

Structuring Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Workshops for Strong Attendance: Workshop Characteristics Associated with Client Participation

White Paper for the Fatherhood, Relationships, and Marriage – Illuminating the Next Generation of Research (FRAMING Research) Project



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Overview

Healthy marriage (HM) and responsible fatherhood (RF; together, HMRF) workshops funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) typically last from a few days to a few months, which can make sustained client attendance challenging. Practitioners must decide how to structure the workshops, such as whether sessions are held during the week or on weekends, during the day or in the evenings. Knowing whether and how such characteristics are linked to client attendance can inform practitioners' decisions.

This white paper examined how workshop characteristics were associated with client attendance. It used the performance data that grantees reported to ACF for workshop series that began between June 2017 and December 2019 and ended from January 2018 to December 2019. The analysis included 48 grantees with workshop series that served any of three populations: HM adult couples, HM adult individuals, and RF community individuals. Because the characteristics associated with attendance could differ by population, we analyzed results for the three populations separately.

We analyzed series attendance in two ways: (1) average hours of attendance; and (2) percentage of clients who attended at least 75 percent of intended workshop series hours (that is, "share of regular attenders"). We used two different types of statistical models for each outcome. One model estimated differences within and across grantees. The other model focused only on grantees that had workshop series with different characteristics, such as grantees that increased the frequency of series to improve attendance or for other reasons.

Generally, across populations examined here, making sessions longer and more frequent was associated with greater attendance. In several cases, the longest and most frequent sessions measured—that is, more than four hours or daily—had the most consistent associations with average hours of attendance and the share of regular attenders. However, there are a few caveats to these findings. Grantees did not offer many of the very long or frequent sessions, so these results were driven by a small share of workshop series. In addition, we did not examine changes in clients' outcomes. Even if offering content in long, frequent sessions led to greater attendance, learning new skills can take time and practice, which might be more difficult in a compressed schedule.

Although workshop characteristics were associated with client attendance, they were not the full story. Many workshop characteristics—such as the time of day or season a workshop series was offered—did not show a pattern of statistically significant relationships with attendance. In addition, the workshop characteristics did not account for all the differences in attendance. So other factors—such as grantee characteristics that changed over time—also played a role in attendance.

I. Introduction

To support family and child well-being, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood (HMRF) programs are designed to help clients improve their relationships, parenting, and economic stability. Since 2005, the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has provided discretionary grants to state, local, and tribal agencies to deliver HMRF programming for a range of populations. The centerpiece of most HMRF programs are group workshops, typically lasting a few days to a few months. Trained facilitators lead the workshops, delivering content—which is often curriculum-based education—and supporting clients (Avellar et al. 2020).

For the services to have their intended effect, clients must have substantial exposure to them (Nation et al. 2003). But low attendance is a common challenge in voluntary, family-based programs (Eisner and Meidert 2011; Fabiano 2007; Nock and Photos 2006). Workshop characteristics—such as whether sessions are held during the week or on weekends, during the day or in the evenings— could potentially boost or reduce client participation. Although some workshop characteristics are driven by the curriculum and the characteristics by the populations being served, other decisions are less clear. Variations in workshop characteristics are well documented (Avellar et al. 2011, 2012, 2020; Bir et al. 2012; Miller Gaubert et al. 2012; Pearson et al. 2018), but there is limited information on how characteristics are linked with attendance (Alamillo and Zaveri 2018; Dion et al. 2010). For practitioners who must decide when and how to offer a workshop, learning from the experiences of other programs can be helpful.

This paper examined the association between client attendance and workshop characteristics across numerous grantees and workshops in the 2015 cohort of HMRF grantees. This paper used data over two years from a subset of grantees that provided workshops to adults enrolled in healthy marriage and relationship education (HM) and responsible fatherhood (RF) programs. We briefly describe the background of the programs, our methods, the results, and conclusions. Appendices include details on the analytic approach and findings.

II. Background

Since 2005, Congress has funded \$150 million each year in HMRF grants to support the long-term success of children and families. OFA has overseen three cohorts of these grants (2006–2011, 2011–2015, and 2015–2020) (ACF, n.d.[a]) and recently awarded a fourth cohort (2020–2025) (ACF, n.d.[b]). HM grantees promote healthy marriage and relationships through eight legislatively authorized activities, such as premarital education, marriage and relationship education, and divorce reduction (ACF 2015a). RF grantees’ legislatively authorized activities promote responsible parenting, healthy marriage, and economic stability (ACF 2015b). OFA works with ACF’s Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation to conduct research on how to best serve families through these grants.

The 2015 cohort included 85 grantees that operated through 2020: 45 offering HM services and 40 offering RF services.¹ In addition to group workshops—which were grantees’ primary service—ACF required grantees to offer case management (unless they received an exemption from ACF).

In this paper, we focused on three client populations that grantees served:²

- **HM adult couples:** Adults who enrolled in an HM program with their romantic partner. The program served both partners.
- **HM adult individuals:** Adults who enrolled in an HM program without a partner, regardless of whether they were in a romantic relationship.
- **RF community individuals:** Adults who enrolled in an RF program offered in the community.

See Boxes 1 and 2 for snapshots of these clients served by the grantees in HM and RF, respectively.

Box 1. Snapshot of HM adult couples and individuals served by the 2015 cohort of grantees

About half of HM adult clients were younger than 35 and they were racially and ethnically diverse. Women made up 51 percent of the clients in adult couples and 60 percent of adult individuals. Most HM couples were married or had a steady romantic partner; in contrast, almost half of adult individual clients were single. HM adult individuals and clients in couples most commonly enrolled to learn how to improve their personal relationships.

