*. Retrieved from National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website: <http://1.usa.gov/XQN0s5>

<sup>6</sup> Achatz, M., & MacAllum, C. (1994). *The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project: Report from the field*. Retrieved from Foundation Center, Issue Lab website: [http://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/young\\_unwed\\_fathers\\_pilot\\_project\\_report\\_from\\_the\\_field\\_the](http://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/young_unwed_fathers_pilot_project_report_from_the_field_the); Avellar, S. (2013). *Forging effective responsible fatherhood partnerships: A research to-practice brief*. Manuscript in preparation; Bronte-Tinkew, J., Carrano, J., Allen, T., Bowie, L., Mbawa, K., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Elements of promising practice for fatherhood programs: Evidence-based research findings on programs for fathers*. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/ZpJlrG>; Martinson, K., & Nightingale, D. (2008, February). *Ten key findings from responsible fatherhood initiatives*. Retrieved from Urban Institute website: [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411623\\_fatherhood\\_initiatives.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411623_fatherhood_initiatives.pdf); Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers’ fair share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood*. Retrieved from ERIC website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED437481.pdf>; Sander, J. H., & Rosen, J. L. (1987). Teenage fathers: Working with the neglected partner in adolescent childbearing. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 19(3), 107-110.

<sup>7</sup> National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. (2008, September). Recruiting men into fatherhood programs. *NRFC Tips for Fatherhood Professionals Series*. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/Vu6jdY>

<sup>8</sup> The White House. (2012). *Promoting responsible fatherhood*. Retrieved from [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/fatherhood\\_report\\_6.13.12\\_final.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/fatherhood_report_6.13.12_final.pdf)



## Toolkit Features

This toolkit is a comprehensive resource for both new and experienced practitioners. It examines topics and issues such as:

- Development of the responsible fatherhood field.
- Building an effective fatherhood program.
- Effectively engaging fathers.
- Cultivating community partners for project success.
- Recruiting, retaining, and training staff.
- Serving fathers with specific barriers, such as recent incarceration.
- Promoting sustainability.

The toolkit covers these and other topics through:

- Tips and suggestions from experienced practitioners.
- Activities for use with fathers in one-to-one or group sessions.
- Tools from model programs and expert practitioners to use and share with fathers.
- Top Takeaways and Helpful Resources.

The resources and activities detailed in this toolkit are available on the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website. Go to **[fatherhood.gov/toolkit](https://fatherhood.gov/toolkit)** to download the resources and activities, whose titles are indicated **in green**.



# Acknowledgments

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# Development of the Responsible Fatherhood Field

“Clearly, there is a need to rethink public efforts on behalf of dependent and impoverished young families. These efforts—which include public assistance, child support enforcement, and employment and training policies and programs—require coordination at the national level and cooperation between the various agencies and actors at the local level.”<sup>9</sup>

With an emphasis on positive father involvement in the lives of children, the responsible fatherhood field dates back to at least the mid-1970s in the United States. At that time, more people were beginning to recognize that father absence had a substantial impact on child well-being.<sup>10</sup> Early efforts sought to support young, primarily low-income men as they struggled with parenting and financial issues.

## Pioneers

One of the first community efforts was in Cleveland, Ohio. Fatherhood advocate Charles Ballard offered help to unmarried fathers through a hospital outreach program in the mid-1970s. In 1983, the Ford Foundation funded the Teen Father Collaboration (TFC), a two-year, eight-site national research project that showed agencies can recruit men for fatherhood programs, but only through aggressive outreach built on knowledge of and connections with the local community. This early project also showed that, contrary to stereotypes, teenage fathers do not neglect their parental responsibilities; in fact, they will participate in services designed to help them. Additionally, the project demonstrated that ambivalence at partnering agencies and lack of top administrative support rendered some programs ineffective.<sup>11</sup>

## Progress in the ‘90s

In the early 1990s, with support from federal and private funders, Public/Private Ventures built on TFC’s work through the six-site Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project. This project brought *Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers* to the field. The project confirmed that young fathers are more involved in the lives of their families than often assumed, and they will participate in a program to help themselves, depending on the approach taken and the services available.

<sup>9</sup> Achatz, M., & MacAllum, C. (1994). *The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project: Report from the field*. Retrieved from Foundation Center, Issue Lab website: [http://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/young\\_unwed\\_fathers\\_pilot\\_project\\_report\\_from\\_the\\_field\\_the](http://ppv.issuelab.org/resource/young_unwed_fathers_pilot_project_report_from_the_field_the)

<sup>10</sup> Children’s Defense Fund, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Clearinghouse. (1988). *What about the boys? Teenage pregnancy prevention strategies*. Retrieved from University of Tennessee Digital Library Collections website: [http://diglib.lib.utk.edu/cdf/data/0116\\_000050\\_000273/0116\\_000050\\_000273.pdf](http://diglib.lib.utk.edu/cdf/data/0116_000050_000273/0116_000050_000273.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Sander, J. H., & Rosen, J. L. (1987). Teenage fathers: Working with the neglected partner in adolescent childbearing. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 19(3), 107-110.



“We must work to change our culture to make possible the involvement of men in the lives of their children.”

Vice President Al Gore,  
1994 Family Reunion Conference

The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project also identified obstacles presented by:

- Complicated personal history of many young families.
- Organizational policies and attitudes that do not embrace father engagement.
- Failures of public policy and services to engage with fathers.

## A Broader National Scope

The federal Parents' Fair Share demonstration project conducted by MDRC further advanced the field. Parents' Fair Share became law under the 1988 Family Support Act, permitting five states (later increased to seven) to create pilot programs offering unemployed noncustodial parents the same employment and job training opportunities available to single parents on welfare.<sup>12</sup> Where the Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project struggled to engage public employment and child support systems, Parents' Fair Share was designed to actively engage these key sectors.

MDRC worked with Public/Private Ventures to modify the *Fatherhood Development* curriculum, making it applicable to fathers of various ages, adding sessions on employment, and decreasing emphasis on health and sexuality issues. Parents' Fair Share sites used the new curriculum in peer support groups that served as the “glue” to keep men engaged in services to help them manage child support payments, improve their employment status, and mediate issues with their children's mothers.

While Parents' Fair Share sites had difficulty improving the performance of nonresident fathers in the labor market, modest gains were achieved for a subsample of the most disadvantaged men—those without a high school diploma/GED or with little work experience.<sup>13</sup> However, Parents' Fair Share confirmed that men will take part in peer support groups with other fathers to help fathers “recognize and begin to change behavior and attitudes that were counterproductive to their progress.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers' fair share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood*. Retrieved from ERIC website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED437481.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Mincy, R. (Presenter). (2012, April 26). *Achieving economic stability: Strategies for successfully connecting dads to jobs* [Webinar]. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/Vu7wSp>

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers' fair share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood* (p. 120). Retrieved from ERIC website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED437481.pdf>

Other national demonstration projects followed, including the Fragile Families Demonstration, Fathers at Work, and the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement's (OCSE) Responsible Fatherhood project. Fragile Families showed that child support agencies and fatherhood programs can work together. It also found that many young, unwed fathers are actively involved in the early lives of their children but tend to "drift away" as the challenges and stresses increase. The OCSE project demonstrated the value of partnerships in supporting dads' employment,<sup>15</sup> while Fathers at Work showed that traditional employment programs could work with fathers on parenting issues.

During the 1990s, the responsible fatherhood field benefited from the support of the private foundation community and attention from the federal government. The Ford, Danforth, Charles Stewart Mott, Annie E. Casey, and William and Flora Hewlett foundations were prominent supporters of fatherhood work. They worked together through a Funders Collaborative on Fathers and Families to support innovations in practice, advance understanding through research, and add more focus on fatherhood in policy arenas. The Ford Foundation, in particular, played a key role with a series of Partners for Fragile Families initiatives that saw the creation of new agencies such as the Center for Fathers, Families and Public Policy (now the Center for Family Policy and Practice), the National Center on Fathers and Families (to gather and organize relevant research), and the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families (NPNFF).

NPNFF grew out of a 1994 meeting organized by then-Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, who invited a group of practitioners and others engaged in fatherhood work to their annual Family Reunion Conference to emphasize the important role that fathers play in families. Following the meeting, and with the support of the Funders Collaborative on Fathers and Families, NPNFF was formed to "encourage father involvement in fragile families and support communication among father-focused programs."<sup>16</sup>

**“I am firm in my belief that the future of our Republic depends on strong families and that committed fathers are essential to those families.”**

**President Bill Clinton,  
Memorandum for the Heads  
of Executive Departments  
and Agencies, 1995**

<sup>15</sup> Mincy, R. (Presenter). (2012, April 26). *Achieving economic stability: Strategies for successfully connecting dads to jobs* [Webinar]. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/Vu7wSp>

<sup>16</sup> National Center on Fathers and Families. (1995, August). *Shared commitment: Issues from the inaugural meeting of the National Practitioners Network*. Retrieved from University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, National Center on Fathers and Families website: <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/sites/ncoff.messageagency.com/files/npn-conference.pdf>  
Al Gore Support Center. (n.d.). Part XII: Children and families: Gore worked to promote responsible fatherhood. *Al Gore accomplishments*. Retrieved from <http://www.algoresupportcenter.com/accomplishments4.html>

Additionally, President Clinton requested a 1995 review<sup>17</sup> of all federal departments and agencies to ensure an emphasis on fathers in all programs pertaining to children and families. The National Conference of State Legislatures produced a report on responsible fatherhood with suggested policy changes. Although not leading directly to new legislation, the Fathers Count Bill of 1999<sup>18</sup> set the stage for new federal initiatives in the decade that followed. At the same time, there was growing realization of the importance of healthy marriage and relationships, a focus that was embraced by the Bush administration in the early 2000s.

This work continued and expanded during the Obama administration. In 2010, the President asked that an interagency working group begin finding ways to encourage activities and policy developments that promote responsible fatherhood. Since then, the Responsible Fatherhood Working Group has coordinated policy, programmatic activities, and engagement efforts on fatherhood across federal agencies.<sup>19</sup>

The body of studies that focus on programs serving fathers continues to grow. To catalogue studies of programs serving low-income fathers in particular, the Administration for Children and Families contracted for an evidence review that identified 75 research studies authored since 1990. Twelve of the studies were impact evaluations, 18 were implementation studies, and 32 were descriptive studies.<sup>20</sup> While continued investments in program evaluation and basic research are needed, the existing range of studies provides a foundation on which to build.

“Be the best father you can be to your children. Because nothing is more important.”

President Barack Obama,  
Commencement Address,  
Morehouse College,  
May 19, 2013

<sup>17</sup> Clinton, W. J. (1995, June 16). *White House memorandum supporting the role of fathers in families*. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Promoting Responsible Fatherhood website: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/pclinton95.htm>

<sup>18</sup> May, R. (1999, November). *A summary of the “Children First Child Support Reform Act of 1999” and the “Fathers Count Act of 1999”* (Policy Brief). Retrieved from Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy website: <http://www.cffpp.org/publications/Summaries%20of%201999%20Acts.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> The White House. (2012). *Promoting responsible fatherhood*.

<sup>20</sup> Avellar, S. M., Dion, R., Clarkwest, A., Zaveri, H., Asheer, S., Borradaile, K., ... Zukiewicz, M. (2011). *Catalog of research: Programs for low-income fathers*, OPRE Report # 2011-20, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



## Local Efforts

Numerous community initiatives have focused on fathers and their families. Many developed along with or as part of larger organizations such as Head Start, family support, or community action agencies. While some have maintained services, many have struggled to sustain their efforts through the ups and downs of funding cycles. Those with the most longevity have had top administrators who support the program and actively advocate for continued funding options.

Successful programs have:

- Followed effective program models.
- Selected, trained, and supported staff based on proven principles.
- Allowed participants sufficient time to complete activities.
- Used incentives to engage fathers.
- Ensured programs are father-friendly.
- Selected outcomes with clear goals.
- Implemented methods appropriate for the populations served.
- Formed strong partnerships for recruitment and service delivery.<sup>21</sup>

These programs also learned that recruitment is an ongoing challenge for reasons that include:

- Program eligibility criteria.
- Fathers' lack of trust in operating agencies or fear of involvement with child support enforcement.
- Mismatches between program services and men's needs.
- Poorly designed recruitment procedures.
- Difficulty creating partnerships with other agencies.<sup>22</sup>

As the field continues to develop, more research is needed to demonstrate program effectiveness.

<sup>21</sup> Avellar, S. (2013). *Forging effective responsible fatherhood partnerships: A research to-practice brief*. Manuscript in preparation; Bronte-Tinkew, J., Carrano, J., Allen, T., Bowie, L., Mbawa, K., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Elements of promising practice for fatherhood programs: Evidence-based research findings on programs for fathers*. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/YaqVql>; Martinson, K., & Nightingale, D. (2008, February). *Ten key findings from responsible fatherhood initiatives*. Retrieved from Urban Institute website: [http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411623\\_fatherhood\\_initiatives.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411623_fatherhood_initiatives.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



## Current Focus

In recent years, the responsible fatherhood field has expanded beyond its roots in employment and parenting services for low-income fathers to recognize the diverse needs of a wide array of fathers.<sup>23</sup> Programs now include elements such as healthy marriage and co-parenting skills training, general fatherhood competency for all income levels, support for fathers involved with the child welfare and criminal justice systems, a focus on children's education and literacy, awareness of the needs of fathers who have children with special needs, and attention to issues of domestic violence.

