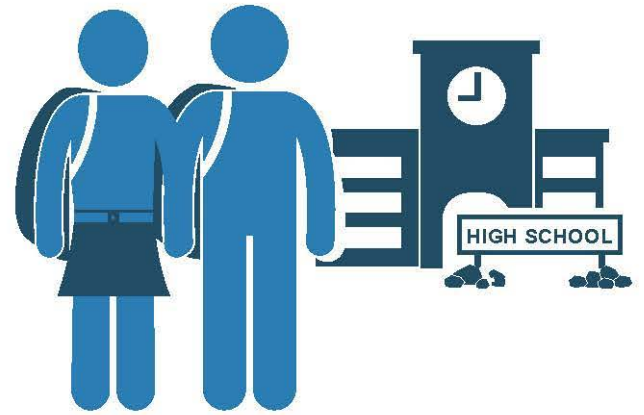


Design for an Impact Study of Five Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Programs and Strategies



March 2018



Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services

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March 2018

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OVERVIEW

The federal government has made a long-standing commitment to supporting healthy relationships and stable families. In the mid-1990s, Congress created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, which had the formation and maintenance of two-parent families as one of its core purposes. TANF provided states with the funding and flexibility to support activities to promote healthy marriage. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the federal government began providing additional funding specifically to support healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) services. The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services oversees these funds and distributes them through a set of competitive multi-year grants to organizations nationwide. OFA made the most recent round of HMRE grant awards in September 2015. These grants support HMRE services for a mix of populations, including youth in high school, individual adults, and adult couples.

The Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services (STREAMS) evaluation is a five-site, random assignment evaluation of HMRE programs funded by OFA, with evaluation sites selected from the current round of HMRE grantees. STREAMS will examine the full range of populations served by HMRE programming, including programs serving high school youth and those serving adults as individuals and as couples. The goal of STREAMS is to expand the evidence base by filling gaps in knowledge about the effectiveness of HMRE programming and by identifying strategies for improving the delivery and effectiveness of these programs. Each STREAMS site functions as a separate study within the larger evaluation, with each addressing a distinct research question. The evaluation team will analyze data and report findings separately for each site. This approach will maximize the study's contribution to the evidence base.

This report describes the design of the STREAMS evaluation in each of five study sites. These sites represent the full range of populations served through the HMRE grant program. One site provides relationship skills education to youth in high school, two sites provide relationship skills education to adults as individuals, and two sites provide relationship skills education to adults as couples. The five selected sites also address other evaluation priorities identified for STREAMS. Two of the evaluation sites offer programs that integrate relationship skills and economic stability services. Two of the sites test implementation factors—namely, the necessary dosage of program services and strategies to boost program attendance. The STREAMS evaluation includes both a random assignment impact study and an in-depth process study in each of the five evaluation sites.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The federal government has made a long-standing commitment to supporting healthy relationships and stable families. As part of welfare reform efforts in the mid-1990s, Congress created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant which had the formation and maintenance of two-parent families as one of its core purposes, with the ultimate aim to promote child well-being. TANF provided states with the funding and flexibility to support activities to support healthy marriage. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the federal government began providing additional funding specifically to support healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) services.¹ Under current law, Congress devotes \$75 million annually to support these services. The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services oversees these funds and distributes them through a set of competitive multi-year grants to organizations nationwide. OFA made the most recent round of HMRE grant awards in September 2015. These grants support HMRE services for a mix of populations, including youth in high school, individual adults, and adult couples.

HMRE programming varies based on the population served. High school-based HMRE programs aim to build students' relationships skills and support positive socioemotional development through classroom-based instruction on such topics as communication skills, goal setting, dating violence, and how to build and maintain healthy relationships. Programs for adults are typically offered in community-based settings and provide instruction through a series of small-group workshops led by a trained facilitator. The workshops cover such topics as how to choose a partner wisely, how to recognize unhealthy relationships and leave those relationships safely, and how to improve communication skills. Some workshops are designed specifically for couples, covering such additional topics as building affection, intimacy, and trust. Some HMRE programs for adults also address the connection between romantic relationships and other aspects of one's life—for example, by offering economic stability services in addition to relationship skills education. The current round of grant funding placed a particular emphasis on programs that offered both relationship education and economic stability services.

Goals of the STREAMS evaluation

For more than a decade, the Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF has led a sustained effort to rigorously test the effectiveness of federally funded HMRE programs through a series of large-scale, multisite random assignment evaluations. These earlier evaluations focused specifically on low-income adult couples. In 2015, OPRE continued its research on HMRE programming by contracting with Mathematica Policy Research and its partner, Public Strategies, to conduct the Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services (STREAMS) evaluation. STREAMS is a five-site, random assignment evaluation of HMRE programs funded by OFA, with evaluation sites selected from the current round of HMRE grantees. Unlike previous OPRE-sponsored HMRE evaluations, STREAMS will examine the full range of populations served by HMRE programming and will include programs serving high school youth and those serving adults as individuals. The evaluation has a particular

¹ The HMRE programs were originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. The programs are currently reauthorized under the Claims Resolution Act of 2010.

emphasis on understudied populations and program approaches not covered in OPRE’s prior federal evaluations.

The goal of STREAMS is to expand the evidence base by filling gaps in knowledge about the effectiveness of HMRE programming and by identifying strategies for improving the delivery and effectiveness of these programs. To maximize the study’s contribution to the evidence base, each STREAMS site functions as a separate study within the larger evaluation, with each addressing a distinct research question. The evaluation team will analyze data and report findings separately for each site.

Overview of STREAMS sites and evaluation activities

The studies conducted in each of the five STREAMS evaluation sites will expand the evidence base in three key ways. First, these studies will examine the full range of populations served by HMRE programming. One site provides relationship skills education to youth in high school; two sites provide relationship skills education to adults as individuals; and two sites provide relationship skills education to adults as couples (Table ES.1). Second, these studies will examine programs that integrate relationship education and economic stability services. Two of the five STREAMS sites offer this integrated approach. Third, they will examine the effects of key implementation factors. One study will test the necessary dosage of program services; another will test strategies to boost program attendance.

The evaluation will evaluate five programs and strategies:

1. Two different versions of the ***Relationship Smarts PLUS*** curriculum for high school students, delivered by More Than Conquerors, Inc. (MTCI) in two Atlanta-area high schools; to test the necessary dosage of the curriculum, MTCI is delivering both the full 12-session curriculum and a shortened 8-session version
2. **Career STREAMS**, an integrated relationship education and pre-employment training program for low-income job seekers, delivered by the Family and Workforce Centers of America through a large employment center in St. Louis, Missouri
3. **MotherWise**, a program for low-income women who are expecting or have just had a baby, based on the *Within My Reach* relationship education curriculum; researchers from the University of Denver deliver the program in collaboration with the Denver Health hospital system
4. **Empowering Families**, a program for low-income romantically involved couples raising children, delivered by The Parenting Center in Fort Worth, Texas; the program features workshop-based relationship education along with case management, employment services, and financial coaching
5. A **text messaging intervention informed by behavioral theory**, designed to improve program attendance and completion rates at a workshop-based relationship education program for adult couples; the intervention is being tested through workshops offered in six Florida counties by the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Services Extension offices

The STREAMS evaluation includes both a random assignment impact study and an in-depth process study in each of the five evaluation sites. The process study for each site will document adherence to program curricula and the types of services delivered. The full design report provides additional detail about the programs and services tested in each study site and the plan for measuring their impacts.

Table ES.1. Key features of STREAMS impact study designs

Grantee	Intervention	Evaluation sample	Primary research questions	Timing and mode of follow up
Site serving youth				
More Than Conquerors, Inc.	Different versions of the Relationship Smarts PLUS curriculum: the full 12-lesson curriculum and a shortened 8-lesson version	1,840 students from two Atlanta, Georgia-area high schools	What is the effect of offering relationship skills education as part of the regular school curriculum? How does abbreviating the curriculum influence program effects?	Follow-up surveys at program exit and 12 months after random assignment, conducted primarily in schools
Sites serving adults as individuals				
Family and Workforce Centers of America	Career STREAMS program for low-income job seekers	900 low-income job seekers from an employment center in St. Louis, Missouri	What is the effect of an integrated approach to relationship education and economic stability services?	Web and telephone follow-up surveys 12 months after random assignment; NDNH data on employment outcomes
University of Denver	MotherWise program for low-income women who are expecting or have just had a baby	900 low-income pregnant women or new mothers from the Denver Health hospital system in Colorado	What is the effect of offering relationship skills education and other support services to low-income pregnant women and new mothers?	Web and telephone follow-up surveys 12 months after random assignment
Sites serving adult couples				
The Parenting Center	Empowering Families program for low-income romantically involved couples raising children	900 low-income romantically involved couples in Fort Worth, Texas	How does an integrated approach to relationship skills and economic stability services affect the outcomes of participating couples?	Web and telephone follow-up surveys 12 months after random assignment; NDNH data on employment outcomes
University of Florida	Text messaging intervention informed by behavioral insight theory to improve workshop attendance and completion	1,500 couples participating in relationship education workshops across five Florida counties	Can text messages informed by behavioral insight theory improve attendance at relationship skills education group sessions for couples?	Program attendance data

NDNH = National Directory of New Hires Data maintained by ACF’s Office of Child Support Enforcement.