In HM programs, almost all enrolled adult individual clients (94 percent) and more than half of clients in adult couples (52 percent) participated in at least one workshop or case management meeting. Among HM clients who participated in at least one workshop session, attendance ranged from 12 hours for adult individuals to 15 hours for adult couples.

Source: Avellar et al. (2020).

Box 2. Snapshot of RF community individuals served by the 2015 cohort of grantees

RF clients were typically male and racially and ethnically diverse. (Women who met the eligibility requirements could also participate in services. They made up 14 percent of the community individual clients.) About half were younger than 35. Most clients were in a romantic relationship when they enrolled in the program. For RF clients, the top reason for enrolling was to learn how to be a better parent.

Most community RF clients (88 percent) participated in case management or workshop services. Among clients who participated in any workshop, community fathers typically attended 26 hours of workshops.

Source: Avellar et al. (2020).

¹ Initially OFA awarded 90 grants (46 HM and 44 RF), but discontinued one HM and four RF grants.

² It was beyond the scope of this paper to include the three other populations that grantees could serve: HM youth (ages 13 to 13), RF community couples (adults who enrolled in an RF program with another individual), and RF reentering individuals (adults who were incarcerated and within three to nine months of release or were recently released).

III. Data and Methods

A. Performance data and sample

ACF required the 2015 grantee cohort to collect consistent, standardized performance data. The data helped ACF monitor grantees' progress and learn more about their work and the people they serve. It included characteristics and outcomes of clients, services provided, and program operations (Avellar et al. 2020).

This paper used the performance data that grantees reported on workshop services. The group workshops have multiple components, such as the curriculum, which can be offered many times within and across grantees, to individual sessions or classes held on a particular date and time (see Box 3). We analyzed data at the series level; that is, we looked at client attendance and workshop characteristics for each complete set of individual sessions, each time it was offered.

We included grantees with workshop series that served any of three populations: HM adult couples, HM adult individuals, and RF community individuals. Because the factors associated with attendance could differ by population, we analyzed results for the three populations separately. It was beyond the scope of this paper to analyze data for three other populations served by grantees: youth in HM programs, RF couples, and reentering fathers.

To focus the analysis, we restricted the sample in additional ways. First, the analysis included workshop series that began between June 2017 and December 2019 and ended from January 2018 to December 2019. The series had to end in this time frame so we could capture total attendance. This period covered two years of operations during grantees' third and fourth grant years. We focused on the middle years of the grants because even new grantees then had some experience serving clients, and services were likely relatively stable. Second, we excluded about one-third of grantees that had substantial issues with their workshop data entry because of concerns that inaccurate data would distort the results (see Appendix A for more details). These and other, more minor, inclusion and exclusion criteria are described in Appendix A. The resulting sample, which included 48 of 87 grantees, is summarized in Table 1. The 48 grantees included in the analytic sample offered workshops located in 22 states and Guam³ and were roughly evenly split between HM and RF grantees. They experienced implementation challenges and staff turnover at similar rates to grantees not included in the analysis (see Appendix A, Table A.1).

Box 3. Definitions of workshop components

Workshop: The umbrella term for the curriculum or group service being provided, such as *Within My Reach* or *24/7 Dad*[®].

Series: The individual offerings of the workshop, such as nine weeks of *Within My Reach* offered every Thursday.

Sessions: The individual classes or occurrences in a series. In the example above, the Thursday series would have nine individual sessions.

³ Grantees in the sample were located in the following states (number of grantees in parentheses): AL (1), CA (7), FL (5), GA (1), GU (1), IA (1), IL (2), IN (1), KY (2), MA (1), MD (1), MO (3), NC (1), NY (5), OH (2), OK (1), PA (3), SC (2), SD (1), TX (4), VA (1), WI (1), WV (1)

Table 1. Sample sizes

Sample units	Sample size by client population		
	HM adult couples	HM adult individuals	RF community individuals
Grantees	17	22	21
Workshop series	748	2,310	1,341
Clients	8,618	15,470	7,279

Note: Grantees may appear in more than one column if they serve multiple populations. However, series can only appear in one column. For HM, clients could appear in both HM analyses, specifically, if an adult individual attended a workshop for couples and a workshop for individuals or vice versa. HM youth were excluded from analyses even if they attended a workshop for adults. RF community individual clients only appear in that column.

B. Statistical approach

We examined how series attendance related to characteristics of the series. Series characteristics included whether the series was held during the week or on weekends and in what season; the frequency, time of day and duration of sessions; total hours; the activities and elements included; if the series was led by just one or multiple facilitators; and whether the grantee or a partner organization led the series (see Table 2 and Appendix A for more information).

We measured series attendance in two ways:

- **Average hours of attendance.** Mean hours of attendance across clients to reflect the number of hours of workshop services that clients commonly attended.
- **Share of regular attenders.** Percentage of clients who attended at least 75 percent of intended workshop series hours to reflect whether the participant received a large percentage of the intended workshop hours, which is one aspect of fidelity to the workshop model.

Grantees’ intended workshop hours could differ substantially (from 1 to 72 hours in the samples used in this paper), so the two outcomes provide complementary information. For example, a client in a 20-hour series can receive twice as many hours as a client in a 10-hour series, so stakeholders might be interested in both the total number of hours as well as percentage of total intended hours received. Both outcomes are restricted to clients who either registered for a series (regardless of whether they ever attended) or who attended at least one session in a series for which registration was not required. Consistent with ACF’s performance measures for workshop attendance, we measured joint attendance for couples, only counting attendance if both members of the couple attended the same workshop session.

We used two different types of statistical models for each outcome. One model estimated differences within and across grantees. The other model focused only on grantees that had workshop series with different characteristics, such as grantees that increased the frequency of series to improve attendance or for other reasons.

