



Supporting Evidence-Based Home Visiting to Prevent Child Maltreatment



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In 2008 the Children's Bureau (CB) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded 17 cooperative agreements to support building infrastructure for the widespread adoption, implementation, and sustaining of evidence-based home visitation programs. Grantees are leveraging their grant funds with other funding sources to implement programs with fidelity to their evidence-based models. Grantees are also conducting local implementation and outcome evaluations. CB/ACF has funded Mathematica Policy Research and Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to conduct a cross-site evaluation of the grantees' programs. This is the second in a series of briefs from the cross-site evaluation.

For more information about EBHV, including earlier evaluation briefs, go to: <http://www.supportingebhv.org/>

Recruiting and Training Home Visitors for Evidence-Based Home Visiting (EBHV): Experiences of EBHV Grantees

by *Brandon Coffee-Borden and Diane Paulsell*
Mathematica Policy Research

This brief summarizes lessons about recruiting and training home visitors for evidence-based programs from grantees participating in the Children's Bureau's Supporting Evidence-Based Home Visiting (EBHV) to Prevent Child Maltreatment grantee cluster. As part of the EBHV cross-site evaluation, Mathematica Policy Research collected the data in spring 2010 during a series of telephone interviews conducted with managers of agencies from 9 of the 17 grantees that were implementing home visiting programs. These "implementing agencies" were selected to participate in the interviews because they had recruited, hired, and trained new home visitors during the preceding year (in contrast to some agencies that were already operating programs when the grant began, or had not yet reached the stage of staffing their home visiting programs). Most implementing agencies had experience with home visiting but few had previously implemented an evidence-based program. The brief provides an overview of agencies' strategies for recruiting and training home visitors, as well as the challenges they faced and lessons learned.

In recent years, policymakers have placed increasing emphasis on the use of evidence-based programs to address social challenges. The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, authorized by the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-148), will provide \$1.5 billion to states over the next five years to provide comprehensive, evidence-based home visiting services to pregnant women and families with children from birth to age 5. To implement these programs, agencies will need to recruit qualified home visitors and train them to deliver services in accordance with the requirements of specific evidence-based home visiting programs. Learning about the experiences of implementing agencies participating in the EBHV cross-site evaluation with recruiting and training home visitors may be helpful to states as they plan for the new federal initiative.

Grantee-Selected Home Visiting Models

The 17 EBHV grantees are implementing one or more of the following national home visiting models:¹ Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, SafeCare, and Triple P. The 9 EBHV grantees included in this brief are implementing Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and SafeCare.

See the home visiting model websites for more information.

Healthy Families America: www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org

Nurse Family Partnership: www.nursefamilypartnership.org

Parents as Teachers: www.parentsasteachers.org

SafeCare: <http://chhs.gsu.edu/safecare/>

Triple P: www5.triplep.net/

¹The summer 2008 federal grant announcement required applicants to select home visiting programs that met specified criteria so as to be considered an evidence-based model. During the grant review process, an independent panel of peer reviewers evaluated applications based on the criteria listed in the announcement to determine if the program(s) proposed by the applicant met standards related to evidence-based models. The criteria used in the 2008 federal grant announcement were in no way related to the criteria for evidence of effectiveness for the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program included in the Affordable Health Care Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-148).

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Recruiting Home Visitors for Evidence-Based Programs

Implementing agencies sought to recruit home visitors who would be highly committed to serving families and could deliver an evidence-based home visiting model with fidelity. They also aimed to hire staff who met the recommendations of specific evidence-based models for levels and fields of education, prior work experience, and professional skills and abilities. Interviewees described the qualifications their agencies sought in prospective home visitors, how they recruited and interviewed candidates, and the technical assistance they used during the hiring process.

Qualifications of Home Visitors

Education. Implementing agencies adhered to recommendations on educational background from specific evidence-based models in hiring home visitors. For example, Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) requires home visitors to be registered nurses at with at least a bachelor's degree; SafeCare does not have requirements for educational attainment but its home visitors typically have a bachelor's degree. In the absence of specific educational requirements, agencies typically applied education standards for other social service programs they operated, usually looking for candidates with at least a bachelor's degree in a relevant field.

