

# Cultural Strategies to Enhance Participation of Hispanics in Family Strengthening Programs

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## HISPANICS AND FAMILY-STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS: Cultural Strategies to Enhance Program Participation

### Introduction

Human service providers increasingly recognize that many interventions (e.g., parent training, marriage education) are designed primarily by and for a white, non-minority population.<sup>1</sup> Developers of human services interventions and program providers need to be mindful of the extent to which interventions may not resonate with a range of minority, non-white populations.

There are some indications that Hispanics, the fastest growing population in the United States, are at risk for negative family outcomes, but few family-strengthening programs have been adapted to address their distinct cultural needs. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), funded the Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHMI) Grantee Implementation Evaluation to examine ways in which nine federally-funded healthy marriage grantees have developed and adapted culturally relevant and appropriate programs to strengthen Hispanic marital and family relationships. This fifth brief describes the adaptations and refinements undertaken by the grantees to make their services more culturally responsive. The adaptations include addressing issues of language, diversity, racism, and immigration, and incorporating cultural constructs like *familismo*, *confianza*, *personalismo*, and *respeto*.

Making appropriate program adaptations to address the backgrounds and life circumstances of people of different cultural, racial, ethnic, or socio-economic backgrounds may improve the recruitment, retention, overall participation, and effectiveness of important interventions.

### Why Hispanics and Why Family-Strengthening?

Hispanics represent an important and diverse group of Americans for whom program adaptations are being and should continue to be explored. An estimated 52 million people identify as Hispanic, approximately 16.7 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>2</sup> Hispanics are currently the nation's largest minority group, continue to grow, and are expected to be 30 percent of the U.S. population by 2050.<sup>3</sup> Additional trends suggest the demand for family strengthening services will also grow. For instance, from 2001-2011, the birth rate for unmarried Hispanic women increased 30 percent.<sup>4</sup> In 2009, 6.0 percent of Hispanic children lived with a cohabiting parent, up from 4.6 percent in 2004.<sup>5</sup> About two-thirds of Hispanic children lived with their two married parents in 2011.<sup>6</sup> These trends vary between Hispanic sub-groups and may differ within groups as well, based on levels of acculturation and other factors. Nevertheless, these trends point to the need to focus family strengthening services on the Hispanic family.

However, program recruitment and retention are two of the most formidable challenges in all areas of service provision—health, mental health, human and other social services—and this is especially true when providing services to poor, marginalized communities.<sup>7</sup> A lack of cultural grounding or cultural relevance in

programs is often cited as a reason why these individuals do not seek services or end services prematurely.<sup>8</sup> Adaptations that address cultural, ethnic, or racial aspects of the target participants can be a potential avenue to increase participation and program effectiveness. However, the process of learning what, when, and how to adapt can be confusing, and if not done appropriately adaptation efforts can be disjointed and even misguided.

### Hispanic Characteristics that have been the Focus of Adaptations

Adaptations to human services interventions for Hispanics generally and marriage and relationship education (MRE) programs specifically are relatively recent, and most proposed adaptations have not been empirically tested. Few studies have explicitly tested an adapted intervention against the original intervention to examine differential outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Thus, most adaptations discussed in the literature are largely based on theoretical assumptions or practitioner insight.

Previous federally-funded marriage education programs providing services to Hispanics included adaptations such as recognizing immigration stressors and disconnectedness from family members left behind (for immigrant Hispanics); acknowledging role strain and tension during the acculturation process (for immigrant Hispanics); emphasizing the positive aspects of traditional cultural values such as *familismo*, *marianismo*, and *machismo* (defined below), and de-emphasizing their negative aspects; recognizing the nonverbal and indirect communication styles favored by some Hispanics; and addressing discrimination and documentation status.<sup>10</sup>

Other adaptations have focused on language, including the use of idioms and phrases from the clients' dialect, assessment tools offered in the client's preferred language<sup>11</sup>, and written materials (e.g., pamphlets, signs and documents)

designed to match clients' literacy and language preferences.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, some programs adapt by hiring a culturally diverse staff reflective of the client population.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1. Definitions of Hispanic Cultural Values<sup>i</sup>