I. INTRODUCTION

The federal government has made a long-standing commitment to supporting healthy relationships and stable families. As part of welfare reform efforts in the mid-1990s, Congress created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant which had the formation and maintenance of two-parent families as one of its core purposes, with the ultimate aim to promote child well-being. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the federal government began providing additional funding specifically to support healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) services. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 authorized the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) in the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to award \$100 million annually for this purpose, through competitive grants to states, local governments, and community-based organizations. In 2010, Congress voted to continue this funding at the level of \$75 million annually as part of the Claims Resolution Act of 2010.

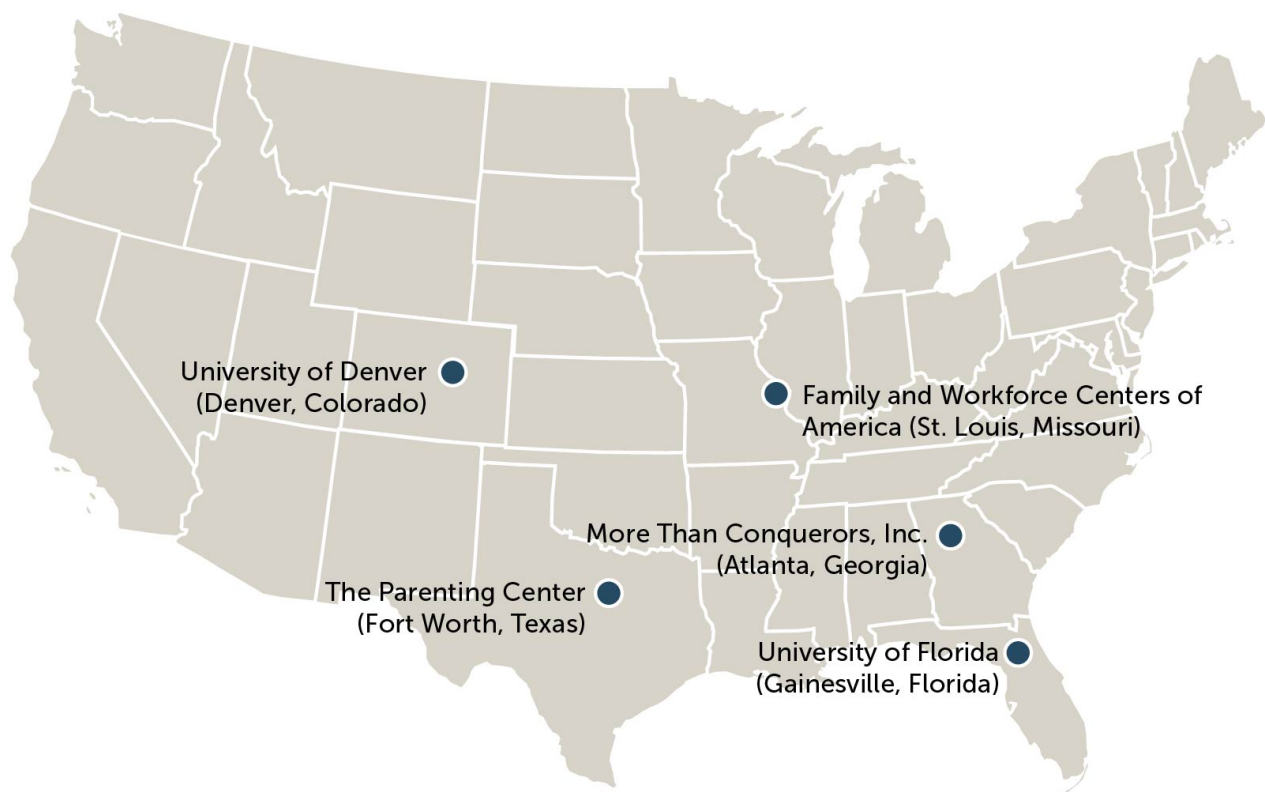
Federal HMRE funding supports a broad range of relationship education services for people of different ages. Among the state and local organizations that received funding for the 2011–2015 grant period, at least half provided services to youth in high schools (Child Trends 2015). These high school-based HMRE programs aim to build students' relationships skills and support positive socioemotional development through classroom-based instruction on such topics as communication skills, goal setting, dating violence, and how to build and maintain healthy relationships. Other HMRE grantees offer relationship education programming for adults. These programs for adults are typically offered in community-based settings and provide instruction through a series of small-group workshops led by a trained facilitator. The workshops cover such topics as how to choose a partner wisely, how to recognize unhealthy relationships and leave those relationships safely, and how to improve communication skills. Some workshops are designed specifically for couples, covering such additional topics as building affection, intimacy, and trust. Some HMRE programs for adults also address the connection between romantic relationships and other aspects of one's life—for example, by offering economic stability services in addition to relationship skills education.

For more than a decade, the Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF has led a sustained effort to rigorously test the effectiveness of federally funded HMRE programs through a series of large-scale, multisite random assignment evaluations. The OPRE-sponsored Building Strong Families (BSF) evaluation rigorously tested a group workshop-based intervention for low-income, unmarried parents in eight sites. The study found no overall positive effects; however, one site did show positive effects at 15 months that generally did not persist at 36 months (Wood et al. 2012 and 2014). OPRE's Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM) study rigorously evaluated a group workshop-based intervention in eight sites for low-income married couples with children. The study found small positive effects on relationship quality and declines in psychological abuse and distress, but no effects on a couple's chances of staying married (Hsueh et al. 2012; Lundquist et al. 2014). Results from a third federal evaluation examining HMRE programs for low-income couples with children, Parents and Children Together (PACT), are expected to be released in 2018. All three evaluations focused specifically on HMRE programming for low-income adult couples.

In 2015, OPRE continued its research on HMRE programming by contracting with Mathematica Policy Research and its partner, Public Strategies, to conduct the Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services (STREAMS) evaluation. STREAMS is a five-site, random assignment evaluation of HMRE programs funded by OFA. Unlike previous OPRE-sponsored HMRE evaluations—such as BSF, SHM, and PACT—in which data from different evaluation sites were combined for analysis, each STREAMS site will function as a separate study within the larger evaluation, with each addressing a distinct research question. The goal of STREAMS is to expand the evidence base, by filling gaps in knowledge about the effectiveness of HMRE programming and by identifying strategies for improving the delivery and effectiveness of these programs. The evaluation has a particular emphasis on understudied populations and program approaches not covered in OPRE’s prior federal evaluations.

This report describes the design of the STREAMS evaluation in each of five study sites (Figure I.1). In the rest of this chapter, we provide an overview of the current OFA grantees, the overarching goals for STREAMS, and the process we used to select sites. In subsequent chapters, we describe each of the five sites in more detail: the program to be tested, the planned implementation and setting, key features of the impact evaluation design, and an expected timeline for conducting the evaluation and reporting the results. Sample enrollment for the study began in fall 2016 and is expected to continue through 2018. The evaluation team plans to release process study and impact findings on a rolling basis, beginning with the first process study report in early 2018.

Figure I.1. The Five STREAMS Study Sites



Overview of current OFA grantees

On September 30, 2015, OFA announced awards to 46 grantees nationwide to provide comprehensive HMRE services in their communities.² Annual awards range in size from just under \$400,000 to \$2 million and are being provided over a five-year grant period. Grantees could propose serving a mix of different populations, including youth in high school, individual adults, and adult couples. Most grantees proposed offering multiple programs and serving more than one target population. According to data reported by grantees, as of April 2017, 44 percent of the participants enrolled in HMRE programming across all grantees were youth. At that same point, 24 percent of enrollees were adults in programs designed to serve individuals; the remaining 32 percent were adults enrolled in programs designed to serve couples.

For the current round of grant funding, OFA placed a particular emphasis on programs that offered both relationship education and economic stability services. According to the funding opportunity announcement (FOA), “In order to achieve specified outcomes included in this FOA, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide comprehensive services, including services designed to improve marriage and relationship skills, as well as activities to promote economic stability and mobility.... Economic stability activities include job and career advancement, and financial literacy activities, such as budgeting, financial planning and management, and asset development.” (Office of Family Assistance, 2015). In addition, unless grantees could provide justification for an exemption, OFA required applicants to include case management strategies to provide or link participants with these economic stability activities, as well as other types of social services.

The 2015 grant program also included an increased emphasis on measuring and evaluating performance. Many grantees who are not participating in the STREAMS evaluation are conducting local evaluations of their programs in partnerships with independent evaluators. OFA requires all grantees to collect and report data on a standardized set of performance measures, including program applicants’ characteristics, program operations, enrollment and service delivery, and participants’ outcomes at enrollment and program exit. The data are reported and stored in a secure online database called the Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting and Management System (nFORM).

Study goals

The STREAMS evaluation involves a subset of five grantees from the current round of HMRE grant funding. The grantees were selected for their potential to fill gaps in the evidence base and to identify strategies to improve the delivery and effectiveness of HMRE programming. The grantees do not necessarily represent the overall grant program, and the findings from STREAMS are not intended to generalize to all funded grantees.

To answer as many distinct research questions as possible, the evaluation team designed STREAMS so that the five grantees each serve as a separate evaluation site. In each site, the grantee implements a different program and serves a distinct population. The evaluation team also plans to analyze the evaluation data and report findings separately for each site. This site-

² One grant has since been cancelled. Therefore, at the time this report was drafted, there were 45 grantees providing HMRE services.

specific approach maximizes the study's contribution to the evidence base by allowing for distinct research questions in each site.

