

**Instrument 5 - STRENGTHING IMPLEMENTATION OF RESPONSIBLE  
FATHERHOOD (SIRF) PROGRAMS**

**Father Semi-Structured Discussion Topics**

*Towards the end of the study period, after multiple cycles have finished, the SIRF team aims to interview staff and fathers from each site. Each interview will be informed by previous information collected by the site. May be conducted over Zoom/phone or in-person.*

### **Introductory script:**

*My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm a researcher with MDRC/MEF/Insight Policy Research. We're contacting you on behalf of the Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (SIRF) project. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) awarded MDRC and its partners MEF and Insight Policy Research a contract to test innovative approaches to overcome these challenges. The funding for this project comes from the Office of Family Assistance within ACF.*

*Today, we are meeting to learn more about your participation in [program name / organization name]. Over the next hour or so, we would like to walk through specific questions about how you learned about [program name], your experiencing enrolling and participating in the program.*

*Please know that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary. You do not to answer any question you do not wish to answer, and you can stop the interview at any time. You won't be penalized for not answering any of the questions we ask. If you are uncomfortable or need to leave the interview for any reason, please let us know.*

*I'll be taking some notes in order to keep track of what we discussed here today. MDRC will be keep this conversation completely private—we will not share specific information about you or your remarks to the program or with anyone outside of our research team, and your names won't be attached to any publications we put out in the future. Notes will be stored securely.*

*I would like to record today's discussion, but—again—all of your comments will be kept private. Only the research team will hear or read anything that is said here. We like to record these discussions so that we can fully capture everything you say. Would this be OK with you?*

*Do you have any questions before we begin?*

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN: The purpose of this information collection is to gather preliminary information about the fatherhood field and explore with fatherhood programs the research questions that are of interest and the design options that are feasible. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 60 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. This is a voluntary collection of information. The answers you give will be kept private. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0531 and the expiration date is 07/31/2022. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Charles Michalopoulos; Charles.Michalopoulos@mdrc.org, and Dina Israel; Dina.Israel@mdrc.org; Attn: OMB-PRA (0970-0531).

## Introductions

To kick us off and to help us to get to know you a little bit, we know everyone is a father so...

*INSTRUCTION: If appropriate, focus group facilitator can start by giving his or her answer and then go around the room.*

1. How many children do you have? How old are they?
2. What is your favorite thing to do with your child/children?
  - a. PROBES if needed: for example, go to the playground, play games, watch TV, read books, visit with friends or family...
3. When did you first participate in services at [organization]?
  - a. PROBE: Was this your first time participating in [organization]'s services?

## Recruitment

My first set of questions is about how you came to learn about [organization] before you enrolled.

1. How did you first learn about [organization]?
  - a. PROBES if needed: Were you referred by another organization? If so, which one? Did you hear about it from family or a friend? Did you see an advertisement? Social media?
2. Why did you want to participate? What was it that drew you to the program? What were your first impressions of the program?
  - a. PROBES if needed: What aspect of the program most excited you? What did you want to accomplish? For example, help with employment, parenting issues, strengthen relationship with coparent/others, get help with child support, get help with court or criminal justice issue, something else?

PROBES if needed: Were you encouraged to participate to satisfy some mandate from a court/probation or parole/child welfare?

## Enrollment

Now I'd like to hear more about the process you went through to officially enroll in the program.

1. What was the process to enroll in the program?
  - a. PROBES if needed: What steps did you have to take to enroll in the program? How long would you say it took? Did all the steps happen at one time? Who did

- you speak or meet with? Was the process in-person, over the phone or computer, or both?
- b. PROBE if needed: Was there any part of the enrollment process that you found especially helpful? Probe about presence of alumni, if appropriate.
2. What challenges, if any, did you face to enroll in the program?
    - a. PROBE if needed: Is this something that was made harder because of COVID-19? For example, needing to do enrollment over the phone or computer and not in person.
  3. How did the program help you through the challenges to enroll?
    - a. PROBE if needed: Did you work with a case manager or other staff person to address any immediate needs you had? How did those interactions go? How did the program help you do enrollment over the phone or computer?
    - b. PROBE if needed for other activities attributable to learning cycle interventions if applicable.
    - c. PROBE if needed: Did the program have additional staff or a program mentor/alumnus speak with you during the enrollment process? How did those conversations affect the enrollment process?
  4. Is there anything the program could've done differently during the recruitment or enrollment process?
    - a. PROBE if needed: What could the program have done to make it easier to enroll? What could the program do to make it more appealing? How could the program attract more fathers in the future?