Cultural Value	Definition
<b>Familismo</b>	Family-centeredness
<b>Personalismo</b>	Preference for warm, personal interactions
<b>Respeto</b>	Encourages deferential behavior towards people with higher social rank as designated by age, gender, authority or position
<b>Machismo and Marianismo</b>	Traditional, often stereotypical, gender roles that guide behaviors
<b>Confianza</b>	Confidence, trust and intimacy in a relationship

Finally, some organizations adapting services for Hispanics recognize and understand the effects of racism and ethnic discrimination. For instance, a postpartum depression intervention adapted for Hispanics specifically provided time for participants to discuss their experiences and frustration with racism and discrimination.<sup>14</sup>

### Adaptations by Grantees in the HHMI Grantee Implementation Evaluation

The remainder of this brief describes adaptations reported by the grantees in the HHMI implementation evaluation. Findings are organized by constructs and issues identified by grantees that necessitated adaptations: cultural

<sup>i</sup> These Hispanic cultural values are well documented in empirical literature; however, not all Hispanics believe in or subscribe to these traditional values. For a review, see Delgado, M. (2007). *Social Work with Latinos: A Cultural Assets Paradigm*. New York: Oxford University Press.

values (specifically *familismo*, *personalismo*, *respeto*, *machismo*, *marianismo*, and *confianza*); and issues related to diversity; language; immigration and racism/discrimination.

The findings are further organized using the schema developed by Lau<sup>15</sup>, who suggests that adaptations are made to fulfill one of two goals: engagement or effectiveness. Engagement adaptations are made to increase program participation, that is, to get more participants into the program and retain them throughout the intervention. Effectiveness adaptations target the underlying risk and protective factors associated with the program outcomes for the particular group for which the adaptation is designed. Effectiveness does not mean that such adaptations have been shown to improve program outcomes; most cultural adaptations have not been rigorously tested, and testing adaptations was beyond the scope of this study.

### Cultural Values

Before discussing adaptations based on grantees' knowledge of Hispanic cultural values, four caveats are in order. First, although Hispanics are indeed a heterogeneous group, there are a set of cultural values that are shared by many or most Hispanics, regardless of country of origin, acculturation level, education, or income.<sup>16</sup> Second, Hispanics also vary in the degree to which they adhere to these cultural values. For instance, a particular cultural value might be very important to a Hispanic couple who immigrated to the United States from Mexico, even after many years living in the U.S., and less important to their U.S.-born children. However, since it is important to the parents, it is still a cultural value that holds sway over the family and one that the U.S.-born children must learn to understand and navigate. Third, all cultural values have positive (e.g., healthy or adaptive) and negative (e.g., unhealthy or maladaptive) components. Programs making adaptations based on cultural values must first assess the degree to which program participants adhere to specific cultural

values, and second determine whether adherence to said values is adaptive or not. Finally, these "Hispanic" cultural values are not unique to Hispanics. They have been described in the literature as existing within Hispanic communities and given Spanish names. However, they exist as well in other cultures that espouse traditional cultural values, although they may be called something different. The behavioral expression and implications of each value, however, may differ between Hispanics and other groups.

The Hispanic cultural values described below were identified by the grantees in this study as the basis for some of their program adaptations.

### *Familismo*

**Increasing Program Participation.** *Familismo* holds that family comes first, that lives are centered around the family, and that the needs of family often trump individual needs. As such, grantees serving couples noted the need to frame their recruitment efforts in terms of the benefits to the entire family. These grantees noted that traditional marriage education marketing that focused on the couple (e.g., "come have a date night with your spouse" or "work on your relationship") was generally not as well-received as messages that underscored how the skills taught in the program would benefit the whole family, especially the children.

Most grantees also felt strongly that providing on-site childcare was a cultural adaptation. In their view, childcare was not a program support for low-income parents, as in traditional marriage programs. Rather, grantees provided childcare to address the cultural value of *familismo*. They felt parents wanted their children nearby and childcare allowed them and their children to travel to and from the program together, share meals, and move back and forth between the adult education room and the childcare area. Grantees also observed that participants were able to more fully engage in

the process knowing that their children were “at arm’s length”.

#### Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.

Incorporating age-appropriate relationship education elements into childcare programming created a common platform for family discussion and acceptance of relationship education concepts. Two grantees developed children’s curricula or modules that concurrently addressed many of the same concepts in the couples’ curricula. These grantees believed the program was an opportunity to strengthen the entire family through relationship education. One grantee noted that children became strong advocates for the program, encouraging their parents to attend subsequent classes even when the parents were tired or ambivalent. A third grantee invited older children to attend certain modules of the adult programming to work together to identify family goals and rules.



Grantees also recognized how the extended family can influence the couple’s relationship. One grantee developed a role play that highlighted how filial reverence for the spouse or partner’s mother could impact the couple’s relationship. In areas with high cost of living, grantees noted that many participants lived in extended-or multiple-family arrangements. Grantees conveyed tools and techniques to help couples make decisions as a nuclear family, while still considering, acknowledging, and respecting the views of the extended family. Some also

incorporated extended family members in program graduation celebrations.

#### Personalismo

**Increasing Program Participation.** *Personalismo* stresses individual, warm, personal ways of relating to others rather than “institutional” relationships. For instance, Hispanics with a high degree of adherence to *personalismo* are more likely to feel connected to their individual service providers rather than to the agency. They may terminate services prematurely due to a change in provider. Grantees observed that establishing personal connections with participants began during outreach and recruitment efforts. One grantee noted that in Hispanic communities it was important to remember that outreach is not a “business transaction.” “You need to listen to participants, hear their stories, and offer them hope.”

All grantees highlighted peer influence as an important engagement tool and used an array of strategies to engage past participants in recruitment or outreach efforts. These included inviting program “graduates” to speak at their quarterly community advisory board meetings; asking former participants to volunteer at community fairs; asking former participants to provide information about the program at their worship services; or simply encouraging participants to invite friends or family to attend future workshops.

Grantees also underscored the importance of *personalismo* in developing strong partnerships, particularly when developing new relationships with other organizations. One grantee noted that trying to solicit new partnerships with Hispanic-led organizations, may require additional time for staff to become acquainted and build trust. Organizations may need to make a personal connection with the prospective partner first, such as sharing genuine, personal motivations for engaging in the work and partnership.

**Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.** Grantees noted that establishing a personal connection helped participants accept the more impersonal elements of programming, such as data collection. Several grantees stated that it was important not to “overwhelm” participants with too many forms—particularly during the first class, because it sometimes interfered with establishing a personal connection and, thus, some participants did not connect with or enjoy the program enough to return.<sup>ii</sup> As well, many of these forms request sensitive information, for which a measure of trust must be established first. Some grantees addressed these issues by moving much of the pre-test and demographic data collection to personalized one-on-one or couple-based intake sessions. Others incorporated data collection into an initial orientation session, or combined it with a pre-curriculum welcome celebration.

### **Respeto**

**Increasing Program Participation.** *Respeto* defines the boundaries of closeness, even among equals, and encourages deferential behavior—including not questioning professionals or admitting a lack of understanding or acceptance—towards people with higher social rank as designated by age, gender, authority or position. One example of *respeto*-based adaptations is in how participants address each other. In Spanish, unlike modern English, pronouns can have formal and informal versions. Many grantees reported using the formal *usted* (thou) rather than the informal *tú* (you) to indicate respect, especially in earlier sessions. Once participants moved to the more informal *tú* then facilitators followed suit. Some grantees also used honorifics to provide respect, like addressing participants as “Don

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<sup>ii</sup> This practice may hold true for other populations as well, as it has been previously documented that lengthy written surveys feel invasive to service recipients (see *Healthy Marriage and Relationship Programs: Promising Practices in Serving Low-Income and Culturally Diverse Populations*, National Healthy Marriage Resource Center).

José” instead of “Señor Rodríguez.” Using the client’s first name with the formal “Don” (loosely translated as “Mister”) conveyed respect without sacrificing familiarity.