Experience. Agencies sought candidates with one to five years of experience in home visiting; experience working with children and families, especially with culturally diverse populations; experience in the fields of child health, maternal health, and pediatrics (especially for NFP); and experience working with high-risk populations, such as families living in poverty.

Professional Characteristics and Skills. For implementing agencies, professional characteristics were as important as education and experience. Agencies sought home visitors with specific professional characteristics, the ability to work with high-need families, and knowledge of the community and target population.

- **Professional characteristics.** Home visitors must work independently while adhering to specific curricula and reporting requirements to ensure implementation with fidelity and recordkeeping needed for evaluation and client-tracking purposes. Therefore, implementing agencies searched for candidates who were accountable, flexible, autonomous, and had a demonstrated ability to manage time and thoroughly complete paperwork. Home visitors must also be able to receive and respond to regular feedback during training and supervision sessions to continually improve their practice. Agencies thus sought candidates who were comfortable with feedback, observation, and constructive criticism; had a willingness to continually learn; and would be responsive to supervision.
- **Working with high-need families.** Implementing agencies searched for candidates who would be accepting, nonjudgmental, supportive, and compassionate with families. They sought home visitors who would respect families' experiences and refrain from imposing their own views on families. In addition, because home visitors work with families frequently over a period of several months to several years, agencies sought home visitors who could build relationships, engage families over time, fit families' goals and interests within program goals, and judge how to address families' changing needs.
- **Knowledge of the community and target population.** Agencies sought home visitors who understood the social and economic challenges of the communities in their program's catchment area and were familiar with the community resources available for families. They also sought home visitors who were culturally competent and knowledgeable about the cultural background of families in the program's target population (and in some cases bilingual in English and another language spoken by families at home).

Recruiting and Interviewing Candidates

Implementing agencies conducted both internal and external searches for qualified home visitor candidates, but most began their searches by seeking candidates from within their organizations. Many public agencies and hospitals required that new positions be posted internally prior to an external search. Across all types of agencies, managers typically identified qualified staff and approached them about transferring to the new evidence-based program. They also posted the position internally, talked to other managers within their agency, and held informational meetings. When searching for candidates outside their organization, implementing agencies used three main strategies: (1) networking and word of mouth; (2) advertising through local media and the internet; and (3) advertising through other community organizations, hospital systems, and colleges and universities. For one model, NFP, the national program office referred interested applicants to local agencies through its website.

Implementing agencies typically used their organizations' standard process and format for interviewing job candidates but adjusted the questions and content to

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ensure that candidates understood the special requirements of evidence-based home visiting. Interviewers usually emphasized that home visitors would:

- Likely need to travel to attend training
- Be observed by supervisors and receive intensive feedback
- Be required to meet detailed fidelity standards and recordkeeping requirements

Interviewers often used scenarios, role-plays, or targeted questions to assess the candidates' reactions to challenging situations, their ability to address families' needs, their comfort with home visiting, and their attitude toward implementing an evidence-based model.

Technical Assistance and Support for Recruitment

Many evidence-based home visiting programs provide implementing agencies with recruitment and interview materials, including:

- Recommended characteristics, skills, and qualifications for home visitors
- Sample position descriptions
- Information about other organizations' successful recruitment and hiring strategies
- Suggested interview questions or scenarios

Some implementing agencies adapted such materials for use in their recruiting process. In addition, several models assigned a consultant or contact person to provide technical assistance and support to the implementing agency. However, few managers reported requesting the consultant's assistance in recruiting and hiring. A few managers requested help to decide whether they could hire a candidate who seemed like a good fit but did not have all of the recommended qualifications.

Some implementing agencies also received technical assistance from outside consultants, state or local agencies, or universities. These outside advisors helped develop the interview process and questions or provided input on specific candidates. For instance, an agency hiring nurse home visitors asked a nurse from another community program to sit in on interviews and assess the candidates' capabilities as nurses. Another manager brought in a consultant from a local university to discuss fidelity to the model and help assess candidates' ability to implement the model with fidelity.

Home Visitor Training

After completing the recruitment and hiring process, an implementing agency's next task is to prepare home visitors to deliver services in accordance with the evidence-based program. A common feature of evidence-based home visiting programs is mandatory pre-service home visitor training that usually lasts for several days. Many evidence-based programs offer training in central locations at standard times during the year, requiring home visitors to travel to attend training. Some program models also send trainers to provide training on site. Although each program model's approach is different, the pre-service training generally covers:

- The program's history, principles, and philosophy
- Curriculum and service delivery



- Roles and responsibilities of home visitors
- Data requirements and reporting

Trainers also offer active demonstrations and discussion and provide opportunities for practice through scenarios and role-playing.