Another key element of STREAMS is the provision of program technical assistance. After identifying the participating sites, the evaluation team assigned each site a smaller group of two or three staff members from Mathematica and Public Strategies to provide ongoing program technical assistance. These technical assistance teams work with each site to refine and strengthen the design and implementation of the site's program, through a combination of regular telephone consultations and periodic in-person site visits. The technical assistance teams customize their activities to the unique needs and circumstances of each site. Example activities include staff trainings on strategies to recruit and retain participants, reviewing and refining the content of group workshop sessions, and working with program staff to resolve practical challenges such as staff turnover and the scheduling of group workshop sessions. The STREAMS technical assistance teams also work with sites to establish and monitor benchmarks for key aspects of program performance, such as recruitment, attendance, and fidelity. The evaluation team conducts these technical assistance activities to help ensure that the programs as delivered will answer the intended research questions and fill relevant gaps in the evidence base. The STREAMS technical assistance activities also align with OFA's goal for the overall grant program of making the funded program services as strong as possible.

Site selection

In selecting the sites and research questions for STREAMS, three key priorities guided the evaluation team:

- 1. Focus on understudied populations.** Although many federally funded HMRE programs serve high school students or adults as individuals, almost all federally sponsored impact evaluations to date have focused on HMRE programs for adult couples. To address this research gap, STREAMS site selection prioritized programs serving youth and programs serving adults as individuals.
- 2. Include programs that integrate economic stability services with relationship skills education.** The 2015 round of HMRE funding placed a particular emphasis on supporting programs that offer both relationship skills education and economic stability services. For this reason, STREAMS site selection prioritized programs making substantial efforts to integrate these two kinds of services.
- 3. Examine implementation factors.** Effective programs must ensure that participants receive a sufficient level of exposure to high quality program services. STREAMS aims to generate evidence to guide practitioners in their efforts to achieve this goal. To that end, the evaluation team looked for opportunities to test key implementation factors, including (1) the necessary dosage of program services to generate effects and (2) strategies to boost program attendance.

To identify and select the study sites that aligned most closely with these priorities, the evaluation team worked in consultation with OPRE, OFA, and two other evaluation teams studying the current HMRE grant program to review and extract a consistent set of information from all of the funded HMRE grant applications. On the basis of this review, the STREAMS

evaluation team selected a subset of 12 grantees with the strongest potential to address the targeted evaluation priorities. The team then conducted a series of in-person and telephone conversations and site visits to arrive at the final set of sites.

As part of the site selection process, the evaluation team also assessed the feasibility of conducting a random assignment impact evaluation in each site. Assessing feasibility required identifying a viable approach to conducting random assignment, specifying the size of the potential sample, understanding the distinction between the planned program and control groups, assessing the risk that the control group could be exposed to the intervention, and assessing the site's capacity to support the required study activities. The evaluation team considered only those sites deemed feasible for a random assignment impact evaluation for inclusion in the study.

Overview of STREAMS sites and evaluation activities

The five STREAMS evaluation sites represent the full range of populations served through the HMRE grant program. One site provides relationship skills education to youth in high school, two sites provide relationship skills education to adults as individuals, and two sites provide relationship skills education to adults as couples. The five selected sites also address other evaluation priorities identified for STREAMS. Two of the evaluation sites offer programs that integrate relationship skills and economic stability services. Two of the sites test implementation factors—namely, the necessary dosage of program services and strategies to boost program attendance. The five programs and strategies being evaluated in the study are as follows:

1. Two different versions of the ***Relationship Smarts PLUS*** curriculum for high school students, delivered by More Than Conquerors, Inc. (MTCI) in two Atlanta-area high schools; to test the necessary dosage of the curriculum, MTCI is delivering both the full 12-session curriculum and a shortened 8-session version.
2. **Career STREAMS**, an integrated relationship education and pre-employment training program for low-income job seekers, delivered by the Family and Workforce Centers of America (FWCA) through a large employment center in St. Louis, Missouri.
3. **MotherWise**, a program for low-income women who are expecting or have just had a baby, based on the *Within My Reach* relationship education curriculum; researchers from The University of Denver deliver the program in collaboration with the Denver Health hospital system.
4. **Empowering Families**, a program for low-income romantically involved couples raising children, delivered by The Parenting Center in Fort Worth, Texas; the program features workshop-based relationship education along with case management, employment services, and financial coaching.
5. A **text messaging intervention informed by behavioral theory**, designed to improve program attendance and completion rates at a workshop-based relationship education program for adult couples; the intervention is being tested through workshops offered in six Florida counties by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Services Extension offices.

The STREAMS evaluation includes both a random assignment impact study and an in-depth process study. Table I.1 summarizes details of the impact study and the rest of this report

describes it in greater detail. For the process study, two members of the evaluation team will visit each site at a midpoint in the service delivery period to conduct individual interviews with program staff and partners and focus groups with participants. The evaluation team will also conduct a web-based survey of all staff working directly with participants. In addition, the team will use data reported in the nFORM performance measurement system to analyze adherence to program curricula, service delivery, and levels of enrollment and program participation. These data will serve as the basis for an in-depth process study report prepared separately for each site.

The rest of this report describes each site and the planned impact study in more detail. Chapter II describes the site for youth in high schools: MTCL. Chapters III and IV describe the two sites serving adults as individuals: FWCA and the University of Denver. The last two chapters describe the two sites serving adult couples: The Parenting Center (Chapter V) and the University of Florida (Chapter VI).

Table I.1. Key features of STREAMS impact study designs

Grantee	Intervention	Evaluation sample	Primary research questions	Timing and mode of follow up
Site serving youth				
More Than Conquerors, Inc.	Different versions of the Relationship Smarts PLUS curriculum: the full 12-lesson curriculum and a shortened 8-lesson version	1,840 students from two Atlanta, Georgia-area high schools	What is the effect of offering relationship skills education as part of the regular school curriculum? How does abbreviating the curriculum influence program effects?	Follow-up surveys at program exit and 12 months after random assignment, conducted primarily in schools
Sites serving adults as individuals				
Family and Workforce Centers of America	Career STREAMS program for low-income job seekers	900 low-income job seekers from an employment center in St. Louis, Missouri	What is the effect of an integrated approach to relationship education and economic stability services?	Web and telephone follow-up surveys 12 months after random assignment; NDNH data on employment outcomes
University of Denver	MotherWise program for low-income women who are expecting or have just had a baby	900 low-income pregnant women or new mothers from the Denver Health hospital system in Colorado	What is the effect of offering relationship skills education and other support services to low-income pregnant women and new mothers?	Web and telephone follow-up surveys 12 months after random assignment
Sites serving adult couples				
The Parenting Center	Empowering Families program for low-income romantically involved couples raising children	900 low-income romantically involved couples in Fort Worth, Texas	How does an integrated approach to relationship skills and economic stability services affect the outcomes of participating couples?	Web and telephone follow-up surveys 12 months after random assignment; NDNH data on employment outcomes
University of Florida	Text messaging intervention informed by behavioral insight theory to improve workshop attendance and completion	1,500 couples participating in relationship education workshops across five Florida counties	Can text messages informed by behavioral insight theory improve attendance at relationship skills education group sessions for couples?	Program attendance data gathered through nFORM

NDNH = National Directory of New Hires Data maintained by ACF's Office of Child Support Enforcement.

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II. EVALUATION OF RELATIONSHIP SMARTS PLUS IN GEORGIA

When delivering HMRE programming in schools, program providers often face the challenge of not having enough class time to deliver the full curriculum. HMRE curricula for high school students typically have 12 to 15 sessions each ranging in length from 45 to 90 minutes. In schools that do not have this much class time available, program providers might consider adapting or shortening the curriculum, reasoning that students are better off receiving at least some HMRE programming than none. However, there is currently no rigorous research evidence on whether shortening or significantly adapting an HMRE curriculum can dilute or negate the curriculum's intended effects.

To expand the available research evidence on school-based HMRE programming, the STREAMS evaluation team is collaborating with More Than Conquerors, Inc. (MTCI) in Atlanta, Georgia, to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the *Relationship Smarts Plus 3.0 (RS+)* curriculum. The full *RS+* curriculum includes 12 sessions, which MTCI delivers in two Atlanta-area high schools with funding from its HMRE grant. For the purpose of the STREAMS evaluation, MTCI also delivers a shortened 8-session version of the curriculum to students in different classrooms within the same schools. By randomizing groups of students by classroom, the evaluation will test the effectiveness of receiving either the full 12-session *RS+* curriculum or the shortened 8-session curriculum relative to receiving no HMRE programming.

Program design, implementation, and setting

MTCI is a nonprofit social service provider that serves at-risk families and youth in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The organization seeks to achieve its mission of improving the capacity of young people to form safe and stable family relationships by providing classes and events focused on relationship education, teen pregnancy prevention, abstinence and character education, and career mentoring. MTCI offers these classes and events through formal partnerships with a large network of area schools, recreation centers, hospitals, and churches. The organization employs a professional team of social workers, case managers, and educators, led by a management team that has worked together for more than 12 years.

MTCI has a long history of delivering HMRE programming with funding from OFA. The organization received two earlier rounds of grant funding, in 2006 and 2011, which it used to deliver HMRE programming to more than 2,000 high school students in the Atlanta area. In October 2015, MTCI received a third round of grant funding, including support for delivering the *RS+* curriculum. MTCI had not previously used this specific curriculum, so the grant also provided support for MTCI's educators to receive training on *RS+*.