Emphasizing the assets and strengths participants brought to the program was also seen as congruent with *respeto*. This often began in initial recruitment efforts, with outreach staff focusing on the program’s desire to improve on relationships, rather than “solve problems.” Grantees also sought to underscore *respeto* by acknowledging participant work schedules and offering courses at convenient times, and by providing meals. Many grantees also spoke of the importance of food, and more specifically the sharing of food with others, as a sign of *respeto*. Often participants contributed to the meals, bringing items from home or assisting the facilitators in their preparation. Regardless of how busy or how poor, participants felt they could contribute and that their contributions were welcome and celebrated.

**Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.** Facilitators noted the importance of recognizing that all participants had knowledge and contributed to creating an environment of shared learning (rather than relying on didactic lecturing). Facilitators in one program incorporated “playful ice-breaker” activities into initial sessions to create a relaxed and respectful environment in which participants from varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds could feel safe and comfortable learning and sharing. Similarly, other facilitators quickly divested participants of their perception of the facilitator as “the authority” or “teacher” to create an environment of mutual learning.

### **Machismo/Marianismo (Traditional Gender Roles)**

**Increasing Program Participation.** *Machismo* and *Marianismo* refer to the traditional, often rigid and stereotypical gender roles that many men and women, including many Hispanics, may be expected to play in family life. *Machismo* dictates

that men be the providers and protectors of their family, that they stifle outward displays of emotion, and sometimes that they engage in philandering. *Marianismo* (so named after the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus) dictates that women's most important role is that of mother, nurturer and homemaker, and holds that women are spiritually and morally superior to men, and as such are able to "bear the cross" that is laid before them. Grantees used their understanding of these traditional gender roles in recruitment and outreach efforts. Many grantees appealed to potential male participants by having male recruitment staff. Others appealed to the positive "strength" and "responsibility" aspects of *machismo*, by recruiting with messages such as "strengthen your family," rather than "learn how to fix problems in your relationship." One grantee coached interested female participants on how to persuade their husbands to attend the workshops. They encouraged women to phrase things positively, such as "I've heard good things about this program and would really like to go, but it is for couples. Will you attend with me?"

#### Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.

Grantees spoke of building on participants' cultures and cultural strengths, rather than attempting to supplant



cultural tenets with those of mainstream American culture. Grantees were attentive to this dynamic tension in different respects, and they appeared particularly sensitive to the traditional values of *machismo* and *marianismo* being juxtaposed to the more fluid gender roles prevalent in mainstream U.S. society. Many facilitators specifically addressed gender roles within the context of communication modules, even if gender roles were not explicitly part of the curriculum.

Grantees noted that relationship education can build on the positive aspects of *machismo*, such as the perception of the male as the provider and protector of the family. Many grantees appealed to the importance of the father to the family beyond the provider role, encouraging men to be more active in their children's lives. However, grantees were also sensitive to the pull of these traditional gender roles. One grantee explained that among the Hispanics they served, fathers felt they could only support their families emotionally if they were providing for them financially. This grantee noted that once their fathers felt secure as the family financial supporter, they were often better able to become broader positive role models for their children and provide them with emotional support. To address this, the grantee included an economic skills component in their relationship education programming.

#### *Confianza*

**Increasing Program Participation.** *Confianza*, the Spanish word for "trust," refers to confidence, trust and intimacy in a relationship. This cultural value governs the *content* of interpersonal transactions, just as *personalismo* governs the *manner* in which interpersonal transactions are carried out. To have *confianza* means, "I trust you and you trust me" or that "I know you will hold what I am in telling you in confidence" (as in the expression "*entre nosotros*," or between us). It also means that the client is placing him/herself in the provider's hands, believing that the provider has his/her best interests at heart.

Consistent with the cultural value of *confianza*, most grantees spoke of the need to establish trust with potential participants during recruitment and outreach. Some grantees had long histories of serving the Hispanic community and felt that they were already trusted organizations. Grantees without a lengthy "track record" in the community reached out to partner organizations trusted by their target population for assistance with recruitment. Grantees also

sought the support of community leaders or gatekeepers to promote the program. Several grantees noted the importance of support from faith leaders.