Perhaps most importantly, federal initiatives authorized by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) and the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 (CRA) and administered through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance have helped reenergize the responsible fatherhood field. Under the DRA, from 2006 to 2011, more than 90 organizations provided services for fathers in the areas of responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability. In the CRA funding cycle that started October 2011, 55 organizations received grants to serve fathers in those three focus areas, with increased emphasis on economic stability, and an additional five organizations received grants to work specifically with fathers returning to the community after incarceration.

Further, since 2010, the federal Responsible Fatherhood Working Group, led by the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the Office of Public Engagement, and the Domestic Policy Council, has coordinated policy, programmatic activities, and engagement efforts across 11 federal agencies (U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Corporation for National and Community Service, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and Office of National Drug Control Policy).<sup>24</sup> This work has focused on five broad goals: promoting fatherhood involvement; supporting and sustaining

<sup>23</sup> Klempin, S., & Mincy, R. B. (2012), *Tossed on a sea of change: A status update on the responsible fatherhood field*. Retrieved from Columbia University, School of Social Work, Center for Research on Fathers, Children and Family Well-Being website: [http://crfcfw.columbia.edu/files/2012/09/OSF-Fatherhood-Survey\\_Final-Report\\_9.25.12\\_SK\\_RM.pdf](http://crfcfw.columbia.edu/files/2012/09/OSF-Fatherhood-Survey_Final-Report_9.25.12_SK_RM.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> The White House. (2012), *Promoting responsible fatherhood*.

stable families; intervening during early childhood; reconnecting disconnected fathers; and fostering high-quality research on fathers and families to support policy and program development.

Current federal initiatives related to fatherhood that have emerged from this work include:

- **Fatherhood Buzz.** This Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance initiative, through the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, reaches out to dads with positive information through their barbers and barbershops.
- **Reconnecting Homeless Veterans with Their Children.** This initiative of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Health and Human Services, along with the American Bar Association, helps homeless veterans gain permanent housing, assist them with child support obligations, and connect them with programs that offer employment and supportive services.
- **Transitional Jobs for Non-Custodial Parents.** This Department of Labor grant program supports local efforts to prepare unemployed non-custodial parents for work through transitional employment, while assisting them to gain unsubsidized employment intended to promote family engagement and long-term self-sufficiency.
- **Building Assets for Fathers and Families.** As part of a wider Department of Health and Human Services initiative to extend the benefits of financial education to individuals and families with young children, OCSE has provided seven three-year demonstration grants to encourage non-custodial parents to establish savings accounts and access other services to increase financial stability.
- **Fathers Supporting Breastfeeding.** The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides educational messages to highlight the advantages of breastfeeding and how fathers can play a critical role in promoting the healthy development of their children and in strengthening family bonds. The WIC program also allows fathers to receive nutrition education, counseling, and referral services on behalf of their children.
- **National Child Support Non-Custodial Parent Demonstration Projects.** OCSE has provided five-year grants to eight states to link non-custodial parents with employment services.
- **The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families,** has a number of ongoing research projects focused on the implementation and impact of fatherhood programs. Two recent projects are the Ex-Prisoner Reentry Strategies Study, being conducted by the Urban Institute to document program implementation funded under the FY 2011 Community-Centered Responsible Fatherhood Ex-Prisoner Reentry Pilot Project grant announcement, and the Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation, which is a formative evaluation being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research to document and provide initial assessment of selected Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage grantees.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.





Careful planning before launch can help ensure the success and sustainability of any fatherhood program. It is important to identify needs, map community resources, foster solid partnerships, craft a thoughtful logic model, and determine the scope of services before the program ever opens its doors.

# Start a Program

“There’s a quote [from Charles Ballard] that stuck with me... ‘Have no fear. This isn’t easy. It’s the hardest work you’ll ever do. You can feel very, very lonely. But walk with great courage and confidence. Know [that] what you’re doing will make a difference.’”

Patricia Littlejohn,  
South Carolina  
Center for Fathers and Families

This section presents planning and design steps that have been taken by successful practitioners (including needs assessment, community mapping, building and formalizing effective partnerships, and using logic models to guide the design of service delivery); staffing considerations (e.g., competencies, key roles, hiring, and training); and tips for fundraising, documentation, and sustainability.

Providing services to fathers is crucial, but does not have to mean starting a new initiative to serve men. Many fatherhood initiatives are part of larger organizations and include job training, social services, and family services. Others are small organizations focused only on fatherhood. Regardless of a program’s scope, any fatherhood effort can succeed, even in challenging funding environments, when certain strategies are used effectively.

A fatherhood program can have many priorities including:

- Helping dads learn about positive parenting.
- Counseling men in their relationships with their children and their children’s mother.
- Supporting men to become more self-sufficient in supporting their families.

Many fatherhood programs began as demonstration or grant-funded programs, some started as individual or grassroots efforts, and others embedded fatherhood into an existing organization. The first two approaches have produced some programs that still exist. The most successful programs typically are those embedded in successful organizations with effective leadership and the ability to cover part of the fatherhood budget through general funds. Those with the most success in “staying the course” also have senior administrators who support the program and actively advocate for continued funding and growth.

No matter how a fatherhood program is structured, the process of launching a new program is not easy. But lessons learned from



research and practice reveal five key elements that make the process easier and help ensure positive outcomes:

- Staff with a passion for the work who are effective, well trained, and well supported.
- A champion who believes in the program's potential, can overcome internal barriers, and has the authority to speak for the organization with community partners.
- Support from senior administrators.
- Effective community partnerships.
- Consistent documentation and evaluation focused on intended outcomes.

## Planning and Design

Careful planning before launch can help ensure success and sustainability. Identifying needs, understanding the community, fostering solid partnerships, crafting a thoughtful logic model, and determining the scope of services are important design steps identified by successful practitioners. Well established community organizations may be able to complete the planning process in 2–3 months, but many organizations will need to devote 6–12 months or longer to this process.

Planning is an ongoing process. Successful programs monitor their performance and make necessary adjustments to services, staffing, and partnerships to ensure that participant needs and program goals are met.

Key questions for fatherhood program early planning include:

- What community needs should be addressed?
  - What will we do to directly address the needs?
  - What individuals or organizations in the community provide services that can help address these needs?
- What organizations are already serving fathers?
- Who can we partner with?
- What outcomes and benefits do we anticipate as a result of the program?
- What staffing do we need?
- What are the budget implications? How will we gain additional funding?
- How will we document and assess our efforts in order to make program modifications?





## Spotlight on...

### Individual Action

Joe Jones began working with fathers in Baltimore, MD, as a city health department social worker in 1993. With support from city government leaders, particularly the health commissioner, Jones built a fatherhood program as part of the department's Healthy Start program and eventually spun it off as an independent nonprofit organization. Now firmly established in the community as the Center for Urban Families, the program provides training and support in parenting, relationships, and employment. In addition to Jones's drive, passion, and organizational ability, the program's success has been built with skilled staff with long tenure, input and support from an active board, effective community partnerships, successful client outcomes, and local foundation support.

### Powerful Partnerships

Marvin Charles and his wife, Jeanett, founded Divine Alternatives for Dads (DADS) in their Seattle, WA, living room in 1998. They had been homeless, unemployed addicts and had lost several of their children to the foster care system before taking steps to become sober, find housing, and obtain steady employment. Since that time, they have successfully applied lessons learned during their own recovery to help others "put their families back together." Their program focuses on helping fathers recover from addiction, return from prison, and deal with general difficulties of life. Key to their success has been effective partnerships with various community organizations and state agencies, including the state departments of Corrections, Social and Health Services, and Child Support; local employment agencies and public and private employers; King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and local courts; Atlantic Street Center, a community-based organization providing court-approved parenting classes; and Union Gospel Mission, which provides services for homeless individuals and families.<sup>26</sup>

### Working Within an Established Organization

Fathers and Families Center in Indianapolis, IN, was founded in 1993 as the Father Resource Program of Wishard Health Services. Under the leadership of Wallace McLaughlin since its inception, the center was incorporated as a 501(c) (3) agency in 1999 and has provided self-sufficiency and job readiness training, job placement, GED preparation, other educational support, and parenting education to thousands of young parents. As an Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage grantee since 2005, the organization has added services to assist couples in building healthy relationship skills.

### Return on Investment

The FATHER Project began under the auspices of the city of Minneapolis, MN, in 1999 and has been part of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota since 2004. An Office of Family Assistance grantee since 2005, the FATHER Project has served hundreds of fathers through an extensive network of partners. A return on investment study by the Wilder Foundation showed a long-term financial return of \$3.41 for every dollar invested in the project. Evaluations have shown increases in parenting skills, educational achievement, job placement, and benefits for the children of participating families.

<sup>26</sup> National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. (2012, July 12). *Effective strategies for working with fathers returning from prison* [Webinar]. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/YaqVql>

## Spotlight on...

### Program Planning and Design

The South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families (SCCFF) was formed in 2002 as a result of a community needs assessment and grant-making initiative by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina that began in 1996. A task force considered grant-making opportunities by posing questions such as:

- Is the issue a niche and does it represent an underserved community?
- Is there any available research on the issue and can more research be done?
- Is the issue palatable for public discourse?
- Does the issue satisfy the mission of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine?

Based on the work of this task force, the foundation decided to address the social and economic consequences of father absence through a statewide fatherhood initiative, Reducing Poverty through Father Engagement. A partnership agreement was created with the University of South Carolina to provide technical assistance, synthesize the research that became the best practices of the initiative, and design the program models. Through a second partnership agreement with the South Carolina Department of Social Services to strengthen fragile families, SCCFF was formed with the mission to develop and support a statewide infrastructure deeply invested in repairing and nurturing relationships between fathers and families. Since 2002, SCCFF has worked with numerous programs throughout the state and developed partnerships with other key agencies, such as workforce development, child protective services, and child support enforcement, to encourage program referrals and ensure that a full array of services is available.





## Needs Assessment

Use methods such as informal conversations, surveys, focus groups, and interviews to discover from the target population and other community stakeholders key needs to be addressed. Unless community members understand that a fatherhood program is designed to help them, they are not likely to be interested in participating or referring others. Organizations with a positive reputation in the community have an advantage during start-up. Staff can talk to current clients and contact others in the community for their input, either informally or in formal focus groups. New or less established organizations can also conduct these activities, particularly if they have staff who are familiar with the community.

Nearly all successful fatherhood programs conduct at least an informal needs assessment and asset mapping that take into account:

- Experience of key staff who understand the community and the needs of the target population.
- Existing data from local, state, and national sources.
- Meaningful dialogue among community partners who serve the same target population or share a concern about the identified need.

## Community Mapping

Organizations should conduct a scan of their community to identify other groups that might be offering complementary services. These organizations and agencies can:

- Be a source of participant referrals.
- Provide a specific service (e.g., job training, housing, mental health).
- Offer seed money and grants for social services.
- Become a full collaborative partner.



“I never hesitate to talk with other seasoned practitioners. I don’t always have the expertise, but I have learned from those who taught us.”

James Worthy,  
Center for Urban Families

In some cases, an alliance with another organization may be a way to expand services; or a new organization might focus on a specific population of men that is currently underserved. Identifying other social service providers can also help with:

- Goal setting.
- Insights on health care issues.
- Job training and employment opportunities.
- Referrals to support services.

By searching the Internet and talking to social service professionals, program staff can develop a comprehensive list of provider organizations in their community.

Compile a community map in a text document, spreadsheet, or other master file that includes:

- Name of organization or agency.
- Mission and description of its work.
- Key staff.
- Possible ways of contributing to your fatherhood program.

## Spotlight on...

**Young Fathers of Santa Fe** conducted a scan to determine its focus on teenagers and other young fathers. The focus on young dads was instrumental in forging relationships with school health clinics, government agencies, and other community agencies with services for a similar population.





## Example of an Effective Elevator Speech

Provided by Catherine Tijerina,  
Co-Founder and Executive  
Director, The RIDGE Project

**“The RIDGE Project is in the business of saving lives by building a legacy of strong families. We accomplish our goal through youth development, fatherhood, healthy marriage, and reentry programs delivered across the state of Ohio.”**

## Effective Partnerships

After identifying potential partners and key points of contact, reach out to them to explore whether a partnership could be mutually beneficial. A formal first step might be to get in touch by email, letter, or phone; less formal contact might be made when attending community events or serving on multi-agency committees. Board members and others may be able to help by providing introductions. But before talking with potential partners, fatherhood programs must be clear about what they are asking for and know how to describe their goals and strategies. One approach is to develop an “elevator speech,” a brief but compelling overview of the fatherhood program that can be adjusted according to the potential partner’s focus. This can be an effective springboard to outlining the ways a prospective partner can benefit from an alliance with a fatherhood program.