Each approach has strengths and weaknesses (see Appendix A), so we present results for patterns of relationships between workshop and attendance (full results are in Appendix B). Because we can be most confident when we see a pattern of results, we focused on workshop characteristics that had a statistically

significant relationship with both participation outcomes, using both types of models. Statistical significance indicates that a characteristic appears linked with attendance beyond random fluctuations.

C. Limitations

Although the approach is useful for examining whether and how workshop characteristics are associated with attendance, there are several limitations. First, linkages between workshop characteristics and attendance outcomes were descriptive and do not indicate causal relationships. Second, the results were limited to a particular point in time—two years in about the middle of the grant period—which might not reflect workshop characteristics and attendance later in the grant. In addition, the relationships between workshop characteristics and attendance could differ in other time periods. Third, if we had used another cutoff for regular attenders (such as more or less than 75 percent of intended workshop series hours), the results could differ. Fourth, as described above, the samples only included grantees with better data quality. If higher performing grantees provided better data, then the results do not apply to lower performing grantees. Finally, we did not examine changes in clients' outcomes, so we cannot say whether workshop factors were related to attitudinal or behavioral changes.

IV. Workshop Series and Attendance Characteristics

Total hours offered in grantees' workshop series varied, ranging from 1 to 72 hours of intended series.⁴ Most series for HM adult couples (56 percent) were 10 to 19 hours, whereas most series for HM adult individuals (57 percent) were 9 hours or less (Table 2). The majority of series for RF clients were 20 to 29 hours. Across the three populations, sessions (that is, individual classes) were likely to be 1 to 2 hours, occurring weekly. Grantees typically led the series, rather than their partners. For HM couples, most series were led by multiple facilitators (such as a male and female pair), but for the other populations, most series were led by a single facilitator. Average hours of attendance were 9 hours for HM adult couple series, 8 for HM adult individual series, and 11 hours for RF series. On average, 64 percent of clients in HM couple series, 57 percent of clients in HM individual series, and 37 percent of clients in RF community individual series attended at least 75 percent of the intended hours.

Table 2. Workshop series characteristics and attendance outcomes

Characteristics and outcomes	HM adult couples (percent unless otherwise specified)	HM adult individuals (percent unless otherwise specified)	RF community individuals (percent unless otherwise specified)
Workshop characteristics			
Total workshop hours			
0 – 9	32	57	22
10 – 19	56	37	9
20 or more (HM only)	13	6	—
20 – 29 (RF only)	—	—	53
30 or more (RF only)	—	—	17
Workshop activities and elements			
Includes job and career advancement (HM only)	15.2	21	—
Includes parenting (HM only)	47	35	—
Parenting only (RF only)	—	—	22
Economic stability only (RF only)	—	—	29
Intimate partner relationships only (RF only)	—	—	8
Integrated (includes more than one activity; RF only)	—	—	42
Day of the week			
Weekend sessions only	19	8	3
Weekday sessions only	59	78	97
Weekend and weekday sessions	22	14	1

⁴ One-hour workshops were not common. No HM couple or RF individual workshops lasted just one hour, and only a small share (less than one percent) of HM individual series had an intended total duration of just one hour. These workshops were offered by a single grantee.

Structuring HMRF Workshops for Strong Attendance

Characteristics and outcomes	HM adult couples (percent unless otherwise specified)	HM adult individuals (percent unless otherwise specified)	RF community individuals (percent unless otherwise specified)
Time of day of sessions			
Morning	42	50	45
Afternoon	15	28	35
Evening	43	22	20
Season delivered			
January–March	26	26	27
April and May	28	27	24
June–August	26	23	27
September–December	21	24	21
Led by multiple facilitators	65	31	30
Maximum number of clients			
No limit	71	80	75
12 or fewer	9	3	15
13 – 20	6	13	6
20 or more	14	4	4
Led by partner organization (rather than grantee)	17	24	25
Duration of sessions			
1 hour or less	1	8	7
More than 1 hour to 2 hours	61	49	63
More than 2 hours to 4 hours	32	40	27
More than 4 hours	6	4	4
Frequency of sessions			
Daily	19	14	9
Weekly	75	67	53
Other	6	19	38
Attendance outcomes			
Average hours of attendance (mean across series)	9	8	11
Share of regular attenders (mean across series)	64	57	37
Number of series	748	2,310	1,341

Source: nFORM (Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management) data system used by the 2015 cohort of HMRF grantees; January 2018 to December 2019.

Note: Percentages for HM workshop activities and elements do not add up to 100 because not all series included job and career advancement and parenting. Percentages for other constructs may not add to 100 because of rounding.

V. Key Findings

We begin with findings that apply to all three populations and then describe key population-specific findings. The statistical approach we used looks at how various workshop characteristics were related to the likelihood the clients attended workshops regularly assuming there was no change in the other workshop characteristics we included in our analysis (shown in Table 2). For example, when we describe the results for the length of sessions or classes (such as two or four hours), the total series hours remained the same. Using this approach, we are able to examine each characteristic separate from other influences. This approach is similar to the circumstance in which a practitioner has a series of set length (such as 24 hours) and must decide how long each individual session should be. Full results are in Appendix B.