Various grantees noted that the political climate with respect to immigration made establishing *confianza* paramount. One grantee spoke of the need to reach out to “hidden” participants-- recent immigrants with little exposure to social services in the U. S. Grantees highlighted the need to convince participants that their organization cared about them as individuals, and provided a safe place to learn. The experience of former participants was critical in getting these messages of trust and safety to the communities. Grantees also spoke of the need for spousal or partner “buy-in” to the program as reflective of *confianza*. One grantee that serves primarily fathers noted that many of the men’s partners were wary of the program. To assuage suspicions, staff held an orientation solely for spouses/partners to explain what the fathers would be learning during the program.

#### Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.

Hiring staff with similar experiences can help to facilitate *confianza* with participants. Some consider it important for facilitators to share a common experience with the target population, whether it is living in the same community, having grown up in poverty, single parenthood, or being an immigrant. Many consider this shared experience more important than shared ethnic background. As one grantee expressed, “a shared language and ethnic background might get the participants in the door, but it’s the sense of a shared experience, the sense of being understood, that keeps them coming.” Another grantee felt staff was able to create trust with participants because they represented and were part of the community. All grantees highlighted the need for grantee and partner staff to be “culturally approachable,” which helped to instill confidence and trust in the organization.

In addition to cultural values, there are other factors that must be considered when providing

services to Hispanics or when deciding to adapt elements of a program. Chief among these are the diversity of the Hispanic population, language issues, and experiences of immigration, racism and discrimination. This brief now turns to a discussion of these issues.

#### Diversity

**Increasing Program Participation.** Grantees served a variety of Hispanic subgroups, including migrants (i.e., families who travel back and forth between their home country and various regions in the U.S. in pursuit of work, typically in agriculture); recent immigrants (i.e., families that have recently left their country of origin in search of opportunities and have settled in the U.S.); longer-term immigrants; adults who were brought to the U.S. as children and grew up in the U.S.; and second generation Hispanics (born in the U.S. of immigrant parents). These groups are diverse on a number of important variables, including language proficiency, level of acculturation, education levels, and income. Grantee’s knowledge of their target population drove their approach to program development, adaptation, and delivery.

All grantees discussed how Hispanic diversity impacts marketing and recruitment strategies and stressed that knowledge of their target population was critical to recruitment and retention. Some grantees conducted community needs assessments to better understand where potential participants were located, any potential barriers to participation (such as transportation or child care needs), and how to recruit participants. Other grantees engaged in conversations with community members at community centers and day labor sites to align the program with community needs. Focus groups were also used as a way to increase the resonance of marketing materials and outreach strategies.

Varying acculturation levels required different outreach and marketing strategies. Multiple grantees noted that direct, person-to-person outreach strategies were more effective with



less-acculturated participants, who were likely to be less familiar with (or more wary of) U.S. social service provision and less responsive to print ads. Grantees found that these adaptations were not necessary with more acculturated participants, as they actively utilized social networking sites. These grantees used Facebook, Craigslist and YouTube, and their own websites (available in Spanish and English) to reach more acculturated or computer savvy participants.

**Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.** Grantees underscored that knowledge of the target population needs to drive both service delivery and content. They acknowledged the many challenges facing the community (e.g., the socio-economic situation of participants, literacy, immigration issues), while at the same time emphasizing that participants bring many assets, such as personal experiences or living in supportive multigenerational households.

One way in which grantees used this deep knowledge of their target population was in the selection of curricula. Some wanted to select established curricula that had been used with some success with similar target populations. Others leveraged prior organizational learning from similar in-house programming, like parenting programs, and developed a relationship education curriculum specifically designed to meet the needs of their clientele.

Grantees indicated that varying acculturation levels can require skillful navigation around “hot button” topics. For instance, topics such as gender roles or domestic violence may be uncomfortable to discuss openly, and in some cases taboo, particularly for less acculturated participants. One grantee found that varying acculturation levels within a cohort disrupted group cohesion, rendering facilitation around gender roles even more challenging and sometimes necessitating smaller group discussions. Another grantee spoke of approaching the topic of domestic violence indirectly and very delicately, because they perceived the level of tolerance for domestic

violence among their participants to be high and often exacerbated by fear of losing their children or being deported. Instead of directly discussing domestic violence, facilitators stressed elements of healthy relationships to help participants come to an understanding of the detrimental and unhealthy aspects of domestic violence.

