



Supporting Families: Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) Programming in Tribal TANF

Session 2 of the Programming to Build Strong Families and Promote Economic Independence Webinar Series

July 9, 2026

As you join, please share in the chat:

Your name, Tribe, and title

Check-in question:

What, if anything, does your program do to strengthen relationships between parents or engage fathers?



KEY FEATURES OF ZOOM: REMINDERS



Use chat to ask questions



Stay muted during presentation



Use 'Raise Hand' before coming off mute



Land Acknowledgement

AGENDA



Welcome and overview of session (5 min)

Overview of Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) and Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programming (5 min)

Approaches and considerations for integrating HMRF and Tribal TANF (10 min)

Breakout groups + discussion (30 min)

Indigenous HMRF Toolkit preview (5 min)

Closeout

MOTIVATION FOR THIS SERIES



- ✓ Provide information and peer sharing to help programs advance the statutory purposes of TANF in ways that address your unique community needs and comply with program regulations
- ✓ Increase awareness of approaches that other programs have used to strengthen families and support economic independence
- ✓ Offer space to share your approaches, challenges, and questions with each other



What Are Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education and Responsible Fatherhood Programs?



HEALTHY MARRIAGE AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

- HMRE programs serve couples and individuals, regardless of relationship status as well as young adults
- Multiple components:
 - Communication
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Stress Management
 - Financial Management
 - Emotional Regulation
 - Relationship Expectations



RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMMING



- Father-focused programs serve fathers and father figures. They may live with the children they care for, or they may not.
- Three components:
 - Parenting education
 - Healthy relationship education
 - Increasing fathers' economic stability

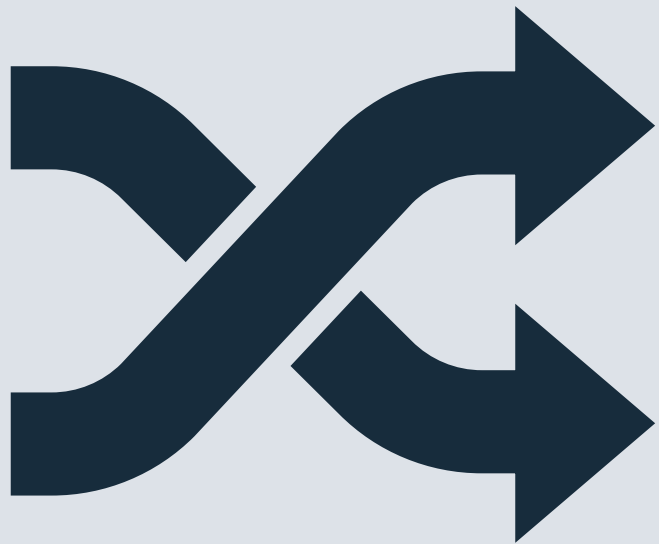


HOW DOES HMRF RELATE TO TANF?



- HMRF programs include services to support workforce training, job placement, and financial management (Purpose 2)
- HMRF programs can improve relationship quality, as well as parenting and coparenting skills, which can contribute to greater family stability and better outcomes for children (Purpose 1 and 4)





Integrating Tribal TANF and HMRF



APPROACH #1:



STRENGTHENING FAMILY STABILITY AND WELL-BEING

Motivation/Need:

Families may face relationship stress, co-parenting challenges, conflict, or social isolation that affect household stability and child well-being

Approach

Integrate healthy relationship and family-strengthening services into existing TANF case management, family support, and prevention activities.

Resources

- Lessons learned integrating HM&RF programs with economic stability services
- Using active listening to improve TANF participant outcomes

Potential Activities

- Healthy relationship education
- Communication and conflict resolution skills
- Stress management and emotional regulation
- Family goal-setting and planning



APPROACH #2:



STRENGTHENING FATHER ENGAGEMENT AND CO-PARENTING

Motivation/Need:

Fathers and father figures may face barriers to involvement with their children or may need support navigating parenting and co-parenting relationships

Approach

Expand TANF family services to include fatherhood programming that strengthens parenting skills, co-parenting relationships, and economic stability.

Resource

- Enhancing your program with [RF content](#)

Potential Activities

- Fatherhood support groups
- Parenting education and child development training
- Co-parenting and communication workshops
- Mentorship opportunities with Tribal fathers and Elders
- Employment and workforce readiness services.
Resource for embedding job and career services



APPROACH #3:



SUPPORTING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AMONG YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Motivation/Need:

Young adults may benefit from skills and support that prepare them for healthy relationships, future parenting roles, and long-term family stability

Approach

Provide preventive and educational services that help youth and young adults develop relationship, life, and economic skills before becoming parents.