As part of the current grant funding, MTCI is working through a partnership with the Gwinnet, Newton, and Rockdale County Health Departments (GNR Health) to deliver *RS+* in two large high schools in Gwinnett County, Georgia, northeast of Atlanta. In both schools, MTCI educators deliver the *RS+* curriculum as part of a semester-long health class for primarily 9th-grade students. The educators deliver the *RS+* sessions during 90-minute class periods on average once or twice per week, accounting for holidays and other school schedule constraints and closures. Student participation in the program is voluntary and requires consent from a

parent or guardian. For students who do not receive consent, school staff arrange alternative educational activities during the specified class periods.

The two participating schools serve predominately Hispanic and African American students from low-income families. According to preliminary analyses of data collected by the evaluation team near the start of the 2016–2017 school year, nearly 60 percent of the students in the program were Hispanic and 30 percent were African American. About 20 percent reported having been born outside of the United States and 44 percent reported speaking primarily Spanish at home. According to the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data, more than 80 percent of students in the school catchment areas were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

For the evaluation, students in the *RS+* classrooms receive one of two different versions of the curriculum (Table II.1). The full *RS+* curriculum has 12 90-minute sessions. The sessions cover such topics as knowledge of healthy relationships, communication and relationship skills, avoidance of teen dating violence, sexual decision making, and unplanned pregnancy. The shorter summary version of the curriculum includes 8 90-minute sessions. The summary curriculum covers most of the full curriculum but excludes the sessions on communication skills (sessions 8 and 9), sexual decision making (session 10), and unplanned pregnancy (session 11). MTCI consulted with members of the evaluation team and staff of the Dibble Institute, which distributes the *RS+* curriculum, in deciding which sessions to exclude from the summary curriculum.

Table II.1. Overview of *Relationship Smarts Plus (RS+)*

Session	Full curriculum	Summary curriculum
1: Who am I and where am I going?	✓	✓
2: Maturity issues and what I value	✓	✓
3: Attractions and infatuation	✓	✓
4: Principles of smart relationships	✓	✓
5: Is it a healthy relationship?	✓	✓
6: Decide, don't slide!	✓	✓
7: Dating violence and breaking up	✓	✓
8: Communication and healthy relationships	✓	
9: Communication challenges and more skills	✓	
10: Sexual decision-making	✓	
11: Unplanned pregnancy through the eyes of a child	✓	
12: Teens, technology, and social media	✓	✓

Design of the impact evaluation

Sample intake and random assignment. Sample enrollment began at the start of the 2016–2017 school year and is expected to continue for four semesters, until spring semester of the 2017–2018 school year. At the start of each semester, staff from MTCI and GNR Health work with each school to identify a list of health classrooms that will participate in the study for the upcoming semester. To meet the evaluation team's overall sample size targets for the study, each school is expected to identify an average of nine health classrooms per semester. Staff from MTCI, GNR Health, and the STREAMS evaluation team then work with school staff to distribute permission forms to the parents and guardians of students in the selected classrooms.

Members of the evaluation team developed the permission forms, which cover permission both to participate in the study and to receive programming from MTCI educators as part of the regular classroom instruction. The parents or guardians of these students have on average two to three weeks to sign and return the permission forms at the start of the semester. For any students who do not receive a completed permission form within this period, members of the evaluation team attempt to call the students' parents or guardians to request permission by phone. Only those students who receive permission either in writing or by phone are eligible to participate.

Concurrent with the permission process, separate members of the evaluation team work to randomly assign the participating health classrooms to one of three research groups: (1) a group that receives the full, 12-lesson *RS+* curriculum; (2) a group that receives the summary 8-session *RS+* curriculum; or (3) a control group that does not receive any HMRE programming. The evaluation team conducts random assignment separately for each school and with an even allocation of classrooms across the three research groups. For example, if a school identifies nine participating health classrooms in a given semester, the evaluation team randomly assigns three classrooms to each of the three research groups. To avoid any risk of the random assignment results influencing the permission process, staff from MTCI and the evaluation team withhold the random assignment results from school staff, parents, and students until after completion of the permission process and baseline data collection at the start of each semester.

Control condition. For classrooms assigned to either the control group or the group receiving the summary 8-session *RS+* curriculum, MTCI staff deliver supplementary sessions from a job readiness curriculum called *12 Pluses for Work Readiness and Career Success*. The sessions cover such topics as career planning, resume writing, planning for a job search, appropriate workplace attire, and interview skills. For classrooms assigned to the control group, MTCI educators deliver 12 90-minute sessions of the *12 Pluses* curriculum on average once or twice per week during the semester. For classrooms receiving the summary 8-session *RS+* curriculum, MTCI educators deliver 4 90-minute sessions of the *12 Pluses* curriculum after the class completes the 8 *RS+* sessions. With this design, students in all study classrooms receive the same total amount of instruction from the MTCI educators, but the content of the instruction differs across the study's three research groups. This design helps isolate the effects of the *RS+* curriculum by making other aspects of the classroom environment as similar as possible across the treatment and control groups. From a practical perspective, the design also helps simplify the logistics of the evaluation, because it enables the schools to keep the regular teaching staff and health curriculum on a consistent schedule across all the study classrooms, regardless of random assignment status.

Because MTCI delivers both the *RS+* curriculum and *12 Pluses* curriculum as part of an existing health class during the regular school day, there is relatively little chance for control group students to mistakenly receive the *RS+* sessions. In addition, MTCI uses different educators to deliver the *RS+* sessions and *12 Pluses* sessions each semester. It is possible control group students may receive second-hand information about the *RS+* sessions from friends or classmates in other health classes. However, without direct exposure to the *RS+* sessions or educators, it is unlikely for second-hand information alone to have a measurable impact on students' attitudes or behaviors (Keogh-Brown et al. 2007).

Data collection. For all students who receive permission from a parent or guardian to participate in the study, the evaluation team administers three rounds of surveys:

1. A baseline survey administered in health class after the completion of the permission process near the start of the semester.
2. A program exit survey administered in health class near the end of the semester, after the last session has been completed.
3. A one-year follow-up survey administered about 12 months after the baseline survey, either in school or by telephone.

Both the baseline and one-year follow-up surveys take about 45 minutes to complete and collect information on students' demographic characteristics; personal relationships; and relationship attitudes, skills, and experiences. The program exit survey takes about 25 minutes to complete and collects information on students' relationship attitudes and perceptions of the program. Students are asked for assent before each survey round and can choose to opt out of any survey.

For all three rounds of surveys, trained members of the evaluation team bring tablet computers into the study classrooms and ask students to complete the surveys using audio computer-assisted self-administered interviewing software. The surveys are available in both English and Spanish. Members of the evaluation team coordinate with staff from MTCI, GNR Health, and the two schools to determine the optimal schedule for administering the surveys, including make-up sessions for students who are absent from school during the initial survey administration. For the one-year follow-up survey, the evaluation team will administer telephone surveys with study participants who move out of the school district or are otherwise unavailable for the in-school group survey administration.

Key outcomes of interest. The evaluation team will assess program effectiveness primarily with data from the one-year follow-up survey. A prior evaluation of the *RS+* curriculum in Alabama high schools found favorable impacts of the curriculum on students' relationship attitudes and perceived communication skills measured a year later (Kerpelman et al. 2009). The STREAMS one-year follow-up survey includes the same measures. To comprehensively assess the curriculum, the evaluation team will also examine program impacts on measures of students' knowledge of healthy relationships, perceived relationship skills, attitudes toward dating violence and unplanned pregnancy, and relationship experiences and outcomes. The evaluation team will examine the same set of outcomes for students receiving the full 12-session *RS+* curriculum and those receiving the summary 8-session *RS+* curriculum to determine whether shortening the curriculum affects certain outcomes. The evaluation team will use data from the program exit survey to assess potential shorter-term impacts on students' attitudes and perceptions of the program.

Likely sample size and statistical power. The evaluation team designed the study with a projected sample size of about 1,600 students for the one-year follow-up survey. This sample size projection assumes that each school will identify nine participating health classrooms per semester, that sample enrollment will occur over four semesters, and an average class size of 32 students. The projection further assumes that 80 percent of the students will receive permission

from a parent or guardian to participate in the study, and the response rate to the one-year follow-up survey will range from 85 to 90 percent. These assumptions yield an enrolled baseline sample of 72 classrooms and 1,843 students, and a follow-up sample size ranging from 1,567 to 1,659 students depending on the response rate (either 85 or 90 percent).

This projected sample should generate adequate statistical power to address the key research questions of interest. The prior evaluation of *RS+* by Kerpelman et al. (2009) found an average effect size of 0.20 across seven indicators of students' attitudes and communication skills. For the present evaluation of *RS+* in Georgia, a projected follow-up sample size of 1,659 students, split evenly across the three research groups, yields a minimum detectable effect size of 0.14. Because this minimum detectable effect size is smaller than the average effect size reported by Kerpelman et al. (2009), the projected sample should be large enough to detect the expected impact of the program on students' outcomes.

Study schedule

The evaluation of *RS+* will be completed following the 2018–2019 school year. Sample intake and baseline data collection began in fall semester of the 2016–2017 school year and is expected to continue through spring semester of the 2017–2018 school year. In fall 2017, the evaluation team began administering one-year follow-up surveys to sample members in 10th grade. Follow-up survey data collection will continue through spring 2019. The team will prepare an impact report after completing the one-year follow-up survey data collection. In addition, members of the evaluation team conducted a process study site visit to MTCI and the participating schools in February 2017 and will complete a process study report summarizing the first year of programming in study schools.