### **Language**

**Increasing Program Participation.** Grantees translated program materials into Spanish, accounting for country of origin, regional, and sometimes local variations. When one grantee learned many participants spoke various indigenous languages or dialects and did not read Spanish, they eliminated the use of text-heavy workbooks, slides and handouts, instead incorporating visual aids. Most grantees incorporated *dichos* (sayings) and other colloquial expressions—with attention to sub-group differences (e.g., Mexican vs. Puerto Rican participants) into recruitment and outreach activities.

**Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.** Grantees that selected existing marriage and relationship enhancement curricula focused on curricula that had already been translated into Spanish and previously used with various Hispanics subgroups. However, they found that they could not fully rely on the existing translations and had to adapt them. Adaptations to established, translated materials included modifications of examples to better resonate with participants from a particular heritage; word or idiom selections; and choosing whether to use accompanying materials (such as handouts, slide shows, or videos). Two grantees using an established curriculum adapted for a Mexican population further adapted several idiomatic expressions for their primarily Puerto Rican or Dominican participants. One of these grantees also served a migrant Guatemalan population and found many adaptations made for the Puerto Rican population did not resonate with their migrant population. Grantees, using Spanish language curricula developed by the agencies

over many years of delivering similar services, also found that they had to make linguistic adaptations to increase resonance with Spanish-speaking Hispanics from groups outside their traditional target population. One such grantee, whose founding mission was to serve communities of recent immigrants, is now serving more second-generation Hispanics and conducted a “reverse adaptation,” translating their curricula to English and adapting it for more acculturated Hispanics.

Most grantees used *dinámicas* (experiential activities such as games and role plays) or skits akin to *telenovelas* (popular soap operas) to connect concepts in a meaningful way by teaching them in a fun, non-threatening atmosphere and avoid asking participants to share too much personal information. They noted that participants identified with the characters in the role plays or the emotions displayed in the *telenovelas*. Grantees also stressed that role plays could easily be adapted for cohorts with different cultural backgrounds if facilitators were attuned to participants’ countries of origin or acculturation levels.

### **Immigration and Racism/Discrimination**

**Increasing Program Participation.** Grantees noted that national tensions and local practices around the issue of immigration and immigration law enforcement created a climate of mistrust and posed serious recruitment challenges. For example, one grantee in the Southwest noted that roadblocks on major thoroughfares to check for drugs and human trafficking made many Hispanics (citizens, legal residents, as well as undocumented individuals) uncomfortable and leery of traveling outside of their immediate neighborhood. Another grantee reported that during recruitment for a new cohort, day labor sites near the community center hosting classes were closed by local officials. Participants were hesitant to meet in the community center, which was perceived as a government facility, and the group was unable to continue. However, cohorts that met at local churches (which were seen as “safe”) did not experience a drop in participation.

Another Southwestern grantee explained that being a Hispanic-led organization was not sufficient to earn the community’s trust, as some members of the area’s more established Hispanic community were in favor of tougher immigration law enforcement. A grantee in the Northeast described that overt dissonance in their catchment area between the more-established Puerto Rican community and the newer migrant community contributed to challenges in recruiting migrant families. Feeling that communities’ perceptions and experiences of discrimination and racism hindered recruitment and retention, staff worked to develop close, trusting relationships within those communities.

### **Targeting Underlying Risk and Protective Factors.**

Grantees incorporated their knowledge of the unique challenges and stressors facing some immigrants into service delivery. Grantees delivering marriage or relationship education to recent immigrants often acknowledged the special stressors on the couple or family. Sometimes incorporating this knowledge was explicit at the organizational level, while in other instances, facilitators adapted service delivery to address immigration. For example, one grantee’s facilitators, many with advanced degrees from institutions in their countries of origin, provided information about obtaining certification for their profession in the United States, as well as insights about differences in child-rearing, where to learn more about immigration issues, and connecting with other resources.