Pre-Service Training Provided by Home Visiting Programs

Implementing agency managers, regardless of program model, said that pre-service training adequately educated home visitors about the model and prepared them for implementation. They also enjoyed attending pre-service training that brought staff from different agencies together; managers and home visitors gained different perspectives and learned about what others were doing in their programs. Some program models required managers or supervisors to attend training with home visitors, while others did not. Regardless, managers felt it was important for supervisors to attend pre-service training with the home visitors, even if not required.

Managers reported that their home visitors responded positively overall to pre-service training, and especially appreciated role-plays, practice, and feedback from trainers. Yet they also reported that many home visitors found pre-service training demanding. Some home visitors found the intensive teaching and practice during a short amount of time overwhelming or felt nervous about role-playing or practicing in front of peers. Others expressed discomfort with unfamiliar model requirements, such as providing periodic developmental or medical screening when they had no previous training. Managers said that training and practice alleviated the home visitors' concerns.

Supplemental Pre-Service Training Provided by Implementing Agencies

In addition to the pre-service training required by program models, some implementing agencies also provided supplemental training designed to help home visitors understand the community, deal with situations that they might confront during home visits, work with specific target populations, and become familiar with the implementing agency. (In some cases, this information was provided as part of an agency's standard orientation and training for new employees.) Training was offered through local colleges, universities, agency staff, or outside consultants. In addition to agencies' employee orientation series, training topics included:

- Domestic violence
- Motivational interviewing
- Safety
- Child abuse and neglect
- Substance abuse
- Conflict prevention/intervention
- Cultural competency
- Therapeutic relationship
- Child and maternal health
- Teen mothers

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In-Service Training

Most home visiting program models also require in-service training. This training may review the home visitors' initial experiences with service delivery and reinforce the topics covered during pre-service training, or introduce new topics. The training may be delivered in-person by a trainer or a supervisor, or may be self-guided using online materials or workbooks. In-service training requirements for some program models are less prescribed. For example, a program may mandate that a certain number of training hours be completed within a period of time but allow the agency to determine the topics and format.

Implementing agencies provided in-service training to fulfill these requirements. They chose topics in response to the needs of the home visitors and the challenges they were encountering with families. They also took advantage of conferences or trainings that occurred in their communities. Some implementing agencies also sent staff to training offered by local colleges, universities, community partners, agency staff, and outside consultants. Compared to agency-sponsored pre-service training, these training topics focused more on community resources or specific social, family, individual, or developmental issues. The topics that were most important seemed to vary by site based upon the needs of the families served. However, the common theme was a focus on preparing the home visitor to deal with challenges or situations that might come up in the home beyond delivery of the curriculum in areas such as:

- The local social service system
- Mental health
- Domestic violence
- Verbal development and language issues
- Individualized Education Plan training for families that have older children struggling in school
- Non-violent communication
- Disability resources in schools and accessing early intervention programs for children with special needs
- Sexual abuse
- Child and maternal health
- Trauma-related issues
- Postpartum depression
- Child abuse and neglect

Technical Assistance and Support for Training

In addition to providing the training itself, the home visiting program models provided technical assistance and support for training. For example, they recommended additional training topics, assisted with logistical issues (such as preparing for training and providing training materials), and helped resolve technology and infrastructure problems such as accessing or downloading materials from the program model's website.

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Recruitment and Training Challenges

Implementing agencies encountered a number of challenges related to recruiting and training home visitors. Many of these challenges are common to social service programs, but may be more acute due to the specific requirements for home visitor qualifications and training imposed by evidence-based programs. Implementing agency managers identified four main challenges related to recruitment:

1. ***Finding bilingual home visitors.*** Several agencies were unable to locate bilingual candidates with the educational credentials and experience required by program models. This limited the agencies' capacity to serve families whose home language was not English.
2. ***Finding culturally competent home visitors.*** Beyond language issues, many implementing agencies also had difficulty finding racially or ethnically diverse candidates and culturally competent candidates who were familiar with the cultural background of their target population.
3. ***Salary competition.*** Implementing agencies found that candidates were drawn to alternative positions because their agency could not offer a competitive salary. This was particularly true for nurses.
4. ***Determining whether candidates will be a good fit.*** The demands on home visitors are numerous and the work is stressful. Managers said it was challenging during the interview process to determine whether a candidate would be a good fit and truly understood the challenges of home visiting. Managers suggested that the use of scenarios during interviews and opportunities to shadow home visitors during the hiring process could help address this issue.