A. Workshop characteristics matter but are not the full story

Attendance was related to workshop and grantee characteristics included in the analysis, as well as other factors not included in the analyses. The statistical approach estimates how well the structural workshop and stable grantee characteristics predict attendance. For example, if the model perfectly predicted attendance, we could describe a grantee's attendance just by knowing about their other characteristics. Across grantees, the workshop and grantee characteristics explained about 43 to 82 percent of the hours of attendance and 14 to 58 percent of the share of regular attenders.⁵ In other words, about 20 to 60 percent of differences in hours of attendance across workshop series across grantees could not be explained by the workshop or grantee characteristics included in our analysis. Similarly, but more starkly, about 40 to 85 percent of differences in the share of regular attenders were not related to the included variables. In sum, the characteristics better predicted average hours of attendance than whether clients attended most hours, but some differences could not explained. This suggests that other factors (such as conflicts with clients' family and work responsibilities) played a large role in attendance, more so for the percentage of regular attenders than for average hours of attendance.

B. One structure might not suit all programs or participants

Across the analyses, many workshop characteristics—such as the time of day or season a workshop series was offered—did not show a pattern of statistically significant relationships with attendance (Appendix B). This may indicate that these characteristics were not associated with attendance, but it could also mean that the association with attendance differed based on client characteristics, such as their work responsibilities. Grantees likely tailored the workshop series characteristics to their clients' needs. For example, a grantee that served employed clients might have the best attendance at weekend sessions, whereas one that served unemployed clients might best offer weekday sessions. Because of differences in the best fit, a workshop characteristic might not show up as better than the other for increasing attendance in our analyses that include different types of clients.

⁵ These estimates are expressed as proportions (0 to 1) in the row labeled "R-squared" at the end of each table in Appendix B.

C. For HM workshops with couples, having sessions that lasted more than four hours or met daily predicted greater attendance

Two workshop variables were consistently associated with attendance for couples in HM programs. We describe the patterns below.



Longer sessions. Offering sessions that lasted more than four hours was associated with better attendance. For example, when grantees offered sessions that lasted for more than four hours instead of two hours, the share of regular attenders was about 30 percentage points higher. Although this was a consistent pattern, the results were mostly explained by a small share of the sample. Only 6 percent of workshop series in the analysis had sessions that lasted more than four hours.⁶



Daily sessions. Offering a series every day instead of once a week was associated with more hours of attendance. For example, when grantees offered daily instead of weekly sessions, the share of regular attenders was about 20 percentage points higher.

Three other characteristics were associated with higher attendance in some cases but did not show patterns as consistent as those described above.

- **Total series hours.** Increasing the total intended hours was associated with increased average hours of attendance but had inconsistent relationships with the share of regular attenders. For example, compared to series that lasted 9 hours or less, series that were 20 or more hours were associated with 8 more average hours of attendance. However, offering longer series was not associated with greater regular attendance, and in some instances, was associated with lower regular attendance.
- **Limited registration.** Grantees can either have unlimited registration (that is, no limits on the number of clients who can attend) or restrict the number of clients allowed to attend a series. Limiting the number of clients who could enroll was associated with higher attendance (both average hours and share of regular attenders). The groups did not have to be very small; for example, even restricting registration to 20 clients (or more) showed a favorable association. Putting some cap on registration might be helpful.
- **Multiple facilitators.** For grantees that offered sessions led by multiple facilitators (rather than one facilitator), the share of regular attenders was 9 percentage points higher than their sessions led by one facilitator. However, the number of facilitators was not associated with a change in average hours of attendance.

⁶ Four grantees serving HM couples offered series with sessions that lasted more than four hours.

D. For HM workshops with individuals, attendance was best when workshops were 10 to 19 hours in total, held for at least two-hour sessions, offered more than once a week, or provided by partner organizations

Four workshop variables were consistently associated with attendance for individuals in HM programs. We describe the patterns below.



Higher total series hours. Series that were 10 to 19 hours tended to have higher attendance. For example, compared to series that were 9 hours or less, series that were 10 to 19 hours had 2 to 3 more hours of average attendance and a 17 percentage point higher share of regular attenders. Longer series (that is, 20 or more hours) did not show consistent differences in attendance compared to shorter series.



Longer sessions. Offering series in sessions that lasted at least two hours was associated with better attendance, including higher average hours of attendance and higher shares of regular attenders. For example, as with HM couples, sessions that lasted more than four hours tended to have higher attendance. Indeed, compared to two-hour sessions, those that were more than four hours were associated with an increase of more than 25 percentage points in the share of regular attenders. However, as with HM couples, these results were mostly explained by a small share of series: only about 4 percent of series had sessions that were more than four hours.



More than once a week. Offering sessions more than once a week was associated with greater attendance. For example, across all grantees, clients in series that met daily attended about five more hours on average than in series that met weekly. Among grantees that offered daily and weekly sessions, average attendance was more than three hours longer in the series with daily sessions.



Partner provided. Series led by partners, rather than grantee staff, had better attendance. For example, the share of regular attenders was about 7 to 11 percentage points higher in series led by partners than those led by grantees. Grantees might have partners lead the series if their own staff do not have the capacity, training, or experience to facilitate.

Three other characteristics were associated with higher attendance in some cases but did not show patterns as consistent as those described above.

- **Including job and career advancement.** Some grantees offered services to help clients with employment, such as help with resumes, job searches, or job skills. Including job and career advancement services was associated with about an hour more of average attendance and a share of regular attenders that was about 11 percentage points higher than series without these components.
- **Weekend only.** Compared to series offered on weekdays, the share of regular attenders was about 11 percentage points higher in series that only met on weekends. However, there was no consistent relationship with average hours of attendance.
- **Series late in the year.** Series held September through December tended to have a higher share of regular attenders than series held earlier in the year. However, there was no consistent association with average hours of attendance.

E. For RF workshops for community individuals, attendance was higher if clients were engaged in sessions that lasted at least two hours or met multiple times a week

Two workshop variables were consistently associated with attendance for community individuals in RF programs. We describe the patterns below.