Experienced practitioners also recommend:

- Ask staff and board members to carry the program’s brochures or other materials with them at all times so they always have information ready to show a potential partner who might help with recruitment, services, or funding.
- When speaking with individuals or organizations that may be potential partners for program referrals, explain what the fatherhood program does, why someone might participate, and how a partnership would benefit both organizations. For example, if talking with a child support agency, focus on how the fatherhood program can help a father with employment, managing his child support payments, and addressing other needs; if talking with a Head Start agency, explain how parenting classes help fathers be better parents and, in turn, improve children’s outcomes, which is a Head Start goal.
- When speaking with someone who could potentially provide a specific service (e.g., skills training, GED classes, legal assistance for navigating child support or custody systems, transportation, substance abuse counseling, anger management), understand what they offer and get feedback from community members and former participants on the quality of services.

## Potential Partners to Contact

- State or local government agencies (e.g., child support enforcement, child welfare, employment, education)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) offices
- Schools/Head Start/ other preschool or early childhood programs
- Substance abuse programs
- Domestic violence programs
- Faith-based organizations
- Non-profit, community based organizations
- Hospital maternity departments
- Judges and mediators
- Attorneys
- Family support or home visiting programs
- Elected officials and their staffs
- Local businesses
- Job skills training programs
- Community colleges
- Barbershops, gyms, or other places where men congregate
- Correctional facilities
- Health clinics
- GED or ABE programs

- Encourage potential partners to visit the fatherhood program to see it in action. Visits can be particularly informative for potential funders, such as community foundations, or small- and medium-sized employers who might hire fatherhood program graduates. Try to schedule visits during an event that allows visitors to interact with fatherhood participants. By “touching their hearts,” fatherhood practitioners can build enthusiasm and initiate or deepen a commitment to partnership.
- Host a forum or community events to showcase the program, its goals, and successes. Feature stories from fathers who have been directly affected by the program.
- Make presentations before community groups that potential partners or funders will attend.
- Share concrete success stories.

## Formalizing Partnerships

After an organization or agency agrees to partner with a fatherhood program, experienced practitioners recommend developing a clear, written agreement between the two programs. An agreement reduces misunderstanding and helps provide continuity during staff changes. Some practitioners recommend setting initial terms that are easily agreeable and not too demanding for either partner.

Many fatherhood programs use one or more types of agreements including:

- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** – outlines the actions expected of all parties with a statement of purpose and clear delineation of roles and responsibilities.
- **Contract** – specifies terms of the partnership in a more formal agreement (strongly recommended when deliverables are required from one partner in exchange for a fee).
- **Performance-based contract** – clarifies the level of outcomes required to receive payment and specifies the repercussions for not maintaining the minimum standard of service.

All relevant staff at both organizations should be briefed about the terms of the partnership and the role of each organization.

## Logic Model

Successful programs are clear about their intended outcomes and develop a service plan to meet participant needs and measure outcomes. Most public funders and many private funders now require a logic model that details program inputs, activities, and outputs with a clear statement of intended short- and long-term outcomes and how they will be measured. A simple logic model could address:

| INPUTS         | ACTIVITIES | OUTPUTS  | OUTCOMES  |  |   |
|----------------|------------|--|---|--|---|
|                |            |  | Short-Term  | Medium-Term  | Long-Term   |
| What we invest | What we do | Direct products from program activities (such as number of sessions or number of participants) | Changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, opinions | Changes in behavior or action that result from participants' new knowledge | Meaningful changes, often in participant condition or life status |

“Helpful Resources” features the logic model used by the FATHER Project of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minneapolis as well as an Evaluation Toolkit and Logic Model Builder from Child Welfare Information Gateway.

Outputs and outcomes are different. Outcomes are the key goals a program wants to achieve related to attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behavior. Outputs are the means by which the program will achieve those outcomes, such as by offering workshops on father skills. A logic model should propose outcomes that are logically consistent with the changes in attitudes and behavior the program wants to achieve.

If a program is reaching short-term goals (e.g., changing parents' attitudes and behavior), funders will have more confidence that longer term goals (e.g., better child outcomes) will be reached.

Successful programs integrate carefully designed logic models into daily operations and ensure that all staff are aware of short- and long-term program goals. Staff should understand how to deliver activities to meet these goals and how to accurately track program processes to stress the importance of good documentation. Also, they should expect to receive support and encouragement from supervisors and peers.



## Program Services

How effective a fatherhood program is in identifying and helping participants with their immediate and ongoing needs, either through in-house services or referrals to partner agencies, will influence whether fathers enroll and stay in the program.

Programs typically decide what services to offer based on:

- Perceived needs of participants.
- Desired program outcomes.
- Potential barriers to client participation.
- Resources available.

To reach desired program outcomes and help participants address various needs, fatherhood programs and their community partners generally provide a mix of services that can include:

- Individual case management to help clients set goals, overcome obstacles, and follow through with necessary services.
- Assistance navigating child support, child welfare, and other public systems.
- Parenting education, with a focus on the importance of father engagement and knowledge and skills to support children over the life course.
- Relationship skills education that may benefit partner, extended family, workplace, and peer network relationships.
- Peer support groups, as part of parenting or relationship skills education groups or as a separate group, to help fathers share issues, brainstorm solutions, and bond with other fathers.
- Manhood development or rites of passage activities.
- Assistance with basic education (e.g., GED, high school diploma, adult basic education) or advanced education (e.g., two- or four-year college).
- Assistance to overcome barriers to participation, such as transportation and child care.
- Job skills training.



- Job preparation training, including resume writing, interview techniques, and leaving voice mail messages.
- Job placement assistance.
- Legal assistance.
- Substance abuse counseling.
- Mediation services.
- Anger management.
- Domestic violence education and screening.
- General health and nutrition.
- Counseling and crisis intervention (e.g., housing, substance abuse, mental health, legal assistance, domestic violence, negotiating child support system).

Many programs provide all services in-house, but others work with partners to provide some services. Services and partnerships should be determined by the needs of a particular program and community. Services provided may also be dependent upon funding sources. Some programs also provide:

- Supportive services such as housing, health, transportation, clothing, or baby supplies.
- Food before or during a group session, particularly for evening sessions, to help participants make the transition from daily demands of work, school, or family and to create informal opportunities to bond with staff and other participants.
- Bus tokens or other transportation assistance to help clients attend program activities.
- Incentives such as gift cards or father-and-child events and outings.
- Certificates that mark program achievements.

“This is more than a job. It’s got to be a calling. Even if you weren’t paid for this job, you’d still be doing something like this in your life.”

Patricia Littlejohn,  
South Carolina  
Center for Fathers and Families



## Staffing

While leaders can bring vision, and services may attract participants, most fatherhood practitioners recognize that the quality of frontline staff is what ultimately determines whether men commit to a fatherhood program. To fulfill their mission, fatherhood programs need well trained staff who understand the challenges facing participants and the various factors that contribute to success. Organizational decision makers, leadership, and direct service staff must share a level of commitment and investment to fatherhood. Careful attention should be paid to hiring and training new staff and providing ongoing support and development for existing staff.

## Competencies

Hiring decisions are among the most important choices any fatherhood program must make. The individuals who work directly with participants make a significant contribution to the success of most programs.

Experienced practitioners recommend including males in key staff positions, especially frontline service delivery. They also recommend that program staff have:

- Flexibility and ability to adapt to new situations.
- Good listening skills.
- Relevant life experience.
- Ability to build relationships.
- Capacity to assess needs and design appropriate interventions.
- Strong group facilitation skills.
- Strong awareness of local resources.

Staff must be able to:

- Relate linguistically and culturally to participants.
- Be sensitive to the needs of men and fathers.
- Be genuine, caring, respectful, and accepting.
- Serve as positive, but realistic, role models.
- See an individual's strengths and potential more readily than their challenges and deficits.
- Demonstrate teamwork and a variety of skills.<sup>27</sup>
- Create and maintain a culture within the father program that embodies empathy and respect for women and mothers.
- Interact professionally and respectfully with all partners, staff, and participants.

The Head Start Bureau recommends a successful fatherhood program coordinator have:

- Understanding of the important role fathers play in healthy child development.
- Commitment to children and families.
- Passion for getting fathers involved in the lives of their children.
- Empathy, respect, and high expectations for all fathers, regardless of their backgrounds.
- Ability and desire to build bridges between women and men, mothers and fathers.
- Desire and ability to develop rapport and sturdy relationships with men from diverse and unfamiliar backgrounds.
- Knowledge of and connections to the community.
- Willingness to work above and beyond the call of duty; this is not a 9-to-5 job.<sup>28</sup>

Although every staff member does not have to have all these skills or attributes, fatherhood program managers should hire a team with a skill set appropriate for delivering a comprehensive array of services.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, P. (1997). Handout developed for NPCL Fatherhood Development Training as part of the Partners for Fragile Families project funded by the Ford Foundation.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Administration for Children and Families; Administration on Children, Youth and Families; Head Start Bureau. (2004). Building block 3: Building a foundation to work with fathers. *Building Blocks for Father Involvement Series*. Retrieved from <http://www.headstartresourcecenter.org/fatherhood/Resources/root/data/Building%20Blocks/HSBCombo4.3.pdf>



## Key Roles

Identify key tasks and roles for implementation before recruiting and hiring program staff. Think about:

- What tasks need to be accomplished, based on the program's logic model?
- What staff roles and responsibilities will ensure these tasks are performed and project goals are met?
- What other tasks, roles, and responsibilities are likely to contribute to program success?
- How many full-time and part-time positions are necessary?
- What services might be available through partner agencies?
- What services might be provided by volunteers?

Some tasks or roles might be specialized and performed mainly by one person, while others will be performed by several staff members. Some key staff will perform multiple functions. A typical fatherhood program may only have one or two full-time positions, with other duties performed by part-time staff or volunteers. This becomes a challenge, particularly during the first six to 12 months of a program, when outreach, partnership development, and participant recruitment are the main focus. The roles of senior administrators and project champions are especially crucial to program success at these early stages.

Key responsibilities can include:

- Project direction and oversight.
- Staff supervision and support.
- Community outreach.
- Recruitment.
- Intake.
- Case management.
- Group facilitation.
- Other direct services.
- Documentation and evaluation.
- Logistical support.



Other functions such as skills training, education, job preparation, job placement, and supportive services might be carried out by program staff or partner agency staff.

“Helpful Resources” features several job descriptions used by fatherhood programs.

## Hiring and Training

In addition to looking for specific key competencies, when filling staff positions, experienced fatherhood program managers look for several essential characteristics in candidates:

**Flexibility:** “This is not a 9-to-5 job.”

Staff might facilitate evening group meetings and juggle one-to-one meetings at any time of the day in the office, at a father’s home, in the community, or over the phone.

**Listening skills:** “This job is at least 75 percent listening. You need to show that you care more about them than you care about your own personal agenda.”

Staff should be personable and engaging, but also must have the patience to listen to men and understand their situations in detail.

**Life experience:** “We have many [program] graduates who have helped us in recruiting dads and keeping them in the program.”

While programs often hire staff with degrees in social work, business management, or other relevant fields, many select employees who know the challenges facing men from the target community.

**Appropriate skills:** “You can teach people about some of the issues, such as child support. But the ability to recruit and build relationships is different. If you’re uncomfortable in that arena, it will show.”

Employees need different skill sets to fit different roles. For example:

- Community outreach: marketing and sales skills.
- Case management: social work skills.
- Participant recruitment: ability to communicate, empathize, and build relationships with potential participants (some program graduates make successful recruiters because they have “been there, done that”).

Given the demands of working in a fatherhood program, some programs ask prospective employees to attend group sessions or accompany staff on home visits to ensure a good fit.

Programs recognize that it can be OK to go outside for expertise. For example, a program that needs a dynamic facilitator might contract with external experts if no full-time staff member has facilitation skills. Program directors must carefully monitor contracted, part-time, and volunteer staff to make sure they:

- Deliver services to meet program goals. Have sufficient time for preparation and review.
- Can manage other commitments they might have.

Even if outside experts are brought in for certain sessions, case managers can be co-facilitators and build their presentation skills for future events. Many programs also encourage case managers to occasionally sit in on group sessions to identify issues that might need support service follow-up. However, other programs limit the involvement of case managers and other staff in group sessions because participants might be reluctant to divulge some information if their case manager is present.

Effective fatherhood programs typically provide orientation training for new staff and ongoing staff development to ensure employees are:

- Professional.
- Competent in program content and teaching skills.
- Sensitive to participants' cultural backgrounds.
- Responsive to program participants' needs.<sup>29</sup>

## Promoting Employee Buy-In

Whether a fatherhood program is a small, independent initiative or part of a larger organization, buy-in and support of all staff are vital. Regardless of their responsibilities, all staff should take part in training about the overall program mission and goals as well as awareness training about the needs of fathers. Supportive staff contribute to an environment where all fathers and families can feel welcome and safe.

Staff should understand the program in order to talk positively about it. For example, if the receptionist does not do a good job of welcoming fathers, recruitment and intake efforts can be affected. Additionally, staff who work primarily with mothers should be prepared to “talk the program up” and encourage referrals. This can be particularly important if the program is part of an organization that has traditionally worked with women and children and has less experience engaging men.