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III. EVALUATION OF FWCA'S CAREER STREAMS PROGRAM

In response to the emphasis in the current round of HMRE grant funding on integrating relationship education and economic stability services, the FWCA in St. Louis, Missouri, has developed a new program that adds relationship education to a pre-employment training program for low-income job seekers. To integrate relationship education and economic stability services, program providers have typically taken the opposite approach of adding economic stability services to an existing relationship education program (Zaveri and Dion 2015). However, with this approach, providers have found that it can be hard to make full use of the economic stability services, because the people who sign up for relationship education programs can have different interests and needs when it comes to employment. FWCA's new program, called Career STREAMS (using the acronym from the evaluation), offers a potential solution to this challenge by building on the foundation of an existing pre-employment training program.

To test the potential of this strategy for integrating relationship education and economic stability services, the STREAMS evaluation team is collaborating with FWCA to rigorously evaluate the Career STREAMS program. The program integrates instruction from the *Within My Reach* relationship education curriculum into an existing pre-employment training program for low-income job seekers. The evaluation randomly assigns study participants to either a treatment group offered the Career STREAMS program or a control group offered FWCA's existing pre-employment training without any relationship education. The evaluation thus tests the effectiveness of an integrated approach to relationship education and economic stability services against economic stability services alone.

Program design, implementation, and setting

FWCA is a nonprofit social service provider offering a broad range of family support and workforce services to adults, adolescents, and families in the greater St. Louis area. The organization's current programming includes an early childhood development academy, a summer job league for youth, relationship education for high school students, and several education and employment training programs. FWCA is housed in the Metropolitan Education and Training (MET) Center, a large employment and training center located in St. Louis County just outside the western border of the city of St. Louis. In addition to housing FWCA's offices and programming, the MET Center also hosts a jobs center funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), an adult basic education program, and vocational training programs in fields ranging from nursing and life sciences to carpentry and heating and air conditioning services.

FWCA currently operates a pre-employment training initiative called Career Pathways Bridge, funded through a grant from DOL. The Pathways initiative serves low-income job seekers ages 18 to 30 through a combination of individualized case management and an intensive two-week job readiness workshop. Upon enrolling in Pathways, each participant is assigned a case manager, who works with the participant to develop an individualized employment plan. The plan includes goals for short-term or temporary employment as well as longer-term employment and career goals. Depending on the participant's longer-term goals, the plan may also include referrals to other education or skills-based training programs offered at the MET Center or through outside partners. The two-week job readiness workshop, led by a trained FWCA staff member, meets daily for seven to eight hours per day, focusing on pre-employment

training topics such as resume writing, job search strategies, and interviewing skills. Some lessons also feature a guest speaker to address related topics, such as money management and financial literacy. After completing the two-week workshop, participants have continued contact with their case managers while searching for employment and pursuing any additional education or training programs identified in their individualized employment plans.

FWCA used part of its HMRE grant funding from OFA to expand the existing Pathways program into a new, integrated relationship education and pre-employment training program called Career STREAMS. In particular, Career STREAMS expands on the existing Pathways program in four main ways:

- 1. Integrating relationship education and additional financial literacy education into the two-week job readiness workshop.** For Career STREAMS, FWCA added 15 hours of content from the *Within My Reach* relationship education curriculum and 3 hours of content from the *Money Habitudes* financial literacy curriculum into the two-week job readiness workshop. The new content is blended with the existing workshop materials and activities so that program participants receive the different types of content in a cohesive, unified way. For example, a typical workshop session may include one or two lessons from the *Within My Reach* curriculum, several pre-employment training activities, and a guest speaker or interactive activity from the *Money Habitudes* curriculum (Table II.1). FWCA developed the integrated workshop lessons with input from its STREAMS program technical assistance team, as part of the program technical assistance resources available through STREAMS (described in Chapter I). To provide time for the new content in the existing workshop schedule, FWCA streamlined some of the existing employment content and adjusted the daily schedule to allow participants to stay on site for lunch every day.
- 2. Adding five one-hour booster sessions on relationship education.** Following the two-week workshop, Career STREAMS offers five one-hour booster sessions once a week for five weeks. Three of the five sessions cover additional relationship education material from the *Within My Reach* curriculum not included in the initial two-week workshop. The other two booster sessions use supplementary material from the *Winning the Workplace Challenge* relationship education curriculum and are designed to reinforce key skills and concepts taught during the initial two-week workshop.
- 3. Hiring and training new program facilitators.** To deliver the new two-week workshop and booster sessions for Career STREAMS, FWCA hired additional program facilitators. The new facilitators received training in both the employment content from the existing Pathways program and the new content from *Within My Reach*, *Money Habitudes*, and *Winning the Workplace Challenge*. As a result, the facilitators have the training to deliver the entire Career STREAMS workshop and booster sessions. This staffing plan aims to further integrate the employment and relationship education content.
- 4. Offering incentives for program participation and completion.** Recognizing the time required to complete the two-week workshop and five booster sessions, FWCA offers Career STREAMS participants up to \$75 in gift cards for completing the program. These incentives fall within the guidelines OFA has established for the use of incentives in the HMRE grant program.

Table III.1. Example Career STREAMS daily workshop session agenda

Time	Activity
9:00 – 9:10 a.m.	Welcome activity
9:10 – 10:15 a.m.	Healthy Relationships: What They Are and What They Aren't (WMR Unit 2)
10:15 – 10:45 a.m.	Dangerous Patterns in Relationships (WMR Unit 7, Lesson 2)
10:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Interviewing in Today's Workforce: How are You Rated During an Interview?
12:00 – 12:30 p.m.	Lunch
12:30 – 1:15 p.m.	Common Interview Questions
1:15 – 2:00 p.m.	Videotaped Practice Answering Interview Questions
2:00 – 2:15 p.m.	Break
2:15 – 3:50 p.m.	Guest Speaker from Local Bank: Understanding Savings and Credit
3:50 – 4:00 p.m.	Key Takeaways and Preview of Tomorrow's Session

WMR = Within My Reach.

Career STREAMS otherwise shares the same key features and components of the original Pathways program. All participants are assigned to an employment case worker who helps them develop an individualized employment plan with both short- and long-term employment goals. Participants maintain contact with their case workers after completing the Career STREAMS workshop and booster sessions. The program serves the same target population of low-income job seekers ages 18 to 30.

Design of the impact evaluation

Sample intake and random assignment. Recruitment and sample intake for the evaluation build on the existing procedures FWCA has developed for the original Pathways program. For recruitment, FWCA has a contract with a marketing firm to conduct a public advertising campaign. The campaign includes flyers, social media, radio advertisements, and advertisements on public transportation and in transit stations. In addition, the MET Center hosts biweekly orientation sessions covering all of FWCA's education and employment programming. Prospective applicants can be referred to Career STREAMS after attending one of these orientation sessions.

All prospective applicants must make an appointment at the MET Center to meet with an FWCA intake and assessment specialist. During this appointment, applicants receive more detailed information on FWCA's programming and, if interested, complete an enrollment packet and initial skills assessment. For the purpose of the evaluation, applicants also receive information about the STREAMS evaluation and an opportunity to participate in the new Career STREAMS program. Applicants who agree to participate in STREAMS complete the evaluation consent process and baseline survey by telephone with a trained Mathematica interviewer. After an applicant has completed the interview, the FWCA intake worker uses a special module of the nFORM management information system to randomly assign the participant to either Career STREAMS or to the original Pathways program.

Control condition. Participants assigned to the control group are eligible to participate in the original Pathways pre-employment training program. This program includes the original two-week job readiness workshop without any relationship education instruction. Control group participants also receive the individualized case management and other employment training and support services offered through original Pathways program. To limit the chances of any interaction between participants in the Career STREAMS and Pathways groups, the two-week workshops for each program are held on separate floors of the MET Center and taught by different facilitators. Only the participants in Career STREAMS can attend the five hour-long booster sessions or receive the incentives for program participation and completion.

Data collection. To document the outcomes of study participants, the evaluation team will collect survey data at two time points: (1) a baseline survey administered at study enrollment; and (2) a follow-up survey conducted about a year after study enrollment. Trained Mathematica interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) software will administer the baseline survey. To ensure high response rates, respondents will have two options for completing the follow-up: (1) a self-administered web survey that they can complete on a smart phone, tablet, or computer; or (2) a CATI survey completed with a trained interviewer over the telephone. The surveys are available in both English and Spanish. In addition, the evaluation team plans to supplement the survey data with records from the National Directory of New Hires, a database of wage and employment information maintained by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Key outcomes of interest. The evaluation will focus on two main groups of outcomes. First, the evaluation team will assess program impacts on key measures of relationship skills, attitudes, and experiences targeted by the *Within My Reach* curriculum. These measures include improved conflict management skills, improved ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships, and reduced exposure to unhealthy relationships and relationship violence.

Second, the evaluation team will assess program impacts on key measures of employment behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes. Although the research design allows participants in both the treatment and control group to receive similar economic stability services, it is possible that adding relationship education to the Career STREAMS group will have positive reinforcing effects on participants' employment behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes. To test for these possible reinforcing effects, the evaluation team will assess program impacts on such outcomes as job-seeking behaviors, perceived barriers to employment, material hardship, and employment and earnings.