Resources

- Grounding program design in evidence
- Working with unmarried couples

Potential Activities

- Healthy relationship education
 - Communication and conflict management training
 - Financial literacy and budgeting
 - Goal-setting and decision-making workshops
 - Youth leadership and mentoring programs
- leadership and mentoring programs



APPROACH #4:



CULTURALLY GROUNDED FAMILY AND COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

Motivation/Need:

Families may seek opportunities to reconnect with cultural traditions, strengthen intergenerational relationships, and reinforce community support

Approach

Use HMRF resources to expand culturally grounded family-strengthening activities that reinforce Tribal values and traditional approaches to family wellness.

Resources

- Culturally adapting HM&RF programming
- Stress-testing program design

Potential Activities

- Elder-led family gatherings and workshops
- Traditional parenting and caregiving teachings
- Family cultural camps and events
- Cultural activities that promote family connection and healing





Breakout Groups



BREAKOUT DISCUSSIONS



- What is your program's motivation for building out services to support healthy marriages, relationships, and engaged fathers?
- What are your program's current supports for healthy relationships and marriages? For father engagement?
- What other HMRF-related services might benefit your TANF participants and their families? Why those?
 - What has been challenging about building out HMRF-related services?
- What are important considerations for your community to ensure HMRF programming is relevant to your culture?

Resources

- [Considering costs in planning HMRE and RF programs](#)
- [Using data for program improvement](#)
- [Continuous Quality Improvement](#)
- [Strong staffing and partnership guidance](#)

REMINDER OF APPROACHES



- **Strengthening Family Stability and Well-Being**
- **Strengthening Father Engagement and Co-Parenting**
- **Supporting Healthy Relationships Among Youth and Young Adults**
- **Culturally Grounded Family and Community Strengthening**

Which of the four approaches seem most relevant or feasible for your Tribal TANF program to integrate?

DIFFERENT METHODS OF INTEGRATION



Fund HMRF services with Tribal TANF resources



Apply for HMRF grants



Partner with existing HMRF programs



Integrate HMRF concepts into existing services

HOW COULD YOU PROVIDE THOSE SERVICES?



- Does your program already provide services or resources to engage fathers or promote healthy marriage?
- What opportunities do you see for doing one or more of the four approaches for integrating HM&RF programming to your Tribal TANF program?



IHMRF Toolkit

Preview



A TOOLKIT FOR PROGRAM DIRECTORS,
STAFF & PRACTITIONERS

Strengthening Families
with Lessons Learned from
Tribal-Serving Healthy
Marriage and Responsible
Fatherhood Programs

IHMRF Toolkit *Preview* #1

48 HMRF TOOLKIT

Promising practice: Balance Compliance, Sustainability, Performance Management, and Research

Programs operating in Native and rural contexts must navigate complex funding, reporting, and evaluation requirements while maintaining cultural responsiveness and community trust. Successful programs take a strategic and coordinated approach to managing grants, data, and partnerships to support long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Tips for implementation

Tip #1: Take a strategic approach to grant-seeking

What does this look like? When identifying new grant opportunities, it is important to consider how new workstreams or requirements will expand or diversify what you offer in a way that complements current services or might sustain momentum around current workstreams when those grants end. Balance new funding opportunities with organizational capacity, including staffing and infrastructure. Coordinate early with Tribal governments and partner organizations to avoid competing for the same resources and to ensure alignment with community priorities. Combining multiple funding streams can provide the flexibility needed to adapt programming and offer participation supports such as transportation, food, or childcare. Diversifying funding sources—for instance, across federal, state, and private—with varying cycles and lengths can also strengthen the consistency of funding availability over time.

What we heard from program administrators

Program administrators shared advice to focus on your program's overarching goals and capacity to ensure new grant work is aligned, noting that "Everyone is very grant-focused, but need to be more program-focused." They shared that this focus sometimes leads to hard choices about strategically not pursuing certain opportunities if your team is already operating at maximum capacity.