Successful programs often are characterized as “mature” in that they:

- Have an agency-wide commitment to engaging fathers.
- Have staff who understand the potential positive and negative impact of fathers on their children's development.
- Consider and involve fathers in intervention planning.
- View fathers and mothers as equally important intervention targets.<sup>30</sup>

One popular strategy for enhancing the ability of an entire agency to embrace fatherhood work is to involve staff in father-friendliness assessment and planning activities. Strategies, a project funded by the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention, has used the *Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment and Planning Tool* for training and technical assistance.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. (2008, September). Training program staff: Five tips for fatherhood programs. *NRFC Tips for Fatherhood Professionals Series*. Retrieved from <http://1.usa.gov/ZDFdAK>

<sup>30</sup> Burgess, A. (2009). *Fathers and parenting interventions: What works?* Retrieved from Fatherhood Institute website: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org>

<sup>31</sup> National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership; National Head Start Association; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Region V; & Illinois Department of Public Aid, Division of Child Support Enforcement. (1999). *Father-friendliness organizational self-assessment and planning tool*. Retrieved from [http://my.nhsa.org/download/parents/org\\_self\\_assess.pdf](http://my.nhsa.org/download/parents/org_self_assess.pdf)



The tool was originally developed for use by Head Start agencies, but is applicable to a wide range of family-serving agencies. Several adaptations of the original tool, including the chart *Enhancing Organizational Father-Friendliness*, have been developed.

## Budgeting and Fundraising

A fatherhood program's budget can depend on whether the program is independent or part of a larger organization and if there is start-up funding. Experienced practitioners recommend:

- Reserving part of a new program's budget for development and fundraising, including outreach to government agencies and businesses through research, presentations, and follow-up.
- Hiring a grant writer to help identify revenue sources and develop applications for local foundations and government grants.
- Fostering a strong commitment to data collection and evaluation to demonstrate quality performance and document program effectiveness. Consider the experience of a program manager: "The corporate world wants a return on investment. You've got to develop a track record before you start going to the general public."
- Making strategic additions to the program's board of directors. Says a fatherhood practitioner, "As a staff person I've asked a group for money and the answer is 'no.' But, if the 'ask' comes from a prominent person in the community, it's a different answer."

Fatherhood programs that cannot rely on a stable in-house source of funds should begin fundraising immediately. Fundraising activities typically include:

- Cultivating local opportunities through in-person meetings with potential funders.
- Writing grants for federal, state, and local government funds.
- Reaching out to local foundations, a process that may include a combination of in-person meetings and grant proposals.
- Building collaborations with existing organizations that may be able to provide funding and/or expertise to a new fatherhood program.

Program support is not always financial. Some fatherhood programs receive support from non-traditional or in-kind sources such as local corporations or civic groups. Even if these organizations do not make a direct contribution, they might provide free equipment or volunteer staff. Local businesses or partner agencies sometimes donate food, materials, clothes, supplies, services, staff time, or space for group meetings. By recruiting community members or college students as interns or volunteers, some programs have been able to get additional help with administrative tasks, community mapping, participant recruitment, and general planning.

Targeted fundraising can be an effective way to generate additional resources, but can be time consuming. Programs should involve their board of directors and staff whenever possible. A strong board should be able to help identify local, regional, and national funding opportunities and make fundraising presentations.

## Fundraising Tips for New Programs

Experienced practitioners offer several suggestions for effective fundraising:

- Look for creative ways to access funds. While a funder's mission statement may not specifically include the word "fatherhood," there may still be interest in supporting fathers as part of wider goals to help low-income residents, reduce unemployment, promote stable families, or improve child well-being.
- Find out where employees of local companies volunteer their time. This information could indicate where a company makes its charitable donations.
- Do your homework! Library or Internet research will help you learn about the priorities and procedures of potential funders. Read the business section of your local newspaper to learn about local companies' interests.
- The most consistent donations are likely to come from foundation staff who believe in your program. Develop and nurture your personal contacts or work with a fundraiser who already has those contacts.
- "Blind" or "cold" proposals are not usually successful. If you do not have a personal contact at a company or foundation, start with an inquiry letter.
- In writing grants and proposals, follow all of the organization's guidelines and requirements. If the guidelines state "no more than 5 pages, 12-point font, double spaced," do not submit a longer document in a different format.
- Have a sound logic model. Define your objectives clearly and show how your program is expected to meet measurable outcomes.
- Share impactful outcomes supported by program data and participant success stories.



## Documentation and Sustainability

Even if a fatherhood program builds a strong staff, gains momentum in its community, and becomes recognized for providing quality services, sustainability challenges can remain if funding sources and community issues shift. Ultimately, programs succeed because they deliver effective services and can adapt to a changing fiscal landscape. Hiring a part-time or full-time grant writer can help a program broaden its funding base. But programs must also be able to demonstrate a track record of outcomes and accomplishments. Having a solid record of success can help a program mature into a long-lasting community institution. Therefore, consistent, comprehensive data collection should always be part of program design.

Data collection tools should be clear, efficient, and tied in a logical way to program implementation. Management and leadership should articulate the importance and rationale of tracking information and encourage full staff engagement in the process. The data can be used to:

- Demonstrate program success.
- Identify areas for program modifications and improvements.
- Provide a powerful story for local and state government agencies, foundations, businesses, and other partners who can have an important impact on long-term program sustainability.

## Top Takeaways

The following are some key considerations for starting or enhancing a fatherhood program:

- New programs should conduct a scan of organizations and programs in the community (i.e., community mapping) to identify other groups providing similar services and to find potential partners.
- Through program design, fatherhood organizations can set strategies to meet participant needs through services. Fatherhood program services often include case management, peer support groups, and parenting education.



## Spotlight on...

The ***Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo*** in Texas measures its success based on outcomes that include:

- Number of established paternities.
- Number of dads with on-time child support payments.
- Child well-being: extent to which children are current on immunizations and well-care visits and whether they have a permanent provider of medical care.
- Number of dads who participate in regular home visits to help them understand children's developmental stages.
- Positive involvement of dads in the parenting of their children.

Through extensive data collection and evaluation, the program has documented:

- 74% of participants are Hispanic.
- Dads range in age from 13 to 40, with an average age of 20.
- 97% of moms and dads regularly participate in home visits.
- 84% of mothers and fathers are working, in school, or in job training programs.
- Nearly all (96%) have participated in the paternity and child support/establishment process.
- 87% are positively involved in parenting their children as demonstrated by:
  - Attending to children's health and safety needs.
  - Showing interest in and knowledge of the developmental stages of their children based on their responses to a developmental assessment.
  - Engaging in developmentally appropriate stimulation with their children.
  - Providing primary child care at least once a week for two hours.

The ***Center for Urban Families*** (CFUF) is a Baltimore, MD, program that serves a predominantly African-American population. It focuses on outcomes such as:

- Reduced recidivism.
- Increased employment in jobs earning at least \$15 an hour.
- Increased awareness of the child support system and its obligations.

The mission of CFUF is to strengthen urban communities by helping fathers and families achieve stability and economic success. That mission is accomplished in a variety of ways:

- In the last five years, CFUF has secured more than 2,100 jobs for Baltimore city residents, with 21.7% going to residents with serious barriers to employment, including criminal background.
- In addition to job readiness training, between 2010 and 2013, 70 participants received training and certifications in fork lift, food service, abetment, and construction.
- As a result of the Baltimore Responsible Father Project, 33 enrolled fathers who owe child support have contributed more than \$87,000 to their child support payments.



- Encouraging potential partners to visit the program location or participate in community forums can help build partner commitment and awareness of the program throughout the community.
- An MOU or contract is helpful for building new community relationships and strengthening existing ones.
- Research and practice show that successful programs have key staff members with a deep passion for the work, and often have a champion who can overcome initial barriers and forge strategic alliances in the community.
- Early planning should determine:
  - Needs the program will address.
  - Actions the program will take to directly address these needs.
  - Staffing needed.
  - Budget plan that supports the goals.
- Reserve part of a new program's budget for development and fundraising that can include personal outreach by fatherhood managers and writing grant proposals for government agencies and foundations.
- Use a logic model to help develop a service plan. Include information on projected inputs, activities, outputs, and short- and long-term goals.
- The right hiring decisions are essential. Employees should have flexibility, listening skills, life experience, ability to serve as positive role models, and sensitivity to the needs of men and fathers.
- Fatherhood programs without a stable in-house source of funds should begin fundraising immediately, through in-person outreach to individuals and businesses as well as proposals for government and foundation funding. A program's board of directors can be critical in fundraising efforts.
- A commitment to outcomes and evaluation can generate robust information about the success of programming and can be the foundation of marketing to local governments, foundations, and businesses to enhance sustainability.



## Helpful Resources

- **The FATHER Project of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota logic model** illustrates the program and its strategy for providing holistic services to low-income fathers to help them overcome barriers to supporting their children emotionally and economically.
- **The RIDGE Project Memorandum of Understanding** clarifies activities and responsibilities within the partnership between The RIDGE Project and the Ohio Department of Corrections. The simple format outlines expectations of both parties and defines the commitment without excessive legal jargon.
- Developing a specific and intentional job description is key in recruiting and hiring appropriate staff.
  - The RIDGE Project: **Case Manager/Facilitator**
  - The RIDGE Project: **Regional Coordinator**
  - South Coast Business Employment Corporation: **Career Consultant/Case Manager**
- **NRFC Tips for Professionals, Staff Selection: What's Important for Fatherhood Programs?** from the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.
- **InfoSheet 8: Preparing for Father Work** from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network offers insights on program design.
- **Basic Fatherhood Training Curriculum** from the National Family Preservation Network features activities designed to encourage buy-in of all program staff.
- **Developing a Logic Model: A Road Map for Navigating the Future** provides an overview of logic models and their role in promoting strong organizations.
- **Evaluation Toolkit and Logic Model Builder** from Child Welfare Information Gateway, a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Indiana Fathers and Families: Sample Evaluation Tools for Fathers and Families Projects** has strategies to help grantees measure their outcomes.
- **The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation** from the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation.
- **Don't Be Bedeviled by These Fundraising Mistakes** covers helpful tips for fundraising.
- **Kids Count Data Center**, from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, provides valuable state and cross-state information on child well-being and family stability. The data can be useful for crafting strong proposals for government or foundation funding.
- **Inventory of Measures for Use in Fatherhood Programs** from Child Trends.
- **Guidebook to the Responsible Fatherhood Project Participant Management Information System** from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs: A Toolkit for Cities** from the National League of Cities provides information on uses for a management information system (MIS); instructions for sourcing, implementing, and expanding an MIS; and information on leading commercial MIS vendors.



# Build Your Program

“I don’t ask partner agencies to give a father my brochure in the hope that he [the father] will call me. Rather, I ask the partner agency to describe the program, give the father the brochure, and ask, ‘Is it OK if I have the fatherhood program call you?’ so gaining the father’s passive consent for me to get in touch.”

Barry McIntosh,  
Young Fathers of Santa Fe

As fatherhood programs develop their capacity to identify potential partners, establish partnership agreements, and begin their work with dads, they also should design a strategic outreach component. Although dynamic outreach certainly enhances a program’s positive visibility among potential partners and funders, its most important outcome is increased awareness among community members and prospective participants. Communicating effectively will help boost recruitment, which can validate a program’s mission and advance its sustainability.

## Communications

Use visually appealing and carefully written products—brochures, flyers, business cards, newsletters, postcards—and effective media outreach to establish your program’s brand in the community. They are the calling cards program staff can distribute at local events or locations.

Key considerations are:

- Create products to suit the audience. Potential funders, community partners, and participants have different information needs and require tailored messages.
- Make publications and other products available in both English and Spanish, or other languages spoken by large numbers of the target population. Make sure translations are accurate and convey the concepts as intended.
- Keep the writing simple. Use short sentences.
- Use language that is easily understandable. A good rule of thumb is to write for a 6th grade or lower reading level and limit the use of words with three or more syllables.<sup>32</sup>
- Use attractive photos and colors.
- Be sure that people in the photos represent the target audience. Also make sure the program has permission to use images.
- Do not clutter the page. Use words and images sparingly and leave adequate white space.
- Remember that printed materials are primarily a tool to start a conversation with a possible funder or participant. Limit the information in brochures or other publications to the essentials. Don’t try to tell them everything there is to know about the program.

<sup>32</sup> McLaughlin, G. H. (n.d.). SMOG: *Simple measure of gobbledygook*. Retrieved from [http:// www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm](http://www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm)



Effective communication and marketing strategies will help your program connect with dads and prompt them to move from interest to involvement.

One-to-one conversation is a powerful way to build awareness about a program. If brochures are left at a particular location, make sure people there can describe the program's services effectively. For example, when leaving products at a barbershop, the barber should be able to describe briefly the benefits of the program. Or, staff might be assigned to a partner location—for example, a weekly visit to a WIC program office—to combine personal contact with offering literature and information.