Likely sample size and statistical power. The evaluation plan calls for the enrolling and randomly assigning 900 individuals. Assuming an 80 percent response rate to the one-year follow-up survey, this projected sample will allow for detecting an effect size of 0.18 on continuous outcomes such as a scale measuring conflict management skills. For binary outcomes, such as whether the sample member has experienced an incident of intimate partner violence in the past year, the projected sample size will allow for detecting an impact of 8 percentage points. Because Career STREAMS is a new program that has not been previously tested, there is no existing evidence on the expected magnitude of program impacts. However, an earlier pre-post analysis of the *Within My Reach* curriculum delivered to low-income adults found improvements on communication and conflict management of 25 to 30 percent of a standard deviation six

months after the program ended (Antle et al. 2013). These results provide suggestive evidence that the projected sample size should generate adequate statistical power for the magnitude of impacts the program can generate.

Study schedule

Sample enrollment for the Career STREAMS study began in late August 2016 and is expected to continue through 2018. The evaluation team began administering the one-year follow-up surveys in fall 2017 and will continue through early 2020. The evaluation team will prepare an impact report after completing follow-up survey data collection. In addition, the evaluation team conducted a process study site visit to the Career STREAMS program in late 2017 and will complete a process study report documenting program services in 2018.

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IV. EVALUATION OF UNIVERSITY OF DENVER'S MOTHERWISE PROGRAM

Many HMRE programs are designed to serve adults as individuals. Similar to HMRE programs for couples, HMRE programs designed to serve adults as individuals typically use a standardized curriculum to deliver HMRE instruction through a series of workshops led by a trained facilitator. Program participants may or may not be in a couple relationship when they attend the program and do not attend group sessions with a partner. Curricula designed to serve adults as individuals cover such topics as how to choose a partner wisely, how to recognize unhealthy relationships and leave those relationships safely, how to improve communication skills and manage conflict effectively, and how relationship choices can have implications for other aspects of one's life (such as employment outcomes or a child's well-being).

Despite the prevalence of these programs, there is little rigorous research on their effectiveness. A pre-post study of *Within My Reach*, a commonly used HMRE curriculum designed to serve adults as individuals, reported high levels of participant satisfaction and improved relationship knowledge and skills (Antle et al. 2013). Researchers have conducted several small studies of *PICK a Partner*, another HMRE curriculum designed to serve adults as individuals. A quasi-experimental study reported high levels of participants' satisfaction and increased knowledge and confidence in their ability to develop healthy relationships (Van Epp et al. 2008). A small descriptive study also reported positive participants' experiences with the program (Manning et al. 2008).

To expand the available research evidence on HMRE programming designed to serve adults as individuals, the STREAMS evaluation team is collaborating with researchers from the University of Denver to conduct a rigorous evaluation of its MotherWise program for low-income women who are pregnant or have just had a baby. MotherWise integrates the *Within My Reach* curriculum into a comprehensive set of services that includes case management, as well as optional couple relationship education workshops for a subset of participants and their partners. The evaluation tests the effect of this full package of services on mothers' relationship outcomes, as well as other outcomes related to child well-being, such as co-parenting and father involvement.

Program design, implementation, and setting

Researchers at the University of Denver, who are also the developers of the *Within My Reach* relationship education curriculum, developed the MotherWise program. For MotherWise, the researchers received HMRE grant funding from OFA to deliver the *Within My Reach* curriculum to low-income women who are expecting or have just had a baby. The University of Denver partners with Denver Health to implement the program. Women receiving prenatal and postnatal services through the Denver Health system are being recruited for the study. Denver Health is the primary provider for Medicaid-funded births in the Denver area, with 85 percent of all births paid for by Medicaid. University of Denver supplements this primary recruitment source with referrals from other medical and social service agencies that serve low-income pregnant women and new mothers in the Denver area. The University of Denver also leads the delivery of program services.

MotherWise has the following three core components:

- 1. Core workshop sessions.** The core component of the MotherWise program is 24 hours of group workshops, organized into six 4-hour weekly sessions (Table III.1). MotherWise offers on-site child care and each group session includes a break for a meal that the program provides. The main content of these sessions is the 15-hour *Within My Reach* relationship education curriculum. Instruction related to mother–infant relationships, with content developed by a Denver Health pediatrician, supplements each session. The four-hour sessions also include a break for refreshments and informal socializing. Two group facilitators lead the sessions and offer them in both English and Spanish.
- 2. Case management.** Case managers begin meeting with MotherWise participants shortly after enrollment and aim to meet with them weekly, in person or by phone, until participants have completed the core workshop sessions. MotherWise case managers make referrals to a number of services, including domestic violence resources; mental health services; job readiness, job placement, and financial literacy classes; and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and TANF offices.
- 3. Supplemental couples workshops.** MotherWise offers optional couples-based relationship skills workshops to participants who are in committed relationships. After participants have completed the core workshop sessions, they decide whether they would like to participate with their partners in a single-session couples’ workshop offered in one of two formats: a four-hour session offered on a weekday evening or a seven-hour session offered on a weekend. The workshops for English-speaking couples use core components of the *PREP 8.0* relationship skills education curriculum. Because *PREP 8.0* is not currently available in Spanish, the workshops for Spanish-speaking couples use core components of the *Within Our Reach* curriculum. The University of Denver anticipates that about 20 percent of MotherWise participants will choose to participate in couples workshops with their partners.

Design of the impact evaluation

Sample intake and random assignment. Women are recruited for the evaluation primarily from the clinic at which they receive prenatal or postnatal services. Program staff identify eligible pregnant women from the Denver Health electronic medical record system. Recruiters approach women who have been identified as potentially eligible for the study at medical appointments and describe the study to them. If the woman is interested in the study, the recruiters set up an intake appointment. When a potential study participant arrives at an intake appointment, an intake specialist verifies her eligibility and connects her by telephone to a trained Mathematica interviewer. The interviewer then completes the consent process with the applicant and administers the STREAMS baseline survey. After the applicant has completed the interview, the intake worker uses a special module in nFORM to randomly assign the participant to either the MotherWise group or a control group.

Table IV.1. Overview of the six MotherWise core workshop sessions

Session	<i>Within My Reach</i> content covered	Mother infant relationship content covered
Session 1	Effects of troubled relationships Is it safe? Love pyramid Should we live together?	Creating a healthy relationship with your baby Sleep
Session 2	Sliding v. deciding Chemistry of love Seven Principles of smart love Taking your own growth and development seriously Learning about personality style	Understanding your baby's needs and cues Feeding your newborn baby
Session 3	The powerful influence of family of origin What to do about family background patterns The legacy of abuse and other childhood hurts The powerful role expectations play in relationships Revisiting sliding v. deciding The four communication danger signs Domestic violence: Conflict, aggression, and serious danger	Being a safe caregiver Stress and your baby
Session 4	What issues affect relationships and marriages most? Issues and events model Conflict's effect on children Time out: A way to stop escalation Complaining and griping: Being heard, not ignored A better way: Using XYZ statements Speaker listener technique: Introduction and practice	Playing with your baby
Session 5	Speaker listener technique continued When to use the speaker listener technique and with whom Problem solving Ground rules for good communication Where's your head at? Infidelity Forgiveness and (maybe) making up Two types of commitment Walking the talk: Priorities and sacrifice	
Session 6	What commitment means to children Making new families work What roles do fathers play? Hanging in there when you think it's probably worth it, but times are tough How to really break up Is taking a break from relationships a good idea? What you need to make the tough decisions Reaching into your future	

Control condition. Control group members are not eligible for MotherWise but are eligible for any other services available in the community.

Data collection. To document the outcomes of study participants, the evaluation team will collect survey data at two time points: (1) a baseline survey administered at study enrollment; and (2) a follow-up survey conducted about a year later. Trained Mathematica interviewers using CATI software will conduct the baseline survey over the telephone. To ensure high response rates, respondents will have two options for completing the follow-up: (1) a self-administered web survey that they can complete on a smart phone, tablet, or computer; or (2) a CATI survey completed with a trained interviewer over the telephone. The surveys are available in both English and Spanish. The evaluation team may supplement the survey data with administrative records data from the Denver Health system to document birth outcomes.

Key outcomes of interest. The primary focus of the impact analysis will be to examine the effects of MotherWise on communication and conflict management skills, the quality of co-parenting relationship with the baby's father, the number of romantic and sexual partners, and incidents of intimate partner violence. The evaluation team selected these outcomes because they align with the program's main goals and because one could reasonably expect to observe impacts on these outcomes within the study's one-year follow-up period. The impact analysis will also examine effects on other potential program outcomes, such as attitudes toward healthy relationships and father involvement.

Likely sample size and statistical power. The evaluation plan for the MotherWise program calls for enrolling and randomly assigning about 900 new or expectant mothers, split evenly between the treatment and control groups. Assuming an 80 percent response rate to the follow-up survey, this projected sample will allow for detecting an effect size of 0.18 on continuous outcomes such as communication skills or the quality of the co-parenting relationship. For binary outcomes, such as whether the sample member has experienced an incident of intimate partner violence in the past year, the projected sample size will allow for detecting an impact of 8 percentage points. Little rigorous research is available to provide guidance on the likely magnitude of the effects of an HMRE program serving single adults. However, an earlier pre-post analysis of the *With My Reach* curriculum delivered to low-income adults found improvements on communication and conflict management of 25 to 30 percent of a standard deviation six months after the program ended (Antle et al. 2013). These results suggest that the projected sample size should generate adequate statistical power for the magnitude of impacts the MotherWise program may generate.