36 HMRF TOOLKIT

Tip #2: Be physically present

What does this look like? Expand engagement beyond the professional setting. This could range from attending community events, or participating in cultural gatherings or celebrations (when appropriate and invited). This could also mean dedicating time outside of or during meetings just to "visit"—to learn about new connections as individuals, without a formal agenda. Also, make the effort to visit the community or entity in person, rather than expecting them to always come to your office for meetings, or to conduct all activities virtually. This signals your commitment to building and sustaining a long-term working relationship.

There are many resources available online that share guidance on how to attend events like powwows, including region, Tribe, or powwow-specific guidance (for example, this [visitor's guide](#)). However, many events provide guidance for appropriate behavior ahead of time.

What we heard from HMRF program administrators

"Challenges in the workforce are 10 times worse at the Tribe, so go to their meetings rather than asking them to travel to yours."

Tip #3: Be consistent and accountable

What does this look like? Building a trusting relationship requires more than a single meeting but takes time and consistency.¹⁸ Discuss a regular meeting cadence that makes sense for your program and the Native community or entity to ensure that you maintain the momentum, even if there are no obvious grant opportunities. As an outsider to the community, you may also make mistakes. If this happens, take responsibility and make meaningful amends.

30 Christopher et al., 2008; Mohatt & Dickson, 2006

14 HMRF TOOLKIT

There is a need for Native-focused HMRF programs that help couples, fathers, and youth

- ▶ **Tribal couples** often face challenges in forming and sustaining stable relationships, including lower rates of marriage, higher relationship instability, and elevated rates of intimate partner violence, often compounded by economic stress and psychological strain.¹⁹ These challenges are further shaped by trauma that disrupts family systems and by tensions between Native relationship norms and Western models of marriage and family.²⁰
- ▶ **Tribal fathers** may experience multiple, overlapping challenges, including high rates of poverty and unemployment, as well as disproportionate exposure to substance use and incarceration.²¹ These challenges are compounded by trauma that can disrupt traditional parenting roles and kinship systems, alongside limited access to culturally relevant fatherhood programs and services.²¹ Fathers also face difficulties navigating co-parenting relationships and complex legal systems, which can affect their ability to remain engaged with their families.²²
- ▶ **Tribal youth** often face elevated rates of dating violence and multiple forms of violence exposure, which are linked to mental health challenges, substance use, and experiences of discrimination that can disrupt healthy relationship development.²³ These challenges are compounded by gaps in culturally relevant programs, the disruption of traditional systems for learning about relationships, and tensions between dating relationships and cultural identity, which together shape how youth form and maintain healthy relationships.²⁴



18 Collett et al., 2016; Limb & Shafer, 2019; Rosay, 2016
19 Avey et al., 2024
20 Neault et al., 2012; Perry, 2004; Richards et al., 2022; Sarche & Spicer, 2008
21 VanEvery et al., 2025
22 Wilson et al., 2022
23 Brockie et al., 2018; Edwards et al., 2021; Hautala et al., 2017; CDC, n.d.
24 Rushing et al., 2024; Schultz et al., 2020

IHMRF Toolkit *Preview #2*

12 HMRF TOOLKIT



Adults 18+

HEART

Helping Every Area of Relationships Thrive

Who can be served

- Adults over the age of 18
- Couples or individuals
- Married or unmarried

Optional Activities



Job & Career Advancement

Job readiness, training, and career development services to improve employment prospects and economic stability, delivered alongside relationship education.



Financial Wellness Development

Activities building financial knowledge and skills, such as budgeting and financial planning, to strengthen economic stability within relationships.

Required Activities



Marriage & Relationship Education (MRES)

Education on communication, relationship skills, and healthy marriage practices to help individuals and couples build and sustain healthy relationships.



Premarital Education

Education for individuals or couples prior to marriage focusing on expectations, communication, and relationship skills.



Marriage Enhancement

Activities that strengthen existing marriages and improve relationship functioning over time.



Divorce Reduction

Activities that address relationship challenges to reduce the likelihood of divorce and support relationship stability.



Marriage Mentoring

Mentoring by married couples or individuals offering guidance, modeling, and peer-based support for healthy relationships.



Public Advertising Campaigns

Campaigns promoting the value of marriage and healthy relationship skills to increase awareness and encourage participation in services.



Reducing Disincentives to Marriage

Activities that address economic or systemic barriers that may discourage individuals from forming or maintaining marriages.