## **Engagement**

I'd like to shift gears a bit now and hear more about the services you've participated in what the program has done to keep you coming back. First, we are going to focus on that first day you participated.

1. Since you enrolled, what services/workshops/activities have you participated in at [organization]?
  - a. PROBE if needed: employment workshops, work with job developer, parenting workshops, workshops about relationships with coparents or others, meet with case manager, get support with housing/food/insurance/COVID resources, met with alumni or peers, etc.?
  - b. PROBE if needed: How did you participate in these activities? Were you in person? Were you on the computer/in a Zoom meeting?
  - c. PROBE if needed: How much time passed between program enrollment and your first day of service?

2. Did you encounter any trouble showing up for your first day of services? If so, how would you describe this trouble?
  - a. PROBE if needed: Was it related to the services being at an inconvenient time/place, issue with computer or internet access, community/neighborhood issues, personal scheduling conflicts, motivation, childcare conflict, work schedule conflict, something else?
3. How did the program help you through the challenges to attend services the first day?
  - a. PROBE if needed: What did staff do to help you overcome challenges? How did other fathers – either alumni or peers – help you?
  - b. PROBE if needed: for other activities attributable to learning cycle interventions if applicable.
4. Think about how you felt after attending services the first day. Talk about how you felt to go back for more the next day.
  - a. PROBE if needed: Did you feel motivated? Excited? Is there anything the program could've done to make you feel more motivated to show up after the first day?

## **Retention**

Now I'm going to shift us away from the first day to talk more about the rest of the time you were/have been participating in the program.

1. How often do you come to [organization] for services? This could be virtually or in person.
  - a. PROBE if needed: How often are you in touch with someone from the program? Daily? Almost daily? At least weekly? Less than once a week? Less than that?
  - b. PROBE if needed: Who are the different program staff or representatives who you're interacting with? Who do you have the most contact with? Workshop facilitator, case manager, mentor or alumni, someone else?
2. What motivates you to keep coming back?
  - a. PROBE if needed: for activities attributable to learning cycle interventions if applicable. Could include relationships with peers or alumni, support of case manager/other staff.
  - b. PROBE if needed: Has your motivation for attending the program changed over time?
3. How do program staff go about forming relationships with you and other fathers?
  - a. PROBE if needed: Do you feel that program staff truly understand you, where you are coming from, and what you need?

- b. PROBE if needed: Can you describe a typical interaction with the program staff? How did the conversations or interactions go, and how did they make you feel?
4. What challenges do you or other fathers face to coming back to the program day after day?
  - a. PROBE if needed: Did they not like the program? Was it related to the services being at an inconvenient time/place, issue with computer or internet access, community/neighborhood issues, personal scheduling conflicts, motivation, childcare conflict, work schedule conflict, something else?
  - b. PROBE if needed: Is this something that is made worse by COVID-19?
  - c. PROBE if needed: Think about all the fathers you started the program with. Do they all still attend? If not, do you have a sense of why those fathers stopped attending?
5. What could the program do to support you or other fathers better to keep you/them returning and staying involved in the program?
  - a. PROBE if needed: change the way services are delivered? Timing of program? Topics of workshops? Additional supports needed?
  - b. PROBE if needed: Make the participant feel more heard or understood by staff?
  - c. PROBE if needed: Have someone from the program be in touch more often? Either staff or mentors who can understand where the father is coming from and help him navigate life challenges?
6. How do you feel about the progress you've made toward reaching your goals? Do you feel that the program is helping you to reach your goals?
  - a. PROBE if needed: What suggestions do you have for making it easier for fathers to achieve their goals? What additional support do you need to reach your goals?

## Wrap Up

Thanks so much for all your contributions so far. I have just a couple more questions to wrap up our time today.

1. What aspect of the program do you think has been most useful for you to meet your goals?
  - a. PROBE if needed: Program topics? Help with employment? Help with parenting issues? Strengthening relationships with others? Help with child support? Help with court or other criminal justice issue? Relationship with staff? other fathers? Something else?
2. How has your life changed by being involved in [fatherhood program]?

- a. PROBE if needed: Have you seen changes in your relationship your children?  
Coparent/partner? Employment? Other aspects of your life?
- b. PROBE if needed: How has the program helped to make these changes happen?

Thank you so much for your time today. This conversation has been very helpful for me to better understand the program! I appreciate your openness and willing to talk with us.