Managers also identified four challenges related to training:

1. ***The cost of pre-service training.*** Training costs in evidence-based programs can amount to several thousand dollars per home visitor. There may also be added costs for materials and travel. Some agencies maximized their resources by paying to bring a trainer on site rather than sending staff out for training. If there is home visitor turnover, however, the agency loses its pre-service training investment and must train incoming staff. Given the high cost of training, some agencies required home visitors to sign an employment contract with provisions to repay all or some training costs if they leave prior to a certain date.
2. ***The cost of in-service training.*** Managers said it was challenging to meet home visitors' needs for continuing education with limited resources.
3. ***Balancing training and other responsibilities.*** Managers reported that, as home visitors' caseloads grew, it was increasingly difficult to set aside time for training and still provide the required dosage of services to families.
4. ***Scheduling training.*** Many program models offer pre-service training at set times during the year. Managers reported difficulty getting new hires started serving families if the next scheduled pre-service training was months away. Although some program models will send a trainer to the site, this option may be too expensive for some agencies when only a small number of staff need to be trained.

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Lessons Learned

Implementing agency managers identified several important lessons about recruiting, hiring, and training home visitors in evidence-based programs. These lessons may be useful to states, communities, and agencies as they plan for the new Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program. Implementing agency managers identified five lessons learned from their recruitment and hiring experience:

1. **Candidates must understand their roles and responsibilities as home visitors.** Managers said that potential home visitors must understand what home visiting is like. They also need to understand the requirements of evidence-based programs and how these requirements will affect their work as home visitors.
2. **Recruitment takes time.** Implementing agency managers warned against rushing to fill staff positions. It is important to be patient and to find candidates who are a good fit for the program and target population.
3. **Agencies may need to prioritize language skills and cultural competence over other qualifications to serve some target populations.** Managers in organizations that specialized in serving families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds stressed the importance of hiring home visitors who can communicate with families in their home language and understand and respect their culture. Hiring such staff may require agencies to be flexible about fulfilling all program model requirements for educational credentials and experience. In such cases, the implementing agencies worked with model developers to address these issues.
4. **Involving current home visitors in the interview process can help assess fit.** Managers reported positive experiences involving current home visitors in the hiring process because they know what it takes to be a successful home visitor. For example, home visitors developed questions and ideas that managers had not considered. Also, the home visitors must work together and support one another. Current home visitors could help assess how candidates would fit into the group.
5. **Involving past program participants in the interview process can also help assess fit.** Managers reported that it was helpful to incorporate former clients in the recruitment process to help gauge candidates' ability to effectively communicate with high-need populations.

Implementing agency managers also identified four lessons learned about home visitor training:

1. **Mastering evidence-based home visiting models takes time.** Managers said that there is a learning curve associated with an evidence-based model. Staff cannot expect to know or understand everything at the beginning.
2. **The training process is demanding.** Managers warned that the training process and requirements may be initially overwhelming for home visitors, but is a critical component of implementing the program.
3. **Even experienced home visitors need time to learn a new program model.** Managers stressed that even experienced home visitors are novices in learning a new evidence-based model. They said that hiring home visitors with training in an evidence-based model was helpful because they understood the

importance of fidelity. Managers found that programs also benefited from the experience of veteran, non-evidence-based home visitors; however, some of these home visitors clung to previous knowledge or had difficulty mastering new evidence-based concepts.

4. ***Agency training about the community and target population is an important complement to training provided by the program model.*** Implementing agency managers felt that pre-service training offered by the program model prepared home visitors to deliver the curriculum with fidelity. Additional training from the agency, however, was critical to the home visitors' success. It helped them understand the community, more effectively deal with families' challenges, and better understand the needs of specific target populations.