Some grantees felt the curriculum itself provided a forum for discussing the issues faced by some immigrants. One grantee noted how activities in the curriculum, though not specifically designed to address immigrant issues, served to highlight challenges their couples were facing. For example, one exercise asks participants to complete a depiction of how they spend their time every day, in half hour increments. Facilitators explained that the exercise did not meet participant needs, since the daily schedule only accounted for a “typical work day.” As participants often worked multiple jobs and night

shifts, the exercise allowed facilitators to bring up the topic of how there may be less “free time” for participants in the U.S. than what they may have experienced in their countries of origin, and that participants must make more difficult choices about how to allocate limited free time.

### ***Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications***

The nine grantees in this implementation evaluation made numerous adaptations, additions, and revisions to traditional marriage education programming to increase cultural responsiveness and better serve diverse Hispanic clients. These grantees believe their adaptations are cultural in nature, meant to increase the cultural grounding and resonance of their programs for various Hispanic subgroups. This brief has documented adaptations that address Hispanic diversity; language; cultural values such as *familismo*, *personalismo*, *respeto*, *machismo/marianismo*, and *confianza*; and immigration and racism/discrimination. Many of the adaptations mirror those in the cultural competency literature. Similarly, some adaptations, such as word-of-mouth recruitment, parallel refinements discussed in the marriage and relationship education literature.<sup>17</sup> Most grantees, especially facilitators, are not well versed in this literature, and intuitively developed adaptations that happened to mirror findings in the cultural competency or marriage and relationship education literature.

It is important to contextualize these findings. As stated above, the cultural values cited by some grantees as the rationale for adaptations may not be unique to Hispanics or shared equally by all Hispanics. Thus, programs must assess which values their target populations subscribe to, and to what degree, before attempting to make adaptations based on these values. Given the overlap in characteristics that may necessitate adaptation—that is, many of the target participants were Hispanic, had low literacy, and

were from low socioeconomic status—it is difficult to disentangle what actually constitutes a cultural adaptation for Hispanics versus what may be an adaptation to make the program more suitable to someone with low literacy, for instance. However, the grantees believe that the adaptations documented in this brief were borne out of their knowledge of Hispanic cultural values, beliefs and practices. While this brief has attempted to make these linkages explicit, the connections between specific adaptations and the cultural values they are purported to address need to be the subject of further studies.

The evaluation was designed to identify as many adaptations and refinements as possible, so sites were purposely selected based on their track record serving large numbers of Hispanics, their knowledge of culture, and their stated use of cultural adaptations to better serve Hispanics. Our findings may not be representative of the efforts of other federal grantees providing marriage education to Hispanics or of non-federally funded marriage education programs.

As an implementation evaluation, the study’s goal was not to examine the efficacy of these adaptations, but rather to document them. More research is needed to examine if these adaptations contribute to program outcomes. Future research is also needed to examine which sub-populations might benefit from which adaptations. For instance, some adaptations may be appropriate only for Hispanics of certain ancestries, low-income Hispanics, less acculturated Hispanics, or immigrants. On the other hand, some adaptations may be appropriate for all Hispanics. Moreover, some may be applicable beyond Hispanic ethnicity and be appropriate for all lower income participants, any participants unfamiliar with marriage education, or may be universally good human service practice. Empirical validation of the effectiveness of these adaptations must occur before they are adopted as standard practice for marriage education or human service delivery targeting Hispanics.

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Or, contact the Federal Task Order Officers or the evaluation team.

### **Federal Task Order Officers**

Girley Wright, Administration for Children and Families Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, [girley.wright@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:girley.wright@acf.hhs.gov)

Linda Mellgren, Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, [linda.mellgren@hhs.gov](mailto:linda.mellgren@hhs.gov)

### **Authors and Evaluation Team**

Stacey Bouchet, PhD: Women In Fatherhood, Inc. for The Lewin Group, [staceybouchet@lwomeninfatherhood.org](mailto:staceybouchet@lwomeninfatherhood.org)

Luis Torres, PhD: The University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, [lrtorres@uh.edu](mailto:lrtorres@uh.edu)

Allison Hyra, PhD: Hyra Consulting, [allison.hyra@hyraconsulting.com](mailto:allison.hyra@hyraconsulting.com)