Longer sessions. Offering series in sessions that lasted more than two hours was associated with better attendance. For example, when grantees offered sessions that lasted more than two to four hours, average attendance was about 2.5 hours longer compared to their two-hour sessions, and the share of clients who were regular attenders was about 12 percentage points higher.



More than once a week. Offering sessions more than once a week was associated with greater attendance. For example, when grantees offered daily sessions, average hours of attendance increased by more than two hours compared to their weekly series, and the share of clients who were regular attenders was nearly 25 percentage points higher.

We also found some evidence that series with higher total hours had higher average hours of attendance, but this pattern was less consistent than those described above. Increasing series hours was typically associated with greater hours of attendance, on average. For example, increasing from 9 or fewer total workshop hours to more than 30 hours was linked to an 11-hour increase in average hours of attendance. However, this change was also associated with a 15 percentage point *decrease* in the share of regular attenders. That is, clients attending series with greater hours might get more hours on average (compared to those attending shorter series) but could be less likely to be regular attenders.

VI. Conclusions

Grantees typically want to engage clients in workshops over days, weeks, or months so the clients receive and potentially benefit from the intended content. Many decisions about how to structure workshops are driven by the curriculum (such as number of required hours) and meeting the needs of the population served. However, for other decisions, there is not always a clear approach that is best. This paper explored aspects of workshop characteristics to identify any patterns associated with greater attendance.

Generally, across populations, making sessions longer and more frequent was associated with greater attendance. In several cases, the longest and most frequent sessions measured here—that is, more than four hours or daily—had the most consistent associations with average hours of attendance and the share of regular attenders. In some ways, these results are not surprising. For example, a 4-hour session is 20 percent of a 20-hour workshop series, so attending once would be a substantial boost to average hours and progress toward completing intended hours. These findings also tell us about how the length of the workshop is associated with attendance.⁷ Generally, shorter programs—with longer sessions, more sessions per week, or both—have higher attendance than longer programs with shorter sessions, fewer sessions per week (or both).

However, there are a few caveats to these findings. Because the analysis was not causal, we cannot be sure greater intensity increased attendance. For example, we would see similar results if grantees offered workshops with longer durations or more frequent sessions only to populations that they expected would have high attendance with that format. In addition, grantees did not offer many of the very long or frequent sessions, relative to shorter and less frequent sessions. So, these results were driven by a small share of series. Lastly, we did not examine changes in clients' outcomes. Even if offering content in long, frequent sessions led to greater attendance, learning new skills can take time and practice, which might be more difficult in a compressed schedule.

Other factors associated with attendance differed by population and the measure of attendance. For example, HM couples and RF individuals had greater average hours of attendance in longer workshops, but that was sometimes also linked with a smaller share of regularly attending clients. HM couples tended to have better attendance if the maximum number of clients in the series was limited or multiple facilitators led the sessions, but the patterns were not consistent. For HM individuals, several characteristics were associated with attendance including sessions lasting more than one hour; series lasting 10 to 19 hours; and series led by partners, rather than grantees. Characteristics for which less consistent patterns emerged included job and career advancement services, weekend-only series, and those meeting later in the year.

Even though we did see patterns among and across the three populations, we could not account for all differences in attendance. About 20 to 60 percent of the differences in hours of attendance and 40 to 85 percent of the differences in the percentage of clients who attended most hours remained unexplained (depending on the population and model). So other factors—such as grantee characteristics that changed over time—played a role in attendance.

⁷ Length cannot be included as a separate variable in the analysis because we have included three other variables that together define workshop length: (1) total workshop hours, (2) length of each session, and (3) frequency of sessions. For example, a 20-hour workshop that meets for two hours each week will be, by definition, 10 weeks long. Because length is not included as a separate variable, we cannot estimate the magnitude of its association with attendance or a corresponding *p*-value for statistical significance.

In sum, this paper showed some structural options for grantees and other practitioners to consider, but there are limitations. The patterns highlighted here were descriptive. We cannot be certain that the identified workshop characteristics caused greater attendance or that greater attendance improved clients outcomes, such as changes in relationship quality or parenting skills. Although we generally expect greater attendance to increase the likelihood of positive change, if the programs are not effective, attending more hours will not lead to change. Using workshop characteristics to enhance attendance is an important first step in developing high quality programs to best serve families.

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APPENDIX A

Data and Methods

A. Sample restrictions: Full inclusion and exclusion criteria

Here we describe decisions that affect the composition of the same of workshop series and clients.

1. Workshop series data

Grantees entered data in a management information system, nFORM (Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management), on each series they provided. We made the following restrictions at the series level for the analysis presented here:

- **Included series that served clients in the focal populations (HM couples, HM individuals, and RF individuals).** Grantees indicated the focal population for each workshop. Using this information, we restricted to series intended for the focal populations for this paper.
- **Included series that ended from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2019.** These series began between June 2017 and December 2019. We focused on series that occurred in the middle of the grant period to capture steady-state services. Requiring that the series end within this period ensures that we have full information on client attendance. We also excluded a small number of series that did not have valid data on series end date.
- **Excluded series provided by 30 out of 87 grantees that were likely to have less accurate workshop data.** In 2019, ACF worked with each grantee to develop a target of its intended primary workshop hours, that is, a service that most or all clients were expected to attend. During the process, about a third of grantees had to substantially change their workshop structure in nFORM, so that future data entry would align with the intended target. The need to make changes suggested that those grantees' previous data might not fully and accurately capture their workshop services. Thus, we restricted this analysis to the grantees that did not have to substantially revise their workshop structure in nFORM.
- **Excluded series provided by one grantee that offered online-only workshops.** The relationship between workshop characteristics and client attendance was likely different for workshops delivered online only. Thus, we did not include series provided by the one grantee that offered only online workshops.
- **Excluded series offered for one day only.** This format is no longer allowable for ACF HMRF grantees that received grants in 2020. To make results of this paper most relevant for practice moving forward, we dropped series provided in a single session.
- **Excluded series with evidence of data entry errors.** For a small share of series, we found evidence that grantees had inaccurately recorded session duration. To limit the influence of data entry errors on results, we dropped these series.