## Working With Media

Contacting local media is an effective way to gain momentum for a fatherhood program. The goal of media relations typically is to increase awareness of the program and its services while creating opportunities for one-to-one interaction that will lead to partnership development and participant recruitment.

- Print media (e.g., newspapers, community circulars, neighborhood and community newsletters) and broadcast outlets (e.g., radio and TV) are good outreach targets. Sometimes a call or email to a reporter is enough to start an ongoing relationship. Many programs also regularly submit news releases, calendar announcements, media advisories, or other news items to earn coverage. Writing community columns and letters to the editor are also proven strategies for gaining media visibility.
- Local media personalities or representatives can provide a well-known face to get people's attention. Invite such individuals to speak at events, host a program graduation dinner, or broadcast from a live event. These personalities could also join the fatherhood group's board of directors. First, take time to cultivate a relationship based on trust and respect. Identify these individuals carefully to ensure their personal and family histories are a good match with the program's goals.
- A public service announcement (PSA) on radio or TV can help in reaching the target population. Although fatherhood programs will not be able to control if and when the PSAs run, they can do detailed research to pinpoint the broadcast outlets that prospective partners or participants are listening to and watching.
- Offer to be a fatherhood resource to local media. Share information with local editors, establish an ongoing relationship with key media representatives, have sustained visibility with a column in a community publication, or contact media on specific occasions only, such as Father's Day or to recognize a particular milestone or achievement.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Spain, M. (Presenter). (2008, May 27). *Utilizing the NRFC media campaign and working with your local media*. [Webinar]. Retrieved from National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse website: <http://1.usa.gov/ZbToKB>

## Interviews

A key to working effectively with any media outlet is to be able to tell compelling stories about the program's services and impacts on participants. Interviews can be great vehicles for telling a program's success stories, but they can backfire if the interviewees are not fully prepared. Many programs avoid this by designating a specific staff person who will work with the media. All staff should be oriented to the program's policy regarding media contact. They should know how to respond if contacted directly by the media (e.g., refer the person to the designated staff person or to the executive director).

| INTERVIEW TIPS <sup>34</sup>  |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| BEFORE AN INTERVIEW   | DURING AN INTERVIEW   | FOR ON-CAMERA INTERVIEW                              |
| Understand the reporter's perspective; know what angle he or she is likely to take; request interview questions in advance, if possible | Remember that nothing is off the record                       | Dress appropriately, avoiding white or busy clothing |
| Look at the relationship with the reporter as potentially long term   | Be brief, concise, and honest; KISS: keep it short and simple | Look at the interviewer not the camera               |
| Know the reporter's deadline for the story  | Provide context, facts, and perspective                       | If possible, don't wear tinted or reflective glasses |
| Anticipate questions and rehearse the key points you want to get across   | Emphasize key messages at every opportunity                   | Use natural gestures and facial expressions          |
| Think about one or two sound bites that best describe your program's benefits   | Provide your website and phone number                         | Use appropriate body language                        |
| Give any participants time to think about what they might want to share and any issues or personal details they do not want to address  | Stay calm and avoid speculation                               | Avoid nodding while the interviewer speaks           |

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.





## Recruitment

The ability to recruit fathers is one of the key measures of a fatherhood program's success. Effective recruitment requires staff who have flexibility, life experience, and listening skills. They should also have:

- Knowledge of the community.
- Solid presentation skills.
- Ability to relate to the target population.
- Ability to act naturally and “be themselves.”
- Ability to be persistent in a respectful way.

In addition to training recruitment staff, fatherhood programs should make sure staff have enough time to spend on recruiting dads. Some programs can achieve recruitment goals with part-time recruiting staff, but many programs have found that recruitment requires more attention. Particularly during the first year of operation, before word-of-mouth has begun to spread in the community, recruitment can be a full-time job for one or more staff. Some programs use a combination of full-time recruitment staff and part-time assistance from other program staff or volunteers. Other programs hire program graduates to spread the word and recruit other fathers.

“We are in the community knocking on doors, standing on the streets, in subway stations, etc.... People know us. Word of mouth kicks in after that. Seventy percent of the people that come through our doors actually met us on the streets. We tell people it is hard, but we show them how to get what they need.”

James Worthy,  
Center for Urban Families

“Just let it be known that fathers are welcome and that they will be treated with respect as an equal. Pretty simple.”

Fatherhood Program  
Participant<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Minnesota Fathers and Families Network. (2011). *Sector analysis, linking fathers: father involvement in early childhood programs* (p. 18). Retrieved from <http://www.mnfathers.org/Resources/Documents/Early%20Childhood%20Sector%20Analysis%20Final%2009-2011.pdf>

“You can’t put up a sign that says, ‘Fatherhood Class—Free Food.’ Most of these guys have to be ‘relation shipped’ into these classes.”

Rozario Slack,  
Rozario Slack Enterprises

Although some staff might be recruitment specialists, a strong recruitment effort requires all program staff to be engaged. All staff members should thoroughly understand program goals and service delivery approach so they can effectively outline the potential benefits to others. All staff should:

- Have high expectations for all fathers.
- Be nonjudgmental. Start where a father is, not where you think he should be or where stereotypes might lead you.
- Be respectful. View each dad as an equal human being worthy of respect and dignity.
- Communicate on an equal level, rather than a position of superiority.
- Be patient. Be willing to hang in there with men who will have ups and downs.
- Demonstrate genuine and ongoing caring.
- Earn their trust.
- Be real and down to earth.
- Use language and messages that men will respond to.
- Ask explorative questions in a non-threatening manner. Allow time for men to respond and open up to you.
- Form connections with men by engaging or joining them in some activity. Let conversation happen as you do something together.
- Assume that all men can be reached. Look for opportunities to meet specific needs, and be prepared to follow up as often as it takes.
- Invite dads personally to specific activities. Follow up regularly if they do not attend.
- Ensure the program is inviting (e.g., positive pictures of dads) and accessible (e.g., flexible hours).
- Limit your use of the “P” word. P is for parent; most dads don’t feel included by it. Say and write “moms and dads” or “fathers and mothers.”
- Tell dads how their involvement benefits their kids.
- Offer the potential for employment assistance, which can be an important recruitment incentive if employment services are available.<sup>36</sup>
- Be realistic and transparent in describing what services and support your program can provide.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, P., & Vann, N. (1997). *Partners for Fragile Families: Fatherhood development training* [Handout]. Copy in possession of author.

## Finding Participants

Some fatherhood programs receive mandatory referrals from child support agencies, family courts, or probation officers. Other programs focus on voluntary intake or referrals from social service agencies or community partners. A single source of referrals, particularly during program start-up, is not adequate for most programs. Plan to carry out an array of different recruitment approaches.

- Get to know—and go—where the fathers are: barbershops, community centers, employment programs, basketball courts, and other locations in the community where men regularly go.
- Spend time at family court or child support offices to talk with fathers who might be eager for assistance.
- Have a presence at community events—in urban, suburban, or rural environments—where you can talk informally with fathers about your program and their needs.
- Leave door hangers with contact and other essential program information at the homes of potential participants.
- Use social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to reach out to fathers.
- Recruit program graduates to be ambassadors; their stories can be a powerful recruitment tool.
- Encourage every staff member, board member, and participant to be ready to talk to potential participants anytime, anywhere.
- Be prepared to “over-recruit.” Not all recruited fathers will enroll in the program.

As your program becomes more established, word-of-mouth recruiting from program graduates, partner agencies, satisfied employers, and others is likely to lead to the majority of referrals. Providing meaningful services becomes one of the best recruiting tools in the long run.



## Opportunities for Engagement

From time to time, all fathers deal with difficult issues. They might seek out other men and ask questions or, more likely, they:

- Learn from the media.
- Learn by observing other men in their community.
- Struggle to get by without assistance.

Many practitioners agree that fathers do not readily come to family agencies to ask for help; in fact, they are not typically encouraged to do so. But if programs anticipate situations in which they might connect with men in need, they can take advantage of opportunities to engage and recruit dads. For instance, some practitioners have referred to “points of pain” or “life transition points” as times when men may be more reachable. By offering immediate assistance or providing an understanding ear at such times, it is possible to build a trusting relationship with a future client. Identifying individuals or organizations that have contact with fathers at these times can allow fatherhood program staff to introduce themselves and provide these potential referral sources with information to give fathers about ways they might benefit from the program.

Less traumatic opportunity points can occur at various life transitions when fathers are more open to talking about fatherhood’s demands. For example, some programs have found creative ways to connect with future participants by:

- Developing relationships with hospital maternity wards, which can lead to direct referrals of expectant parents, formal opportunities to meet with groups of expectant parents, or informal conversations with expectant dads in the waiting area.
- Working with school counselors to connect with parents as their children move from one school level to another, or identify children who are having problems at school.
- Helping child welfare workers locate and work with non-residential fathers if there is a possibility of a child being removed from the home or other concern about the child’s situation.
- Connecting with a local military base to work with fathers as they transition in and out of the home for deployment or when they leave military service.
- Identifying fathers of children with special health care needs, perhaps through their primary health care provider.

## Examples of points of pain that present opportunities to engage fathers:

- Unemployment.
- Substantial child support payments.
- Divorce or separation.
- Custody or visitation issues.
- Incarceration.
- Unplanned pregnancy.





### Potential partners or referral sources:

- Child support workers.
- Family court judges.
- Legal Aid staff.
- Lawyers.
- Court mediators.
- Probation officers.
- Corrections officers.
- Teachers/school counselors.
- Child welfare workers.
- Faith leaders.
- Crisis housing or shelter staff.

Additional life transition points with engagement opportunities include:

- Preparing for marriage.
- Becoming a stepfather or foster father.
- Dealing with the loss of a relative or close friend.
- Raising children as a single father, either full-time or part-time.
- Having children in multiple households and facing co-parenting challenges.

Fathers in their teens or early 20s can face particular challenges because they have not completed their own transition from adolescence to adulthood. While some recruitment strategies can be effective regardless of the father's age, program staff should be trained to take alternative approaches in recruiting young dads. A young father is more likely to feel confused about his role as a father and excluded by the reactions of extended family members, compared to older fathers who more commonly face issues related to employment or child support.

## Connecting With Dads

Because many fathers do not come readily to fatherhood programs or even recognize the benefits of doing so, it is crucial that programs foster a welcoming environment and that staff are well prepared for all opportunities to connect and talk with fathers.

### Do's:

- Use welcoming words in speaking and in writing. For example, stay away from judgmental terms such as “deadbeat dads.”
- Use recruiters with ethnic backgrounds similar to those of the targeted participants. Although any recruiter can potentially be highly effective, veteran practitioners agree that fathers are more likely to join a program when recruited by someone who is culturally, racially, or linguistically similar.
- Register and involve men in the program immediately after they express an interest in participating. Immediate follow-up with recruited fathers encourages them to participate. Recruited fathers are more likely to become active participants with a quick transition from initial interest to involvement.
- Decide on an appropriate staff dress code. Some programs encourage recruiters to dress down for street recruitment; others emphasize professional dress at all times to establish credibility and serve as an example of men’s aspirations. At the Center for Urban Families in Baltimore, MD, staff wear suits and ties and employment program participants are required to dress similarly. The program maintains an inventory of donated clothing fathers can choose from if needed.
- Focus only on the things you can realistically offer. Don’t be tempted to provide instant solutions as you “feel the pain” of some fathers. Veteran recruiters stress that their role is to listen, empathize, and look for ways to guide men in a new direction. Promising easy solutions only sets fathers and the program up for failure. The journey to success is a long one, and successful practitioners find ways to help fathers set short-term goals that can eventually lead to longer term outcomes.
- Hire recruitment staff who can forge connections based on mutual respect and caring. When asked about factors that kept them involved with a program, many successful graduates talk about the love they felt from program staff. Many men who participate in fatherhood programs have not had consistent support and nurturance in their lives.
- Start from a strengths-based perspective. View every father coming through the door as an essential resource to his family and children, regardless of immediate barriers.
- Place reminder calls for parenting classes, activities, and other program components.
- Carry through with planned program activities, even if only one or two participants show up, especially early on in the program.
- Support staff in making every visit a father has to the program a positive, productive experience so that they feel valued.

**Don'ts:**

- Use words such as “class” or “program” that might have negative connotations for men with bad experiences in school or other social service programs.
- Make generic statements such as “we can make you a better father,” which suggests a negative perspective on your part before you know a father’s story.
- Give up. Persuasive, persistent recruiters can ultimately break through resistance from potential participants by showing they are unwilling to give up on them. Many fathers struggle to accept that program staff really see the best in them and want to help.

## One-to-One Connections

Outreach and recruitment are designed to create one-to-one opportunities to talk with fathers in the community, listen to their story, and determine how the program can be helpful to them. Recruitment staff can make the most of one-to-one opportunities for informal conversation or formal intake procedures in several key ways:

- Create a safe, non-threatening dialogue.
- Listen actively and empathetically to the person with whom you are talking.
- Find common ground.