Study schedule

Sample enrollment for the MotherWise study began in September 2016 and is expected to continue through 2018. The evaluation team began administering the one-year follow-up survey in fall 2017 and will continue administering the survey through early 2020. The evaluation team will prepare an impact report after completing follow-up survey data collection. In addition, the evaluation team conducted a process study site visit to the MotherWise program in late 2017 and will complete a process study report documenting program services in 2018.

V. EVALUATION OF THE PARENTING CENTER'S EMPOWERING FAMILIES PROGRAM

Research suggests that children fare best when raised in stable, low-conflict, two-parent families (Amato 2005; Carlson and Corcoran 2001; Kim 2011; McLanahan and Sandafur 1994). For this reason, a central goal of federal HMRE funding is to improve the lives of children by increasing the stability and healthy functioning of their parents' relationship. However, prior research on HMRE programs serving low-income families with children has shown limited evidence of effectiveness (Lundquist et al. 2014; Wood et al. 2014). The limited success of programs tested to date points to the need to implement new approaches for offering HMRE services to this population and to test their effectiveness.

In its HMRE grants awarded in 2015, ACF encouraged implementing more comprehensive approaches. Specifically, the agency prioritized programs that planned to offer both healthy relationship and economic stability services such as job search assistance or employment training to low-income families (Office of Family Assistance 2015). The agency hopes that by integrating HMRE and economic stability services, these two program elements will have reinforcing effects on relationship, family, and economic stability outcomes. ACF's PACT evaluation is currently testing two HMRE programs that combine relationship education and economic stability services, in El Paso, Texas, and the Bronx, New York. Impact findings for these programs will be available in 2018.

To expand the available research evidence on HMRE programming that combines healthy relationship and economic stability services, STREAMS evaluation team is collaborating with the Parenting Center in Fort Worth, Texas, to rigorously evaluate its Empowering Families program for low-income couples raising children together. Empowering Families is built on *Family Wellness*, a relationship education curriculum that has not yet been rigorously studied. The Parenting Center has integrated *Family Wellness* into a comprehensive set of services that includes case management, employment services, and financial coaching. The evaluation will test the effect of this full package of services on couples' relationship and employment outcomes. The evaluation will also examine effects on outcomes that could later have consequences for child well-being, such as co-parenting and father involvement.

Program design, implementation, and setting

The Parenting Center is a nonprofit, social service agency in Fort Worth, Texas. The organization has served the families of Fort Worth and surrounding communities since it was established in 1974. The Parenting Center offers services focused on parenting and relationship skills, with a particular emphasis on services designed to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect. It began offering healthy relationship services in 2004.

The Parenting Center uses its grant funds to offer Empowering Families to low-income romantically involved couples raising children. The Parenting Center delivers the relationship skills education content and two partner organizations—the Community Learning Center, Inc. (CLC) and Pathfinders—deliver the economic stability content. The voluntary program has four core components:

1. **Core workshop sessions.** The core Empowering Families workshop is organized into eight 2.5-hour weekly sessions. The main content of these sessions is based on the *Family Wellness* relationship education curriculum, which is covered in six sessions led by two trained facilitators employed by the Parenting Center (Table V.1). The Parenting Center facilitators and the partner organizations, CLC and Pathfinders, co-lead the remaining two sessions on career planning and financial literacy, respectively. Workshop sessions are held in the evening and on weekends to accommodate participants' work schedules. The program offers on-site child care, a meal before each workshop, and transportation assistance to encourage regular attendance. Programming is available in both English and Spanish.
2. **Employment supports.** Early in their participation in Empowering Families, a Parenting Center case manager assesses each participant's employment needs and refers to CLC those participants who could benefit from intensive employment supports and services. Those referred to CLC for employment supports are assigned an employment specialist who, at an initial meeting works with them to complete an assessment and develop a service plan. Participants then attend a CLC-led workshop orienting them to their employment services. Employment specialists help participants access CLC job search assistance services, including resume development, interview skills building, and transportation to job interviews. As appropriate, some Empowering Families participants receive short-term job training in fields such as certified nursing assistant, information technology, manufacturing, and food preparation.
3. **Financial coaching.** Each couple is eligible for four sessions of financial coaching with a Pathfinders financial coach. During these sessions, which are offered at the Parenting Center, financial coaches provide tailored support to help couples set goals about money; saving, budgeting, and building wealth; and credit.
4. **Case management.** The Parenting Center assigns couples in Empowering Families to a case manager soon after their entry into the program; couples receive case management for about six months. In addition to assessing each participant's employment needs (described earlier), case managers reinforce curriculum concepts delivered in the workshops and may provide referrals as needed to other social service agencies. Case managers are available before each weekly group workshop to meet with couples on their caseloads. They also reach out regularly to couples on their caseload by phone and aim to have periodic in-person meetings.

Table V.1. The eight workshop sessions for Empowering Families

Week	Topic	Organization of lead presenter
1	Getting started: being a strong team	The Parenting Center
2	Two worlds, one relationship	The Parenting Center
3	Building a strong team	The Parenting Center
4	Vision for your career	CLC/The Parenting Center
5	Parents as Leaders/Parents as Models/Parents in Healthy Families	The Parenting Center
6	Financial literacy: Money Matters and Goal Setting and Budgeting	Pathfinders/The Parenting Center
7	As children grow	The Parenting Center
8	Keeping the fire alive	The Parenting Center

Design of the impact evaluation

Sample intake and random assignment. The Parenting Center aims to recruit couples who are economically disadvantaged, raising children, and likely to want both relationship skills and employment services. To be eligible for program services, both members of the couple must: (1) be 18 or older; (2) report that they are in a committed relationship with their partner; (3) be interested in participating in a program that offers both relationship skills and economic stability services; and (4) report that they are not currently experiencing domestic violence. In addition, at least one member of the couple must have a biological or adopted child who is younger than 18 and lives with the couple at least half time. Recruiters work to reach eligible couples in various locations in the community, including family health clinics, local elementary schools, Head Start programs, houses of worship, and community centers. Services are available in both English and Spanish.

When they identify an interested couple, recruiters schedule the couple for an intake appointment at the Parenting Center to complete the study enrollment process. At this appointment, an intake specialist confirms study eligibility and completes the domestic violence screening. The intake worker then calls the Mathematica survey center and connects each member of the couple to a trained interviewer who works with them to complete the study consent process and the STREAMS baseline survey. After both members of the couple have completed the interview, the intake worker uses a special module in nFORM to randomly assign the couple to either the Empowering Families group or a control group. When this process is complete, the intake worker informs the couple of their research status.

Control condition. Control group members are not eligible for Empowering Families but are eligible for any other services available in the community.

Data collection. To document the outcomes of study participants, the evaluation team will collect survey data from both members of the couple at two time points: (1) a baseline survey administered at study enrollment; and (2) a follow-up survey conducted about a year later. Trained interviewers using CATI software will administer the baseline survey over the telephone. To ensure high response rates, respondents will have two options for completing the follow-up: (1) a self-administered web survey that they can complete on a smart phone, tablet, or computer; or (2) a CATI interview completed with a trained interviewer over the telephone. The surveys are available in both English and Spanish. In addition, the evaluation team plans to supplement the survey data with records from the National Directory of New Hires, a database of wage and employment information maintained by ACF's Office of Child Support Enforcement.

Key outcomes of interest. The focus of the impact analysis will be to examine program effects on outcomes that are most central to program goals and on which one can reasonably expect to observe impacts within a one-year period. Outcomes of primary interest include those measuring relationship quality, co-parenting, father involvement, employment and earnings, and economic well-being. The analysis will also examine program effects on potential mediating outcomes, such as attitudes toward healthy relationships and marriage, and steps respondents have taken to find better jobs or plan for their financial futures.

Likely sample size and statistical power. Empowering Families is expected to enroll and randomly assign about 900 eligible couples, split evenly between the two research groups. Assuming an 85 percent couple-level response rate,³ this projected sample size will allow for detecting an effect size of about 0.17 on continuous outcomes such as relationship quality or co-parenting. The Oklahoma Building Strong Families site generated impacts of this magnitude on measures of relationship quality at the 15-month follow-up (Wood et al. 2010). For binary outcomes such as poverty status or whether the family has experienced material hardship in the past year, we will be able to detect impacts of 8 percentage points.

Study schedule

Sample enrollment for the Empowering Families study began in September 2016 and is expected to continue through 2018. The evaluation team began administering the follow-up survey in fall 2017 and will continue administering the survey through early 2020. The evaluation team will prepare an impact report after completing follow-up survey data collection. In addition, the evaluation team will conduct a process study site visit to the Empowering Families program in 2018 and will then complete a process study report documenting program services.

³ The couple-level response rate is the percentage of couples for which at least one member responds to the follow-up survey. For couple-level measures, such as relationship quality and co-parenting that combine information from the responses of both members of the couple, if only one member responds to the survey, the evaluation team will impute the response of the other member. For this reason, the couple-level response rate is the relevant response rate for determining statistical power.