2. Client attendance data

Grantees also provided information on clients' registration for series and attendance at individual sessions. For this paper, we linked client-level attendance information for each series with series-level information on workshop characteristics. Beginning with data on all clients' registration and attendance, we made the following restrictions:

- **Included clients of the focal grantees.** That is, we dropped clients served by the 30 grantees likely to have less accurate workshop data and the one grantee that offered online-only workshops.
- **Included clients in the focal populations.** We kept only HM couple, HM individual, and RF individual clients.
- **Included complete sessions.** We only considered attendance at sessions that grantees indicated were complete.
- **Included sessions within focal series.** Using the series-level restrictions listed above, we only considered client attendance at sessions within focal series.

B. Characteristics of grantees included and excluded from the analysis

The analytic sample for this paper represents 48 of 87 grantees. Grantees included in the analytic sample generally experienced similar implementation challenges and turnover as those excluded from the analysis (Table A.1).

Table A.1. Characteristics of grantees included in the analysis and those excluded

Characteristic	Grantees included in the analytic sample	Grantees excluded from the analytic sample
	Percentage	Percentage
Implementation challenges in the reporting period		
Enrolling the intended population		
Not a problem	63	69
Somewhat of a problem	23	26
A serious problem	6	0
Missing	8	5
Getting enrollees to attend regularly		
Not a problem	42	41
Somewhat of a problem	44	51
A serious problem	8	3
Missing	6	5
Getting enrollees to complete the program		
Not a problem	40	33
Somewhat of a problem	48	56
A serious problem	6	5
Missing	6	5
Staff turnover in the reporting period		
Proportion of facilitators who left or were removed from their position		
None	63	69
Fewer than half	29	21
Half	0	0
More than half	0	0
All	0	0

Characteristic	Grantees included in the analytic sample	Grantees excluded from the analytic sample
	Percentage	Percentage
Missing	8	10
Proportion of case managers who left or were removed from their position		
None	60	67
Fewer than half	25	18
Half	2	5
More than half	0	0
All	0	0
Missing	13	10
Proportion of program managers who left or were removed from their position		
None	83	85
Fewer than half	4	5
Half	0	0
More than half	0	0
All	13	10
Sample size		
Number of grantees	48	39

Source: Round 8 of the program operations survey, which covers September 30, 2017 through March 31, 2018.

Note: Differences between the two groups were not statistically significant at the 0.10 level or less.

C. Description of variables

Using the grantees’ performance measure data on workshop series and client attendance, we constructed all variables used in the analysis at the series level. Table A.2 gives details on variable construction.

Table A.2. Description of constructed variables

Variable	Type	Description
Average hours of attendance	Attendance outcome	Variable indicated the average hours of attendance in the series across all clients who either registered for the series (regardless of whether they ever attended) or who attended at least one session in a series for which registration was not required. Series with no such clients were excluded from the analysis. Consistent with ACF’s performance measures for workshop attendance, we only counted attendance for HM adult couple clients if both members of the couple attended the same workshop session.

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Variable	Type	Description
Clients attended most hours	Attendance outcome	Variable indicated the share of clients who attended at least 75 percent of intended workshop series hours. We selected 75 percent as a cutoff with face validity that the client was getting much more than the majority of intended hours, but allowed for leeway because many clients will not participate in all intended hours. As in the construction of average hours of attendance, we counted attendance for clients who either registered for a series (regardless of whether they ever attended) or who attended at least one session in a series for which registration was not required. Series with no such clients were excluded from the analysis. Consistent with ACF's performance measures for workshop attendance, we only counted attendance for HM adult couple clients if both members of the couple attended the same workshop session.
Workshop activities and elements	Workshop characteristic	<p>Grantees indicated the activities and elements that they intended to include in each workshop. Response options differed for HM and RF workshops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HM workshops. Response options for HM grantees included the following activities: divorce reduction; education in high schools; marriage and relationship education/skills; marriage enhancement; marriage mentoring; premarital education; conflict resolution; financial management; job and career advancement; parenting; and none of the above. Using these data, we created two binary variables indicating if the series included content on job and career advancement or parenting, respectively. • RF workshops. Response options for workshops for RF clients included parenting; economic stability; and intimate partner relationships. Using these data, we created four binary variables for RF workshops that indicated if the series included only parenting content, only economic stability content, only intimate partner relationships content, or content on two or more of these topics.
Day of the week	Workshop characteristic	Three binary variables that indicated if the series included weekend sessions only, weekday sessions only, or weekend and weekday sessions.
Time of day of sessions	Workshop characteristic	Three binary variables that indicated if sessions in the series had a morning start time (6 a.m. or later, but before noon), an afternoon start time (noon or later, but earlier than 5 p.m.), or an evening start time (5 p.m. or later, but earlier than 6 a.m.).
Season delivered	Workshop characteristic	Four binary variables that indicated whether the series had a start date in the winter (January through March), spring (April through June), summer (July through September), or fall (October through December).
Led by multiple facilitators	Workshop characteristic	For each series, grantees provided the names of the series facilitators. Using these data, we created a binary variable indicating if a series had more than one facilitator. In some cases, we were not able to discern whether the series had one or multiple facilitators (for example, some grantees listed "staff" or other similar responses to this open-text field in nFORM). In these cases, we set the variable to missing.
Maximum number of clients	Workshop characteristic	For each series, grantees indicated whether there was a limit on the number of clients who could participate in the series. If so, grantees would indicate the limit. Using these data, we constructed four binary variables that indicated whether the series had no limit, a limit between 1 and 12 clients, a limit between 13 and 20 clients, or a limit over 20 clients.
Led by partner organization (rather than grantee)	Workshop characteristic	A binary variable indicating if the series was provided by a partner agency, rather than the grantee.