- Create a level of comfort.
- Establish personal and organizational credibility.
- Use empathetic listening—be willing to listen solely to understand what the other person means and feels, without judging, rebutting, advising, or contradicting. There is no way you can respond to questions if you have not truly understood where the other person is coming from and what they mean.
- Make the program real for potential clients by speaking about its benefits.
- Do not sell. Remember that the needs of the potential participant are important, not meeting program enrollment goals. Establishing possibilities is the difference between hard sell and enrollment.
- Give examples of the benefits dads, children, and families will gain and the types of skills they can learn.
- Give all pertinent information and answer questions.
- Ask a question, such as, “How do you think you might benefit from participating in this program?”
- Encourage commitment to enter the program.<sup>37</sup>

## Additional Recruitment Strategies

Fatherhood practitioners use diverse ways to find and connect with fathers. Successful strategies and best practices identified by veteran practitioners include:

- Conduct outreach at school health clinics. Young Fathers of Santa Fe began doing this after visiting a teen health clinic to learn more about their services. They emphasized that the fatherhood program focused on keeping both parents in school. “You can get what you want by helping others get what they want,” a program staff member reported.
- Use text messaging and social media for initial contacts. Many recruiters have found that it can be problematic to leave messages on home phone numbers for young fathers if the prospective participant still lives with his parents.

<sup>37</sup> Eisenberg, S. (2007). OFA Grantee Conference.



- Visit WIC centers where low-income women and couples enroll for government benefits. This has been a successful strategy for the Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo.
- Make presentations before local groups of OB/GYNs or midwives. It can be an effective approach to recruiting fathers.
- Help dads file taxes, search for employment and training opportunities, or address other practical needs before encouraging them to participate in a broad fatherhood program.
- Work with recognized names in the community to build program credibility, particularly for new programs. Consider asking local professional sports or political figures to publicly support a program, but be certain they exemplify the lifestyle the program intends to promote to fathers. Support can also be solicited from non-celebrity individuals who are known and respected in the community, such as a grandfather who coaches Little League or a young man who used to be a drug dealer but is now following a positive path.
- Partner with Head Start, Job Corps, or other local programs that are known for having an impact in the community.
- Recruit high-achieving program participants to deliver presentations at radio stations, schools, social service organizations, health fairs, and jails. The FATHER Project, a program of Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota, does this, calling them Dadvocates or Citizen Fathers. These dads have the opportunity to help others based on what they have learned.
- Provide information on visitation, transfers, parole, and support programs for current and formerly incarcerated fathers and their families. The Osborne Association in New York City has a Family Resource Center with a toll-free hotline staffed by former prisoners and their family members to provide this information.<sup>38</sup>
- Partner with training programs. The Family Health and Education Institute recruits many of its participants from an urban automotive academy in Washington, DC. The institute delivers fatherhood services as the life skills portion of the curriculum for these men, most of whom are young fathers. The auto academy reports higher program completion and success rates since the start of the partnership.<sup>39</sup>
- Keep detailed statistics in simple databases to monitor recruitment efforts. The data will help in identifying the most effective strategies and improving others with adjustments in personnel, approaches, or targeted groups and geographic areas.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, Responsible Fatherhood Technical Assistance Project. (2009). *How to implement promising practices: Peer guidance from the Responsible Fatherhood Program*. Retrieved from [http://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/files-for-pages/How%20to%20Implement%20Promising%20Practices\\_09\\_29\\_09.pdf](http://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/files-for-pages/How%20to%20Implement%20Promising%20Practices_09_29_09.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## Effective Recruitment and Retention: The AIDA Model

At an OFA grantee roundtable, the facilitator presented a marketing model that features four components: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (AIDA). Roundtable participants gave the following examples of how this can work:

### **A**ttention (connect/relate/listen)

- Connect to what concerns fathers in the community.
- Use the latest research on the target market.
- Listen to fathers and other community members.
- Pump up the writing: don't be programmatic; use simple, direct, action words.
- Improve community visibility.
- Develop referral opportunities.
- Place signs in the community.
- Have staff in the community, talking to dads on street corners.
- Go to high schools to discuss parents' rights, responsibilities, and realities.

### **I**nterest (be relevant/provide examples/excite them)

- Speak about what concerns the target group.
- Provide examples and testimonials highlighting how others have benefited.
- Excite them and be encouraging. ("They don't hear many people say encouraging things.")
- Ask what they want for their children. They'll tell you, but they don't know how to achieve it.

### **D**esire (stress benefits/"feel-good" factor/overcome objections)

- People want what makes them feel good.
- Be prepared to overcome objections. Provide examples of the experience of others.
- Explain how the program can help with child support and employment issues.

### **A**ction (demonstrate what is doable and worthwhile/get permission to follow up)

- Explain the benefits the target population can gain.
- Involve program graduates to spread the excitement.
- Inspire better staff performance.
- Go where dads are.
- Reach out to moms.
- Ask questions such as, "Do you want to protect your kids?" "Do you want to be better than your father?"
- Explain how "We'll help you break the pattern," but keep it real: "It can take a year and it's hard."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Smoot, B. (2009). OFA Grantee Roundtable facilitated discussion.

## Top Takeaways

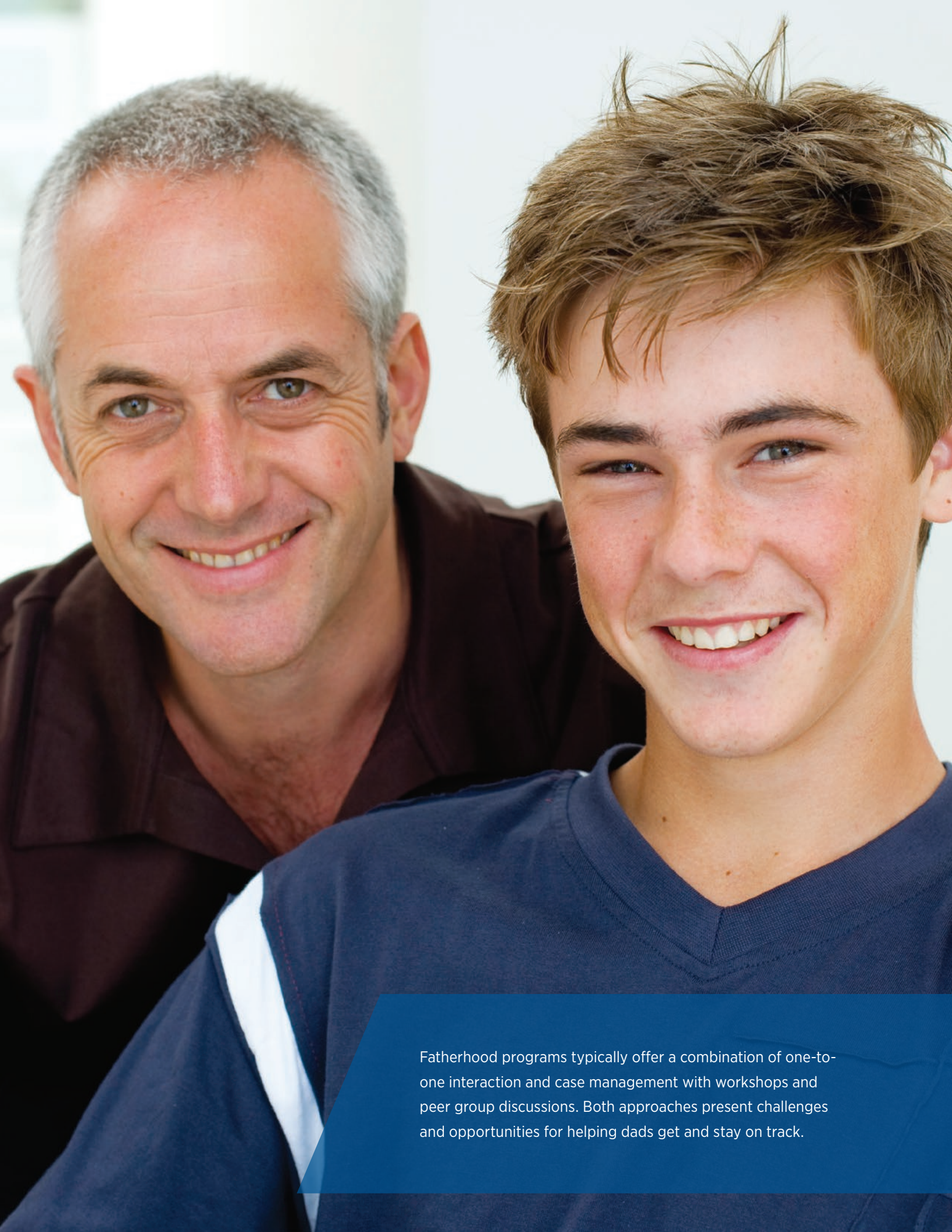
The following are some key considerations for outreach and recruitment activities to build or enhance a fatherhood program:

- Printed brochures and materials are an important part of a comprehensive marketing and communications strategy. Materials should be simple, easy to understand, and tailored to those the program wants to reach. The program's purpose and benefits should be clearly described. The format, graphics, language, tone, and reading level must be accessible and appealing to the target audience.
- A strong media strategy can include direct contact with reporters, strategic public service announcements, and columns or letters to the editor in newspapers and other publications.
- Hire recruitment staff or volunteers who can genuinely relate to the target population. Provide thorough training to ensure they are professional and responsive to the needs of potential participants, but also encourage them to act naturally and be themselves.
- Go to where the dads are: both physically in the community and online at Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Use text messaging to make initial contact with potential participants.
- Have conversations with men in diverse settings. Listen to what they have to say before offering anything. When describing their program, outreach and recruitment staff should make sure they respond to the current life needs of the potential participant.
- Reach out in multiple ways to reach more dads effectively.
- Providing meaningful services will not only increase retention, but also will become the program's best recruitment tool through word-of-mouth marketing.
- Thorough planning and skillful, caring staff are key to successful recruitment.
- Use training, education, and career services as recruitment tools.

## Helpful Resources

- **Recruitment and Retention: Preparing for and Following up on Group Connections**, from Parents as Teachers, has tips on recruitment and developing solid outreach and follow-up efforts.
- *Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs* by James Levine, Dennis Murphy, and Sherrill Wilson, 1993.
- National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse has developed and tested an outreach campaign—**Fatherhood Buzz**—to recruit men in barbershops.
- **Fathers and Parenting Interventions: What Works?** presents The Fatherhood Institute, UK, perspective on recruitment and retention.





Fatherhood programs typically offer a combination of one-to-one interaction and case management with workshops and peer group discussions. Both approaches present challenges and opportunities for helping dads get and stay on track.



# Work With Dads

“The relationship is built by how you come across to the dads. At first, you want to spend 90% listening and 10% talking. Remember that you won’t solve everything in a day or a week.”

Barry McIntosh,  
Young Fathers of Santa Fe

“The first contact is most important. Don’t say something like, ‘I can’t help you today. Come back tomorrow.’ They won’t come back.”

Patricia Littlejohn,  
South Carolina Center  
for Fathers and Families

Although many fatherhood program activities take place in group settings, critical work can also occur on a one-to-one basis. In fact, whether a father even decides to join a program can depend on the first one-to-one encounter with a staff member. One-to-one interaction and group activities both have important roles in helping fathers successfully complete a program. Workshops led by facilitators can generate tremendous positive energy among a group of fathers and influence retention. Similarly, the quality of individualized interaction and case management can affect how long a person stays in the program and whether he follows through in achieving his goals.

## One-to-One Work

The first one-to-one participant-staff interaction typically takes place before enrollment. This conversation is generally informal and may be on the phone or in person at a teen health clinic, court proceeding, doctor’s office, or street corner. No matter where it occurs, this conversation is likely to be crucial in a father’s decision whether to get involved with a program. Preparing staff to engage in these conversations is critical to success. Staff members who work one-to-one with fathers should be aware of their own skills and limitations so they know when they can help a father directly or need to seek assistance from a colleague or partner agency with more specialized knowledge.

Experienced outreach workers emphasize the importance of listening and taking cues from the dad’s comments. A father might speak about his need for a job to generate income so he can meet child support obligations, which presents an opportunity to discuss how the fatherhood program can help with employment as well as developing a stronger father-child relationship. Some men express frustration about their relationships with the mothers of their children or the court system, which provides the opportunity to develop trust with fathers by listening to them carefully, empathizing with their situation, talking about co-parenting, and explaining how the program might be able to help them navigate the court system and improve their communication or presentation skills. Many practitioners agree on the importance of not overpromising what they or the program can deliver; ultimately, that will result in a loss of trust.



“It’s important to maintain a non-judgmental approach and build a relationship from the start.”

Barry McIntosh,  
Young Fathers of Santa Fe

“Participants must know that if they slip and fall we’ve got them...they have to feel they belong.”

Joe Jones,  
Center for Urban Families

The overall “feel” of a program can determine whether fathers stay or leave. Fatherhood practitioners agree that showing genuine concern and interest in establishing a long-term relationship are essential to creating trust. Listening carefully to figure out the father’s needs, addressing urgent or initial needs, and always demonstrating honesty and trust are cited as essential skills for one-to-one work.

