

Fatherhood Research and Practitioners Network Grant Proposal

The Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, in partnership with Ohio University and Bowling Green State University, will be pursuing a grant to support extended evaluation of outcomes associated with OCF grant-funded programs. \$100,000 of grant funding is being sought to support evaluation activities from January 2015 through December 2016.

The proposed project will address several key research issues and questions:

1. **Recruitment, Engagement and Retention:** Which participant recruitment strategies, settings, incentives and services are most effective at recruiting, engaging and retaining fathers? Are particular strategies more effective with specific populations? The focus on recruitment, engagement, and retention will address process issues that have received little previous attention.
2. **Program Design & Modes of Delivery:** Which program elements are most associated with positive changes in father involvement? Do various program elements/curricula contribute differentially to positive changes in father involvement with children and perspectives on positive fatherhood? Does the sequence of services or service approach impact the effectiveness of fatherhood programs? The proposed study will provide a more extensive exploration of program elements across multiple sites than has previously been conducted. The literature lacks such broad, statewide explorations, especially among programs that are already collecting some degree of standardized data.
3. **Adaptation of Proven Interventions:** Do court-mandated parenting classes and other interventions for divorcing parents also work for never married parents? Do nonresidential fathers who have child support and parenting time orders established simultaneously make more consistent payments and spend more time with their children? Much of the research on nonresidential fathers was developed through samples of divorced fathers. Never married fathers are dissimilar to divorced fathers in many ways. The proposed research will explore differential outcomes that may be associated with these differences and the efficacy of programs developed for divorcing parents on this group.
4. **Designs Responsive to Needs of Specific Sub-Groups of Fathers:** Are particular program elements impactful on African American fathers? Approximately 40% of the participants in the programs to be included in the proposed project are African American. This offers the opportunity for an extensive exploration of impacts among this sub-group that is often lacking in the literature.

The evaluation project will consist of three phases:

Phase 1: Secondary Analysis of Previous Data: Data has been collected from OCF-funded programs over the past two years. This includes both pre- and post-intervention data that will facilitate partial assessment of changes in attitudes and beliefs concerning fatherhood during the course of participation in programming. While these data are not sufficient to yield a fully-detailed evaluation of prior programming, this phase of the overall project is expected to generate basic understanding that will inform the more substantial evaluation activities conducted in programs going forward. 1,110 fathers completed pre- and post-testing in 2012-2013 with 1,369 doing so in 2013-14. A post hoc power analysis indicates these sample sizes are sufficient to support the analysis to be undertaken. Pre- and post-assessment included administration of the Inventory of Father Involvement. Differences in pre- and post-intervention scores will be analyzed across all programs and in relation to each of the implemented curricula.

Pre-intervention in-take also included the collection of various demographic data as well as information on child custody/parenting time status, child support compliance, involvement of child welfare services, incarceration, drug/alcohol use, and co-parental relationship quality. Post-intervention out-take also included the collection of information on various activities undertaken

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during the course of programming including receiving help in furthering education, gaining employment, resolving child support problems, establishing a parenting time order or gaining custody of children, and seeking assistance with various legal issues. Analysis of variance on all of these items using simple paired-sample t-tests will be included in the secondary analysis conducted in this phase of the proposed project. ANOVA scores for each program will be analyzed to facilitate a rudimentary comparison of effects associated with the various curricula employed by the previously-funded programs. In doing so, attention will also be given to variations in target subject populations across these programs. Because the data will be analyzed retrospectively, no comparisons to control groups will be included in this phase of the project. Both the in-take and out-take forms are included in Appendix E.

Phase 2: Assessment of Parenting and Child Outcomes in Fatherhood Programs across Ohio:

Because OCF will not make program funding decisions until Spring 2015, there is an opportunity to build the evaluation model into all funded programs. In past years, OCF funded programs have enrolled over 1,000 fathers in various program activities. It is anticipated that will be the case this year, as well. Once the program sites have been selected, a determination will be made of the number of fathers who will participate in assessed program activities. Once that number is established, an a priori power analysis on the various sample sizes will be conducted to assure suitability for the analysis to be undertaken.

This phase of the assessment will include a quasi-experimental design including comparisons between treatment and non-randomized control groups at each program location. Because participants self-select into programs, true random assignment to treatment and control groups is not possible. Each participating program will work with project evaluators to identify a comparison group drawn from program clientele who do not choose to participate in the identified intervention program. Efforts will be made to develop comparison groups that reflect the highest possible degree of demographic similarity to treatment groups and exploration of demographic differences will be included in the statistical analysis.

This phase of the analysis will include examination of factors associated with the following fathering outcomes:

1. Amount and quality of time spent with child(ren)
2. Rates of child support compliance
3. Patterns of co-parental communication and conflict with mothers
4. Perceptions of and commitment to various dimensions of fathering as measured on the Inventory of Father Involvement
5. Changes in patterns of employment and/or education seeking

Key aspects of this phase of the project will include:

1. Pre- and post-test analysis using the Inventory of Father Involvement (Hawkins et. al., 2002), an instrument assessing nine dimensions of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of father involvement in the lives of their children. Fathers are asked to assess themselves on nine domains of father involvement: discipline and teaching responsibility, attentiveness, providing, reading and homework support, praise and affection, mother support, developing talents and future concerns, school encouragement, and time and talking together
2. Quasi-experimental design incorporating non-randomized control groups at each program location. These control groups will be formed from clientele at the participating agencies who do not participate in the evaluated program and/or from demographically-similar fathers in the general population in the areas served by participating agencies. Control groups will complete the Inventory of Father Involvement at a time interval similar to

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that of the participant groups. These individuals will also be surveyed regarding their reasons for not participating in the program as part of the process evaluation phase described below.

3. Program participants will be surveyed regarding specific aspects of program curricula in an attempt to determine which elements of those curricula are most salient to participants.

Phase 3: Process Evaluation: Because data will be collected in five different program sites, the proposed project will facilitate a rigorous comparison of process variables across those sites. This phase of the evaluation project will include attention to various dimensions of program implementation including: program marketing/participant recruitment, staff training, connections to related services/supports, offering of ancillary services to program participants, reporting of evaluation results, and decision processes regarding future programming.

Process evaluation will be largely qualitative in nature. Key elements of this phase of the evaluation will include:

1. Interviews with program leadership and key staff focusing on various aspects of staff training, program design, and participant recruitment. Staff will also be asked to provide descriptive input regarding program clientele and the broader communities served by their organization.
2. Interviews/surveys of program participants will focus on participants' reasons for participating in the program, assessments of the value of specific curricular modules, and reflections on the impact of the program on various aspects of fathers' involvement with their children.
3. Interviews/surveys of key community informants will explore perceptions of the value of the program in meeting needs in the community, the place of the program in the broader panoply of community programs available to fathers, and areas of need not addressed by the program.

All activities undertaken as part of the proposed project will be reviewed by the Ohio University Institutional Review Board. IRB proposals are being developed along with this application with an expectation of submission for review in early October. This will allow all proposed activities to begin according to proposed timeline included in Appendix B.