Variable	Type	Description
Duration of sessions	Workshop characteristic	Four binary variables that indicated whether sessions in the series were of a duration of 1 hour or less, over 1 and up to 2 hours, over 2 and up to 4 hours, or greater than 4 hours.
Frequency of sessions	Workshop characteristic	Three binary variables that indicated whether the series occurred daily (sessions five to seven days per week), weekly (sessions one day per week), or with another frequency (two to four days per week).

D. Analytic approach

In this section, we describe how we handled missing data and the statistical models used.

1. Missing data

Missing data on workshop characteristics were rare. Information on whether a series was led by multiple facilitators was the only workshop characteristic with any missing values for series in the analysis. HM couple series had the highest number of series with missing data on this variable (204 series), with lower numbers for HM individual series (5 series), and RF individual series (68 series). In univariate and multivariate analyses, we dropped series with missing data on this variable, that is, we conducted a complete case analysis. Supplementary analyses using mean imputation for the HM couple series suggested little sensitivity of results to the decision to conduct a complete case analysis.

2. Statistical models

We used two different types of regression models for each outcome:

- **Ordinary least square (OLS).** OLS uses differences in workshop characteristics within and across grantees to show associations between workshop characteristics and the two attendance outcomes. Results from OLS regressions can be biased if unmeasured aspects of series or grantees influence attendance. For example, if better facilitators (unmeasured) boosted attendance, and grantees with better facilitators tended to have longer programs, the model would show that longer workshops had greater attendance even if there was no true effect of workshop length.
- **Fixed effects (FE).** FE regression uses only differences in workshop characteristics within grantees to show associations between characteristics and outcomes. An FE approach has the advantage of controlling for characteristics of grantees that do not change over time, even if unmeasured—for example, average facilitator quality (if stable). However, this only focuses on grantees that have different characteristics across series. So, if grantees that are struggling with attendance are more likely to change their workshop series characteristics (for example, changing series to meet more frequently), the results will primarily reflect the relationship between attendance and series characteristics experienced by poorer performing grantees. In addition, if an unmeasured characteristic changes over time and is associated with attendance—such as if facilitator quality improved or declined—the FE results could be biased.

The OLS and FE models generally used the same variables (Table A.1). However, the exception is that the FE models also included grantee FEs, which control for unobserved grantee-level characteristics that do not change or vary across workshop series. For all models, we assessed statistical significance of the relationships between workshop characteristics and the attendance outcomes using robust standard errors to account for dependence between multiple series within a given workshop and grantee.

APPENDIX B

Regression Results

Table B.1. Regression results, HM couples (N = 748 series)

Workshop characteristics variables	Average hours of attendance		Share of regular attenders	
	OLS	FE	OLS	FE
Total workshop hours				
0 – 9	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
10 – 19	2.60	4.48	-2.14	-0.99
20 or more	8.24	8.33	-21.44	1.72
Workshop activities and elements				
Includes job and career advancement	-0.09	-0.30	14.15	9.27
Includes parenting	2.31	0.80	12.78	10.37
Day of the week				
Weekend sessions only	-0.80	-0.39	-1.08	-3.76
<i>Weekday sessions only</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Weekend and weekday sessions	-3.33	-1.52	-16.48	-10.68
Time of day of sessions				
Morning	-0.25	-0.04	-2.35	3.30
Afternoon	-0.02	-0.10	2.25	2.68
<i>Evening</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Season delivered				
January–March	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
April and May	-0.41	0.01	-1.58	0.03
June–August	-0.18	0.27	1.47	2.42
September–December	0.13	0.48	4.27	5.84
Led by multiple facilitators	0.33	0.39	7.60	9.42
Maximum number of clients				
No limit	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
12 or fewer	1.68	-0.19	13.82	-1.11
13 – 20	2.33	0.69	18.95	1.88
20 or more	1.30	0.08	9.05	-3.80
Led by partner organization (rather than grantee)	-0.53	-0.63	11.12	-10.10
Duration of sessions				
1 hour or less	1.46	-0.39	9.13	-6.36
<i>More than 1 hour to 2 hours</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
More than 2 hours to 4 hours	0.65	0.98	-4.93	6.20
More than 4 hours	4.56	2.67	32.14	29.80

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Workshop characteristics variables	Average hours of attendance		Share of regular attenders	
	OLS	FE	OLS	FE
Frequency of sessions				
Daily	4.77	1.14	66.61	20.26
Weekly	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Other	1.87	0.80	13.07	6.38
Grantee FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	4.31	5.51	39.67	49.37
R-squared	0.50	0.71	0.36	0.58

Source: nFORM (Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management) data system used by the 2015 cohort of HMRF grantees; January 2018 to December 2019.

Note: Table reports coefficients on the workshop characteristics variables. For the average hours of attendance, the coefficients can be interpreted as the average change in average hours attended associated with a one-unit change in the workshop characteristic variable. For the share of regular attenders, the coefficients can be interpreted as the average point change in the percentage of clients who attended at least 75 percent of hours in the series associated with a one-unit change in the workshop characteristic variable. Bold numbers indicate changes that are significantly different from zero at the .05 level (two-tailed test). FE regressions include grantee FEs.