Many men who come to fatherhood programs struggle with depression and low morale as a result of life experiences and current circumstances. They have often felt rejected and let down by various institutions and programs. Many have not had loving, actively involved fathers in their lives. Therefore, helping dads identify and manage their emotions—anger, resentment, disappointment—can be a key component of successful one-to-one contact. “Try to get them out of the eye of the storm. Calm them down, slow them down, and help them to see things more objectively,” one fatherhood program manager recommended.

“Be responsive to guys and be willing to take some risks.”

Patricia Littlejohn,  
South Carolina Center  
for Fathers and Families

## Case Management

The following are key components of case management:

- **Build relationships** – Case management often involves a professional relationship grounded in trust that can provide effective support and accountability. Some programs conduct a rolling intake process in which case managers gather information gradually through informal discussion. The most important outcome of this process is to build a father’s trust in the counselor or case manager. Counselors build trust by listening, remaining objective about a father’s problems, and providing a supportive environment.
- **Assess needs** – Case managers usually conduct a needs assessment, but as one program staff member noted, “We don’t use that term because it sounds like a clinical study.” The goal is “to have frank, open conversations with the men we serve.” Those discussions play a large part in determining the services they need. “We’ve had guys confess to having open warrants. We then set them up to have legal representation so they walk in protected.”
- **Set goals** – Develop a realistic plan for the future to incorporate both short-term and long-term goals. Plans should document the goals and be updated frequently, both to document and foster progress toward future goals. “We often take the situation in bite-size pieces,” one practitioner noted. If a father struggles to gain visitation rights or has trouble interacting with his child, a case manager can offer encouragement but suggest patience. “There is so much water under the bridge.” A mom or a child “will have to see you acting differently” before their own behavior can change. “I try to de-emotionalize the situation and have them look at it differently.”
- **Take a step-by-step approach** – Identify the action steps that will help the father reach his goals. For example, many fathers want a job or a better job to provide for their children, so case managers can take steps to assess the man’s skills and interests. Young Fathers of Santa Fe follows a strategy in which fathers are given tasks to assess their capabilities: Does he know how to do a basic job search? What are his basic literacy skills? Many have no experience looking for a job. They may need help preparing a

resume or leaving a message on a potential employer's answering machine. Some will need a referral to an adult basic education program to develop their reading and writing skills. By assigning dads "little things to do" (e.g., writing a description of their general interests, preparing a list of jobs they have done, looking through online job listings, or practicing leaving a voice mail message), the program can more accurately assess needs, help fathers set attainable goals, and enable them to move forward.

- **Make referrals and follow up** – Programs cannot meet every need of a father through in-house services. Successful programs build on their understanding of the community and established partner relationships to address a father's needs and help him reach his goals. Effective referrals involve more than just providing a phone number. Case managers should, when able, directly introduce a father to the referral source. Additionally, staff should follow up with both the father and the referral source regarding progress. Some of the needs that might be addressed include housing, employment, substance abuse, child support, and visitation issues.
- **Promote self-esteem** – Even if they display a veneer of silent strength and toughness, many dads have low self-esteem that is reinforced if they are non-custodial parents. Young dads, in particular, often need a boost, especially if they face anger from the family of their child's mother. One program invites graduates back to speak to new participants. Other programs take current program participants, who are young dads themselves, to speak at pregnancy prevention classes in high schools. The presenters gain skills and confidence while new program participants or students hear from those who have dealt with a real-life problem.
- **Keep fathers on track** – Individualized activities help sustain men's lives and are an opportunity to develop a personalized strategic plan. But many dads are in danger of going "off course" through the normal routines of life. Being available to respond to crises and having regular one-to-one sessions can help keep men on course for success. These meetings are also an opportunity to refine or tweak goals and add new ones, depending on a dad's changing circumstances.

**Case management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's and family's comprehensive needs through communication and available resources to promote quality, cost-effective outcomes.<sup>41</sup>**

<sup>41</sup> Case Management Society of America. *What is a case manager?* Retrieved from <http://www.cmsa.org/Home/CMSA/WhatisaCaseManager/tabid/224/Default.aspx>



Working with fathers through home visits, the **Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo** in Texas uses an activity that asks dads what they want for their child. Men can choose from items such as good health, politeness, being good in school, excelling in sports, and other goals. When men rank the top three or four items on their wish list, staff can then focus discussion toward these goals. For example, if a dad of a newborn wants his child to be a good athlete, the counselor will encourage him to lie down on the floor with the baby on his stomach. The baby's act of raising his or her head supports muscular development. "It's an activity that builds kids' bodies for the future," one program case manager said. "Some dads think they just wait until a child is 14 to start working on athletics, but that's not the case."

One-to-one meetings require extensive planning by case managers. While strategic plans provide a focus for both the father and practitioner, one-to-one discussions often veer into new or unexpected areas. "Always make time for planning," one practitioner said. The long-range goal of such plans is to "deal with the cause of a crisis, not just the crisis of the week."

Maintaining accurate and up-to-date records is critical for effective case management. Using MIS software can make record keeping more efficient, allow for controlled access by other team members, and allow for more dynamic assessment of overall participant needs and engagement. Software systems come in many variations. Programs should carefully consider the costs, both initially and to maintain the system, and their needs and capacity before selecting one. The Center for Urban Families uses Efforts to Outcomes from Social Solutions to maintain its case management records.

## Top Takeaways

The following are some key considerations in one-to-one work with dads:

- A dad's first impression of a fatherhood program and staff is a lasting one, and it is important to engage him from the start.
- Individual fathers usually face various challenges, not all of which will be apparent at the first or second encounter. Developing a relationship of trust and respect is important to ensure they actively seek help in dealing with particular issues.
- Offering advice and encouragement on identified issues and involving other staff members as necessary will help staff balance the help they provide to individual fathers. When appropriate, refer clients to services within or outside the program.

Once a trusting relationship is established, much of the one-to-one work involves assistance with a variety of life issues. These issues might relate to personal development, employment, legal problems, child support, parenting, relationships, or other challenges.

“The basic goal was to help participants recognize and begin to change behavior and attitudes that were counterproductive to their progress.” (p. 120)

“‘Bob’ [group participant]: ‘I learned a lot ... because there was a lot of things going on that I was holding in, and peer support would help me bring all them problems that I had in me, out.’” (p. 118)

Johnson, Levine, & Doolittle<sup>42</sup>

## Helpful Resources

- **Teaching Important Parenting Skills: TIPS for Great Kids!** can be used as an alternative to parenting classes or incorporated into group sessions. The toolkit provides research-based parenting information in a format that allows programs to incorporate parenting skills and information into existing services. More than 250 parenting tips are listed on 4” x 6” parenting tip cards on topics of interest to parents of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Topics are organized into 12 domains that research has shown to be important for child well-being. Some tips are designed specifically for fathers.
- **Guidebook to the Responsible Fatherhood Project Participant Management Information System** from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- **Building Management Information Systems to Coordinate Citywide Afterschool Programs: A Toolkit for Cities** from the National League of Cities provides information on uses for MIS; instructions for sourcing, implementing, and expanding an MIS; and information on leading commercial MIS vendors.

## Group Work

In most fatherhood programs, group workshops are an efficient way to engage multiple men on issues of common concern, from navigating family relationships and establishing parent-child bonds to learning skills to help them take charge of their lives. When done effectively, group sessions are the “glue” that keeps men involved in a wider program and leads to powerful life changes for them and their families. Effective group programs are built on a foundation of trust that encourages self-reflection, personal sharing, peer support, and ongoing growth.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, E. S., Levine, A., & Doolittle, F. C. (1999). *Fathers' fair share: Helping poor men manage child support and fatherhood*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

## Facilitation

The success of peer support depends on the skills and dedication of peer facilitators and their ability to establish rapport with participants.<sup>43</sup> Facilitators should receive training in both general facilitation skills and the approach and content of the curricula.

Facilitators play four basic roles and each role requires a slightly different set of skills:

1. *Engaging* – creating a welcoming and safe environment that draws participants in and encourages them to stay.
2. *Informing* – providing knowledge and information that is meaningful and useful to participants through a variety of approaches that engage and involve participants in the sharing of knowledge.
3. *Involving* – ensuring all group members are able to participate and benefit from the group activities and discussion.
4. *Applying* – allowing time for reflection about key take-home messages and encouraging the use of new awareness, knowledge, and skills to build stronger relationships and outcomes for children and families.<sup>44</sup>

Facilitators should know the subject matter and be able to establish credibility while drawing on group knowledge and recognizing they are not the only expert in the room. Preparation can make the difference between an engaging rap session and a successful group session focused on outcomes. In fact, veteran program managers recommend that facilitators spend at least twice as much time preparing as they do facilitating. Part of that preparation should involve a careful review of the purpose and goals for each session, as well as awareness of long-term goals for the group and the fatherhood program.

“If facilitators aren’t doing a good job, pull them out. They can do harm.”

Joe Jones,  
Center for Urban Families

### Features of poor group facilitation:

- Insufficient preparation.
- Lack of purpose.
- Disorganization.
- Too much lecturing or dominating the conversation.
- Personal storytelling that is not relevant to group goals.
- Failure to manage problem group behaviors.
- A boring speaking style.
- Approach feels too much like school.
- Judgmental attitude.
- Projecting insincerity.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Brooks-Harris, J. E., & Stock-Ward, S. R. (1999). *Workshops: Designing and facilitating experiential learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



Effective facilitators focus on the journey of the group members and have a clear vision of the changes needed in their attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behavior. To successfully guide their participants, they:

- Create a safe and comfortable learning environment.
- Promote group interest and interaction through various types of activities.
- Encourage active participation and involve all group members.
- Keep things on track by being prepared, organized, and clear about the goals of group activities.
- Keep a focus on outcomes by encouraging development and application of new skills.

The most productive facilitators engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection and practice to hone their skills. Reviewing, sharing, and working on these strengths and growth areas with a co-facilitator, supervisor, or other colleague can strengthen their skills. Observing other facilitators in action is also beneficial.

Many fatherhood programs whose staff do not have strong group facilitation skills have contracted with individuals to provide workshops on a freelance basis rather than committing to a full-time hire. It is important that any consultants, part-time staff, and/or volunteers work closely with full-time program staff to ensure they have adequate time for preparation, meet the needs of the group, and focus on program goals.

## Stages of Group Development

Workshop facilitators should not expect men to start sharing and supporting each other immediately. All groups go through various stages of development.<sup>45</sup>

**Forming** – Everything seems new and participants are often wary and unsure. The role of the facilitator is important as he or she uses “engaging” skills to create a welcoming environment, provide guidance and direction, and establish that the group is safe for sharing information.

<sup>45</sup> Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6): 384–99.



**Storming** – Participants begin to get comfortable sharing in the group, but there is still uncertainty and unfamiliarity with the group process. Group members open up to each other and may confront each other's ideas and perspectives. The facilitator's ability to listen and deal with conflict or competition is essential in helping the group move forward.

**Norming** – The group coalesces around common goals, shares a sense of group belonging, and embraces group process and mutual support. Some members may have attained “a-ha” moments that signify new, deeper learning.

**Performing** – The group becomes more task oriented and comfortable solving problems. Most members will be aware of key take-home messages as the facilitator sometimes takes a back seat while the group dominates the proceedings.

**Adjourning** – This is one of the most difficult stages. After creating a meaningful group experience for members, the facilitator must prepare them for the end of the group. Successful facilitators conduct an array of interesting and engaging activities to encourage participation and reflection, provide relevant take-home messages, and continuously challenge dads to apply their knowledge in new, tangible ways.

## Engaging Participants

Fatherhood programs employ many strategies to ensure participant engagement.

**Opening and closing rituals** – Adopting rituals to begin and end each session provides a sense of familiarity and comfort that is useful during early group development. Providing food, playing music, or simply allowing time for informal conversation as group members arrive can serve as an opening ritual. Some groups always end with a closing ritual such as a group hug or a quick “whip” around the room for final thoughts.

As groups reach the norming and performing stages, rituals can be used more purposefully to further learning and encourage application of skills. Some programs begin their group sessions with a check-in, sometimes called “yos and nos,” where participants have the opportunity to share their experiences between sessions. This strategy helps facilitators learn how participants are doing in applying new skills and knowledge. By allowing time at the end of group sessions for reflection on key takeaway messages, facilitators encourage participants to use some of their new skills at home and be ready to report back at the next session.

**Talking and sharing** – One fatherhood program uses an activity called I-Cards, in which universal symbols such as a bird in flight, a broken heart, or a ladder are cut out and attached to 3” x 5” cards and spread out on a table. The facilitator asks participants to pick out a few of the cards, talk about why they picked the cards, and how the symbols relate to their situations. “This is a way to get a deep discussion in a short amount of time,” a case manager said.

**Icebreaker** – One popular icebreaker activity is to ask dads, “How do you want to be remembered as a parent?” This activity can get them talking about how they remember their own parents and grandparents, and it can help them take greater ownership of parenting responsibilities.

**Role-play** – Role-playing can help fathers see issues from a different perspective. It can also break down barriers and produce teachable moments to help men navigate difficult situations or relationships. If properly used, role-playing can also include humor that breaks down barriers and helps build trust.