VI. EVALUATION OF TEXT MESSAGING INTERVENTIONS IN FLORIDA

Findings on program participation from prior federal evaluations of workshop-based HMRE programs indicate that program providers can face challenges getting enrolled couples to regularly attend voluntary workshop sessions (Dion et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2012; Zaveri and Baumgartner 2016). For example, for the Building Strong Families evaluation, 45 percent of couples offered Building Strong Families services never attended a workshop session (Wood et al. 2012). The 55 percent who did attend spent on average 21 hours in the workshop sessions, about half the hours of programming offered in most sites. When the STREAMS evaluation team was identifying research priorities for the study, federal staff from OFA noted that among the most common technical assistance requests they receive from HMRE grantees is for help improving program attendance.

A large and growing research literature from outside the field of HMRE programming suggests that text messages informed by behavioral science can be an effective way to improve program participation and attendance. Hasvold and Wootton (2011) conducted a systematic review of studies providing telephone and text message reminders about hospital appointments; they found that, on average across 33 studies, missed appointments decreased 34 percent from baseline. Studies have also shown that the content of reminders makes a difference (Hallsworth et al. 2015). More broadly, a key insight from the rapidly growing field of behavioral science holds that reminders can significantly increase the rate at which people complete their intended actions (Mullainathan and Shafir 2013; Bergman 2015; and Castleman and Page 2015).

In collaboration with researchers from the University of Florida, the STREAMS evaluation team is examining the effectiveness of text messages informed by behavioral science as a practical, relatively low-cost strategy for improving couples' attendance at HMRE group workshop sessions. The evaluation will add to the growing effort across the federal government to study the use of behavioral interventions—or nudges—to improve social programs. In particular, the evaluation will make two unique contributions to the literature: (1) it will examine the effectiveness of low-cost text messaging to promote attendance by couples in voluntary HMRE programs; and (2) it will examine the relative effectiveness of the specific content of different messages.

Program design, implementation, and setting

In October 2015, OFA awarded a five-year grant to researchers from the University of Florida to deliver HMRE programming through the University's Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) Extension. Although university-based extension programs are often known for their historical roles in supporting agricultural programs and services, most have broadened their focus over time to serve the more general purpose of connecting university experts and resources with local communities. At the University of Florida, the IFAS Extension currently offers programming on diverse topics ranging from health and nutrition to money management and consumer rights, in addition to its more traditional agricultural programs and services.

With funding from the HMRE grant program, the IFAS Extension offers voluntary healthy marriage and relationship education workshops to adult couples in six Florida counties. Programming in Citrus, Duvall, Manatee, Palm Beach, and Santa Rosa counties began in summer 2016. Programming in Alachua County began in March 2017. In each county, local IFAS Extension staff identify couples interested in participating in the workshops and deliver the workshop sessions at either the county extension office or an alternative community location. Each workshop comprises five 2.5-hour sessions, offered once a week for five weeks. The first session focuses primarily on intake activities, and the final session includes a program exit survey. The remaining sessions feature instruction from either the *ELEVATE* or *Smarts Steps* relationship education curricula. In total, the five workshop sessions provide about 9.0 hours of HMRE content. The counties plan to deliver the five-week workshop cycle on a consistent schedule up to nine times each year. The workshops are offered as part of the IFAS Extension's broader Strengthening Marriages and Relationship Training (SMART) Couples Program, which is advertised through the county extension offices and on a public website (SMARTcouples.org).

To develop the text messaging interventions intended to promote attendance at the workshop sessions, the STREAMS evaluation team reviewed existing literature and consulted with experts and the program staff in Florida to identify behavioral "bottlenecks" participants might encounter to attending the group sessions. For example, couples might forget the date or time of the session, fail to plan for child care or transportation, lose initial motivation, or decide other activities are more important than attending the session. To account for these issues, the STREAMS evaluation team developed an initial set of three distinct text messaging interventions, each comprising a series of nine messages. For each intervention, the nine text messages are delivered at consistent intervals across the five workshop sessions. Participants receive three texts between Sessions 1 and 2, and then two texts each week after Sessions 2, 3, and 4. Both members of the couple receive the texts as long as both have cell phones. If a couple share a phone, only one phone receives the texts. Each couple receives only one of the three interventions.

The three text messaging interventions are as follows:

- **Intervention 1** offers future-oriented messages with personalized reminders and motivational nudges based on program goals. These messages focus on the future benefits for the couple of attending the sessions.
- **Intervention 2** includes present-oriented messages with personalized reminders, prompts to plan ahead for child care and transportation, nudges that emphasize progress the couple has already made attending the sessions, and prompts to commit to attend future sessions. These messages focus on addressing factors that might interfere with the couple's attendance, or on highlighting the couple's progress in completing the workshop sessions.
- **Intervention 3** provides simple reminder messages noting the date and time of the next workshop, without any behavioral nudges.

Text Message Examples

Intervention 1: Future-oriented reminders

- Hi [Name]! Tomorrow's [ELEVATE/Smart Steps] class is about how you and [PARTNER] can take care of yourselves and each other. This will help you build a stronger relationship. See you at [time]!

Intervention 2: Present-oriented reminders

- Hi [Name], your next [ELEVATE/Smart Steps] class is tomorrow at [time]. Please check with [PARTNER] and let us know you both can attend by texting back "Yes". Thanks!

Intervention 3: Simple reminders without behavioral nudges

- [Name], your next [ELEVATE/Smart Steps] class is on [DAY] at [TIME].

All three interventions incorporate several best practices for text message reminders (Reich 2015). The messages are personalized with the participant's first name, and in most cases the name of the participant's partner. The messages provide the date and time of the next session and are limited to 160 characters as much as feasible to prevent the texts from splitting into two messages. The messages also emphasize the program's focus on couples and the expectation that couples should attend together, consistent with the goals of HMRE programming designed for couples.

To deliver the text messages, the STREAMS evaluation team created an account with an automated online text messaging platform, SignalVine. For each of the three interventions, the evaluation team programmed a string of messages for automatic delivery at certain dates and times. Whenever a new group of couples is randomized (described in the following section), the evaluation team provides SignalVine with a small set of information about each participant (first name; first name of partner; phone number; county of program; and the name, time, and dates of their workshop series), as well as a treatment group indicator. Automating message delivery helps ensure that all messages are sent consistently on the correct date and time.

Design of the impact evaluation

Sample intake and random assignment. Sample intake for the evaluation takes place during the first weekly workshop session. To participate in the evaluation, both members of a couple attending the workshop must (1) consent to participate in the STREAMS evaluation; and (2) provide at least one valid mobile phone number to receive the messages. Participation in the evaluation is voluntary. Couples who do not participate can still attend the workshops but do not receive any text message reminders.

The random assignment approach for the evaluation uses a Bayesian adaptive design that enables the evaluation team to adjust the random assignment probabilities for assigning couples to research groups over time (Finucane et al. 2015). Initially, the evaluation team randomly assigned couples in roughly equal numbers to one of four research groups: one of the three behaviorally informed text messaging interventions or to the study's control group. As the study progresses and the evaluation team accumulates evidence on the relative effectiveness of the different text messaging interventions, the team will adjust the random assignment probabilities

to allocate more couples to the interventions that appear most promising. If the accumulating evidence can clearly establish that one intervention is definitively less effective than the others, the evaluation team will stop assigning couples to that intervention and potentially replace it with a new intervention. This adaptive design enables the evaluation team to test a larger number of interventions with greater statistical power than would be possible under a more traditional random assignment approach.

Control condition. Couples in the control group remain enrolled in the workshop sessions but do not receive any text messages from STREAMS.

Data collection. The evaluation will draw on data from two main sources. First, OFA's funding requirements for the HMRE grant program require all workshop participants to complete an applicant characteristics survey and program entrance survey upon enrolling in the workshop. In Florida, the local IFAS Extension staff administer these surveys on the first day of the workshop. The evaluation team will use responses from these surveys to document the demographic and other personal characteristics of workshop participants. Second, the funding requirements for the HMRE grant program also require the local IFAS Extension staff to record detailed information on the attendance of each couple at each workshop session. The evaluation team will use this detailed attendance information to assess the relative effectiveness of the different text messaging interventions.

Key outcomes of interest. The evaluation team designed the text messaging interventions with the goal of improving workshop attendance as the key outcome. Because the HMRE workshops are designed for couples, the interventions focus specifically on promoting the attendance of both partners. The evaluation team will examine the impacts of the text messaging interventions on both (1) the total number of sessions the couple attended; and (2) whether the couple attended all five workshop sessions.

Likely sample size and statistical power. To account for the Bayesian adaptive design used for random assignment, the evaluation team conducted an analysis to jointly determine: (1) the necessary sample size; (2) the number of different text messaging interventions that could be tested; and (3) the rules for adjusting the random assignment probabilities and replacing an ineffective intervention. From the results of this analysis, the team decided to target an overall sample size of 1,500 couples and to begin the study with four research groups. The team will consider adjusting the proportion of couples assigned to the four research groups after each cycle of the five-session HMRE workshop, and will replace an ineffective intervention when the proportion of entering couples assigned drops below 5 percent (as long as at least one other significant intervention effect has been detected). The analysis further suggested that the first opportunity to consider replacing an ineffective intervention is unlikely to occur until the study has enrolled at least half of the target sample size of 1,500 couples.

Study schedule

Sample enrollment began in January 2017 and is expected to continue for about 30 months, until summer 2019. The evaluation team will prepare an impact report after it has recorded workshop attendance information for all study participants. In addition, members of the evaluation team expect to conduct a process study site visit to the participating IFAS Extension agencies in 2018 and will complete a process study report documenting program services.

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