Table B.2. Regression results, HM individuals (N = 2,310 series)

Workshop characteristics variables	Average hours of attendance		Share of regular attenders	
	OLS	FE	OLS	FE
Total workshop hours				
0 – 9	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
10 – 19	1.58	3.17	-3.55	17.42
20 or more	12.99	9.29	-12.87	16.85
Workshop activities and elements				
Includes job and career advancement	0.92	-0.08	3.15	10.77
Includes parenting	2.01	0.26	1.51	1.84
Day of the week				
Weekend sessions only	-0.17	0.30	10.53	10.66
<i>Weekday sessions only</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Weekend and weekday sessions	-3.90	-0.64	13.02	-3.22
Time of day of sessions				
Morning	1.23	0.04	-2.99	-4.42
Afternoon	1.31	0.18	1.56	-1.61
<i>Evening</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Season delivered				
<i>January–March</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
April and May	-0.30	-0.15	-1.19	-2.94
June–August	-0.39	-0.17	0.17	-1.46
September–December	0.21	0.28	5.94	4.17
Led by multiple facilitators	-0.74	0.06	2.26	2.09
Maximum number of clients				
<i>No limit</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
12 or fewer	0.00	0.19	5.39	0.26
13 – 20	-0.37	-0.05	-0.80	-2.85
20 or more	-0.07	0.14	5.26	3.50
Led by partner organization (rather than grantee)	1.92	0.50	7.47	10.99
Duration of sessions				
1 hour or less	-3.05	-1.63	-39.01	-56.51
<i>More than 1 hour to 2 hours</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
More than 2 hours to 4 hours	0.07	0.80	0.22	9.18
More than 4 hours	12.45	2.96	0.14	25.46
Frequency of sessions				
Daily	5.60	3.61	38.48	45.51
<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Other	1.06	0.50	-0.01	7.63

Structuring HMRF Workshops for Strong Attendance

Workshop characteristics variables	Average hours of attendance		Share of regular attenders	
	OLS	FE	OLS	FE
Grantee FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	4.00	4.73	50.25	30.66
R-squared	0.70	0.82	0.27	0.35

Source: nFORM (Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management) data system used by the 2015 cohort of HMRF grantees; January 2018 to December 2019.

Note: Table reports coefficients on the workshop characteristics variables. For the average hours of attendance, the coefficients can be interpreted as the average change in average hours attended associated with a one-unit change in the workshop characteristic variable. For the share of regular attenders, the coefficients can be interpreted as the average point change in the percentage of clients who attended at least 75 percent of hours in the series associated with a one-unit change in the workshop characteristic variable. Bold numbers indicate changes that are significantly different from zero at the .05 level (two-tailed test). FE regressions include grantee FEs.

Table B.3. Regression results, RF individuals (N = 1,341 series)

Workshop characteristics variables	Average hours of attendance		Share of regular attenders	
	OLS	FE	OLS	FE
Total workshop hours				
0 – 9	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
10 – 19	2.74	5.61	17.44	2.03
20 – 29	6.55	6.94	-5.32	-6.33
30 or more	10.89	11.10	-4.12	-15.47
Workshop activities and elements				
Parenting only	2.78	1.18	6.86	-11.06
Economic stability only	-0.33	-0.19	3.00	-1.03
Intimate partner relationships only	1.28	0.66	1.55	-6.42
<i>Integrated (includes more than one activity)</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Day of the week				
Weekend sessions only	1.60	-1.16	-0.55	-7.57
<i>Weekday sessions only</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Weekend and weekday sessions	1.07	1.02	23.80	26.17
Time of day of sessions				
Morning	0.44	-1.41	2.96	-4.87
Afternoon	0.26	-1.76	4.60	-3.73
<i>Evening</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Season delivered				
<i>January–March</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
April and May	0.43	0.29	0.17	-1.22
June–August	-0.40	-0.55	-2.23	-3.81
September–December	-0.66	-0.97	-2.13	-4.67
Led by multiple facilitators	2.25	0.03	5.41	-0.09
Maximum number of clients				
<i>No limit</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
12 or fewer	2.42	0.63	9.59	-3.50
13 – 20	0.67	2.03	1.07	6.93
20 or more	0.27	-0.42	-1.12	-7.54
Led by partner organization (rather than grantee)	-1.72	2.38	-9.77	13.18
Duration of sessions				
1 hour or less	-0.14	-0.75	-6.51	-1.38
<i>More than 1 hour to 2 hours</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
More than 2 hours to 4 hours	4.43	2.47	18.96	11.49
More than 4 hours	4.28	3.66	15.92	12.52

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Workshop characteristics variables	Average hours of attendance		Share of regular attenders	
	OLS	FE	OLS	FE
Frequency of sessions				
Daily	2.23	2.15	17.36	24.63
Weekly	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Other	3.15	1.86	13.42	10.18
Grantee FEs	No	Yes	No	Yes
Constant	1.20	12.11	22.03	76.18
R-squared	0.43	0.55	0.14	0.26

Source: nFORM (Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management) data system used by the 2015 cohort of HMRF grantees; January 2018 to December 2019.

Note: Table reports coefficients on the workshop characteristics variables. For the average hours of attendance, the coefficients can be interpreted as the average change in average hours attended associated with a one-unit change in the workshop characteristic variable. For the share of regular attenders, the coefficients can be interpreted as the average point change in the percentage of clients who attended at least 75 percent of hours in the series associated with a one-unit change in the workshop characteristic variable. Bold numbers indicate changes that are significantly different from zero at the .05 level (two-tailed test). FE regressions include grantee FEs.

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