**Building trust** – Using a dad’s story, gained through one-to-one conversation, as an anonymous case study is a strategy that can build trust with the father and generate conversation and problem-solving. The dad’s identity is always kept confidential. “I tell them I will never talk behind their back,” a program manager said.

**Peer-to-peer learning** – The Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo in Texas schedules a father-and-child play group with activity stations where men can learn from each other. In this way, a dad with a 6-month-old child might learn something from watching another dad interact with a 2-year-old. “It’s informal but still has some structure,” a practitioner said. The program also invites moms to the session, which is an opportunity for a woman to see the father act in a new, more attentive way toward his child. “If they see the father learning to interact with the baby, it can be important in developing a stronger mom-dad relationship.”

## Managing Problem Behaviors

Despite effective facilitation, problem behaviors in groups can undermine success and present communication problems. The facilitator’s role is to listen carefully and pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues to pick up on problems.

One way to avoid problems is to clearly state session rules and expectations. These ground rules, described by one experienced practitioner as a group agreement, should reflect the consensus of group members. In fact, many groups begin to self-regulate as members refer each other to the ground rules.

However, a facilitator might face challenges from a group member who tests the leader’s authority during early sessions. Facilitators need to be confident in their ability to be credible and create a safe environment for group discussion.

Facilitators often confront three common types of problem behaviors:

**The Monopolizer** – Almost every group has someone who talks too much. While this person may have good information to share, letting him talk continually will generate resentment within the group and jeopardize its success. Referring back to the ground rules is one strategy for facilitators. Use phrases such as “share the time” and “allow all voices to be heard.” Facilitators can also respond with comments such as, “Thanks for sharing. Can we hear from someone else?” or “Has anyone else had a similar experience?”

A strong facilitator will monitor the rest of the group and directly ask for other input, politely interrupt the monopolizer, or summarize the information. A good rule of thumb is to limit each person to no more than two or three answers per session. Another strategy is to use a “talking stick” that is passed around the group. Only the person holding the stick can speak at that time. Avoiding eye contact with



the monopolizer can also reduce his tendency to dominate the conversation. If these actions are not successful, the facilitator may need to talk directly with the person at session breaks to remind him that everyone must have an opportunity to share ideas.

**The Quiet Participant** – Some people talk a lot, but others talk little or not at all. Try to reverse the roles of the monopolizer and the quiet participant. Encourage monopolizers to share the time and quiet people to speak up when they have something to say. Some people are just shy or embarrassed about giving a “wrong” answer. A facilitator can encourage input by making eye contact with the quiet participant and supporting his contribution. Calling on individuals to speak or using small group activities are other ways to involve quieter members in the group discussion.

**Side Conversations** – Side conversations occur in most workshops and may or may not relate to the session content. Side discussions should not intrude on the workshop. Some facilitators will lower their voices or just stop talking when they hear such a conversation. As soon as the room is quiet, the side conversation usually ends. By stopping to listen, the facilitator might recognize that the conversation is relevant to the group’s topic and will encourage the individuals to share their discussion with the entire group. If the conversation is not relevant to the discussion, facilitators can remind the individuals of the ground rules and the need to respect the group process. It may also be a sign that the group needs to take a break.

## Working With a Co-Facilitator

A co-facilitator, male or female, can also help manage problem behaviors, with the person located just “off stage” to monitor participant activity. Two facilitators are useful for a group of more than 20 individuals. Organizations can also match co-facilitators based on their skill sets and approaches; for example, a team might include someone particularly effective at engaging and involving participants with a partner skilled at informing and applying skills. Fatherhood groups sometimes rely on a male-female team of co-facilitators for various reasons, including the opportunity to model respectful male-female interaction.

Yet co-facilitation will not always work. Program managers should observe facilitators in action and encourage a team to recognize each other’s strengths and growth areas. Also, allow joint planning time before a group session and a debriefing afterward. Decide whether one facilitator should be the lead or if they will share this role. Co-facilitators should discuss beforehand how to resolve conflicts or disagreements that may arise during discussion. Developing a system of signals to communicate with each other will help ensure that goals are met and activities are adapted as needed.

## Top Takeaways

The following are some key considerations in group work with dads:

- Facilitators play four basic roles: engaging, informing, involving, and applying (actively encouraging participants to apply program lessons in their daily lives).
- Opening and closing rituals can be effective tools. To encourage application of knowledge and skills, make time at the beginning and end of each group session for reflection on takeaway messages and discussing how participants can integrate the lesson into their lives.
- Effective facilitators offer varied activities, respond to individual group member needs, listen to and learn from the group, and manage difficult people.
- Role-play activities, talking and sharing, and peer-to-peer learning are three ways to engage participants during group sessions.
- Identify problems in group dynamics early and intervene as needed to ensure everyone can participate in discussions.

## Helpful Resources

- *Workshops: Designing and Facilitating Experiential Learning* by J. E. Brooks-Harris and S. R. Stock-Ward (1999) identifies the four basic roles played by facilitators and the required skill sets for each. This publication features a self-assessment that can be helpful in identifying strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Working with Fathers in Groups: Tips to Enhance Your Facilitation Skills** is a 2009 National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse webinar that discussed tips for group workshops.
- **Facilitation Skills – Self-Assessment** can help individuals assess their skills on a 5-point Likert scale based on topics such as engaging, involving, informing, and applying skills.
- The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse has developed a **Compendium of Curricula Used by Fatherhood Programs**.



# Activities

A solid organization and effective facilitators are critical to a successful fatherhood program. Similarly, the activities that prompt and guide group discussion can have an important impact on the success of program participants. Used effectively, group and one-to-one activities can motivate fathers and help them overcome barriers they once might have thought were insurmountable.

While all the activities detailed here can be used in one-to-one settings, they can also be used in group sessions where fathers can interact and share ideas and experiences. All the activities are designed for use with any dad participating in a responsible fatherhood program.

## Reflection and Awareness

Effective fatherhood programs help fathers reflect on their life experiences and increase their awareness of the impact of these experiences on their current situation, parenting style, and relationship skills. Breakthrough moments can occur when fathers commit to being a better father, doing better than their dad, or improving their relationship with their child's mother. Most fatherhood and relationship curricula incorporate activities that can be used to encourage such reflection and discussion.

### **What's It Been Like? or Manhood Collage** from **The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum: A Curriculum Developed for the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration**

Participants in these activities reflect on and discuss their past and current experiences as sons, men, and fathers. Fatherhood practitioners can use these activities to engage fathers in reflection as they guide them on a journey of self-awareness and growth as men and fathers.

From **Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers:**

- **Values Voting**  
Can be used as a 20-minute icebreaker or a 40-minute program activity. Participants choose to agree or disagree with controversial statements and then defend their positions. In the full activity, participants are encouraged to explore their personal values and reflect on their position as a role model for their children. If used as an icebreaker, the statements can be adapted to encourage interaction and sharing.
- **Trust Walk**  
Can be used as a short warm-up or a longer program focused on the needs of small children. Group participants assume the role of "child" or "parent." Those in the child role are blindfolded and led through an obstacle course by parents who are given instructions on how to interact with their child. The activity reminds participants of the feelings of dependence among children and the responsibilities facing parents. Participants are encouraged to reflect and discuss parenting techniques.
- **The Values Auction**  
In this 30–45 minute activity, men identify the values, behaviors, and characteristics they want to nurture in their children by bidding in an "auction" of attributes that they value in children.





Adults often learn best by doing. Activities done in one-to-one or group sessions can give fathers hands-on experience that they can apply outside the program with their children and families.





From **The Nurturing Fathers Program**:

- **Male Nurturance**

A two-part, 45-minute activity designed to help fathers define and identify the difference between nurturing and non-nurturing parenting practices.

- **Fathering Without Fear or Violence**

A 45-minute series of three activities explores the difference between nurturing and non-nurturing fathering practices, helps fathers identify the intentions and outcomes of various fathering practices, and encourages men to commit to specific nurturing fathering practices that do not represent fear or violence.

From **Quenching the Father Thirst: Developing a Dad** by the National Center for Fathering:

- **The Mask of Masculinity versus a Real Man**

Short activity designed to show what real manhood is not and to explore the qualities of a real man.

- **My Father Is Like A \_\_\_\_\_ and Like Father, Like Son**

Two short activities that challenge dads to think about their relationship with their own father and its impact on them as fathers themselves.

## Parenting Skills

Most fatherhood curricula feature activities to help fathers focus on and improve their parenting skills. Several general parenting curricula also incorporate activities that can be used in fatherhood programs, although few are specifically designed for fathers. The following activities were designed specifically for group or one-to-one work with fathers.

**Understanding Children's Ages and Stages** from Pamela Wilson and Nigel Vann

A 45-minute activity that involves teams of fathers competing to answer questions about child development. Designed to increase or reinforce participants' knowledge of child development from birth through adolescence.

From **Dealing With Children's Behaviors** in **The Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum: A Curriculum Developed for the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration**:

Three activities that help fathers examine the difference between punishment and discipline and think about ways to discipline children in constructive, age-appropriate ways:

- **Looking Back, Looking Ahead**

A 25–30 minute activity to help participants identify how they were disciplined as children, examine how those experiences affect their parenting style today, and begin a conversation about effective alternatives to hitting as a means of correcting children's behavior.

- **Punishment or Discipline?**

A 20–30 minute activity to clarify, define, and foster understanding of the terms discipline and punishment and help fathers understand the meaning of abuse.

- **What Do You Do?**

A 40-minute activity with role-play situations can help fathers identify constructive and age-appropriate ways to deal with their children's behavior. Features a handout for fathers called *Age Makes a Difference* that presents four basic guidelines for fathers to keep in mind as they discipline their children. It also provides age-specific hints for parents and includes "a word about spanking."

### **Reading With Your Child**

This activity from **Focus on Fathering** helps fathers understand the important role that reading plays in children's language development and later school success.





## Communication Skills

The following activities are designed to help fathers enhance their communication and relationship skills.

### Active Listening

A 35-minute activity from **Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers** divides participants into pairs. A “speaker” discusses a problem with a “listener” who secretly was instructed to listen poorly. Group members then assess aspects of poor and good listening, and practice using effective listening skills in a role play.

### Showing and Handling Feelings

This three-part activity from **24/7 Dad™** takes about 100 minutes and helps fathers increase their awareness, knowledge, and capacity for showing and handling feelings and emotions. The final part of the activity focuses on showing and handling grief and loss.

### Same Gender Conversations

This 40-minute activity from **Planning for Children** incorporates a focused discussion and PowerPoint presentation for fathers, and a corresponding activity with mothers, about the role they can play in cooperatively planning with their partners for pregnancy and preventing becoming a father again by chance.

### Listening/Drawing

A short activity from **Quenching the Father Thirst: Developing a Dad** by the National Center for Fathering can help dads understand the complexity of communication.



## One-to-One Activities

The following activities can be used in one-to-one work during home visits or in-office sessions. They also can be adapted for group work.

### **The Modern Dad's Quiz: How Well Do You Know Your Children?**

This quiz from **The Modern Dad's Dilemma: How to Stay Connected With Your Kids in a Rapidly Changing World** can be completed by fathers on their own or with a fatherhood practitioner. Its goal is to show fathers how much they know about their children and encourage them to learn more if they don't know all the answers.

### **Meeting Baby's Basic Needs (Baby's Cycle of Care) and Five Keys to Being an Involved Father**

Originally developed for fathers in prenatal classes, these handouts from **Conscious Fathering** are also useful in one-to-one work to help fathers understand the needs of babies and ways they can be an involved father.

From **Maps for Dads: Welcome to Dadhood and Doin' the Dad Thing**:

The Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo (Texas) offers handouts to leave with fathers during a home visit or for structuring one-to-one conversations aimed at increasing developmentally appropriate father-child interaction. Program staff encourage dads to keep these and other handouts as a “memory book” to document their children’s growth and development.

- **Just the Facts Jack**

A two-page handout with illustrations and layman’s language that emphasize the basic facts about the importance of father involvement in a child’s life.

- **Bonding with Your Baby**

Ideas that dads can use to bond with their infants and babies.

- **Crying**

Tips dads can use to respond to their crying babies.

## **CHEEERS**

The Dads Make a Difference program of Healthy Families San Angelo staff use the CHEEERS assessment to structure conversations with dads about positive father-child interaction while reinforcing positive behaviors and assessing them over time. CHEEERS gets its name from father-child interaction: how a father responds to the baby’s **C**ues; the quality and frequency of **H**olding; what **E**xpressions he uses; how much **E**mpathy a dad shows for his baby’s feelings and needs; the extent to which a dad promotes an **E**nvironment that supports the baby’s growth and development; whether there is a smooth **R**hythm to father-child interaction; and how much dad **S**miles at his baby.

## **Tips for Dads**

Developed and adapted from various sources by Fernando Mederos of the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, these four tip sheets can be used as handouts in one-to-one or group sessions to reinforce key points:

- **Tips for Dads: Playing with Children**
- **Tips for Fathers: Disciplining Children**
- **Tips for Dads: It’s a Matter of Pride, Being a Good Role Model**
- **Sixteen Things Fathers Can Do to Support Their Pregnant Partners**