10 HMRF TOOLKIT

HMRF populations and authorized activities

ACF funds three HMRF grant programs:

1. Relationships, Education, Advancement, and Development for Youth for Life (READY4Life): A grant program designed to serve youth through three authorized activities.
2. Helping Every Area of Relationships Thrive – Adults (HEART): A grant program designed to serve adult couples and individuals through seven authorized activities.
3. Family, Opportunity, Resilience, Grit, Engagement – Fatherhood (FORGE Fatherhood): A grant program designed to serve fathers through three authorized activities.

Grantees in 2025–2030 cohort by grant program

Administered by ACF Office of Family Assistance
Project period: September 2025 – September 2030

109 Total grantees nationwide
across 38 state | 2025–2030 cohort



READY4Life

Relationships, Education, Advancement, and Development for Youth for Life

27
grantees



HEART

Helping Every Area of Relationships Thrive – Adults

50
grantees



FORGE Fatherhood

Family, Opportunities, Resilience, Grit, Engagement – Fatherhood

27
grantees



Use the following infographics to explore who each grant program can serve and associated authorized and optional activities.

38 HMRF TOOLKIT

Tips for implementation

Tip #1: Do your research first

What does this look like? Programs should rely on available sources of information first to understand Native context and history. However, keep in mind the source of the information you are reading, and how sources from outsiders might influence the information or perspective shared. Many Tribal Nations have information available online that highlights their history and culture. For example, one program in our case studies serves the Navajo Nation, who has a [website](#) which provides an overview of their history, governance, and events.

Tip #2: Ask the community for recommended resources

What does this look like? After doing some research on your own, a simple ask to a trusted community member within your network can provide you with additional resources and knowledge for understanding a community. Asking your contacts for resources they think capture historical or contemporary events is important for understanding the current community and its values or challenges. In addition to written sources like webpages or books, they might recommend speaking with respected leaders in the community, including Elders. Ask your contacts about best practices when engaging with these leaders to ensure you know and can follow any appropriate protocols.



NEXT STEPS



Final session — August (Date TBD)

Strengthening Economic
Independence through
Employment Services

Companion Product and Recording

These will be made available on the
*Programming to Build Strong
Families and Promote Economic
Independence series* webpage!

Contact & Resources

Email: STARinfo@blhtech.com

STAR Website: peerta.acf.hhs.gov

- Thousands of resources for TANF programs!

***Programming to Build Strong Families and Promote Economic Independence Webinar Series* webpage:** Coming soon!

- Recordings, slides, and products from this series

State & Tribal TANF Resource Repository:

peerta.acf.hhs.gov/repository

- A central place to share your program materials with other practitioners

Need 1:1 technical assistance or support?

- Request it here: peerta.acf.hhs.gov/form/request-technical-assistance

IHMRF TOOLKIT RESOURCES



- **Brief:** Cost considerations for planning HMRE Programs
- **Brief:** Strengthening the Implementation and Evaluation of HMRE Programs for Youth: Considerations from Four Recent Impact Studies
- **Brief:** Using Data to Guide Improvement in HMRE Services
- **Brief:** Strong staffing and partnership approaches in HMRF Programs
- **Brief:** Integrating HMRE with Economic Stability Services: Findings from Two Programs
- **Podcast:** How Responsible Fatherhood Programs Can Support the Goals of TANF
- **Video:** Using Active Listening to Build Stronger Two-Parent Households and Improve TANF Participant Outcomes
- **Brief:** Tools for Building Evidence for Responsible Fatherhood Programs
- **Video:** Strengthening Families through Father Engagement in TANF: Part 2 - What Father-Focused Programs Do to Engage and Serve Dads
- **Study:** Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation
- **Brief:** Improving HMRE Programs for Unmarried Couples with Children
- **Brief:** Strategies to Support Healthy Relationships for American Indian and Alaska Native Fathers

RELEVANT STAR RESOURCES



- **Video series:** HMRE techniques to Build Stronger Two-Parent Households and Improve TANF Participant Outcomes
 - Using Active Listening
 - Using Relationship Agreements
 - Using Speaker-Listener Technique
- **Video series:** Strengthening Families through Father Engagement in TANF
 - Part 1: Why Fathers Matter
 - Part 2: What Father-Focused Programs Do
 - Part 3: How to Find and Connect with Father-Focused Programs
- **Brief:** Family Financial Planning: Strategies for TANF Programs to Support Intentional and Healthy Family Planning
- **Brief:** Family-based Services: Strategies for TANF Programs to Support Intentional and Healthy Family Planning