

# **Instrument 1. Discussion Guide for REFRAME: HMRF Program Leadership Focus Groups**

# REFRAME: Race Equity for Fatherhood, Relationship, and Marriage Programs to Empower Black Families Project

## Introductory Statement and Consent

Thank you for your interest in today's discussion. This focus group is being conducted as part of the *Race Equity for Fatherhood, Relationship, and Marriage Programs to Empower Black Families (REFRAME)* project with the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and sponsored by the Office of Family Assistance, both in the Administration for Children and Families, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. MEF Associates is conducting the study for them, with Insight Policy Research as partners. MEF Associates and Insight Policy Research are social policy research organizations located in the Washington, DC area. The REFRAME project is designed to understand the assets, needs, and experiences of Black individuals and couples to inform the development of practice resources that promote equitable service delivery among HMRF programs.

We know that Black families have cultivated strengths and resilience due, in part to the unique systemic and structural challenges that they have experienced. We know this means supporting Black families might be different from how to best support other groups of families. This discussion will focus on your experiences serving Black individuals and couples, their strengths and support systems, the challenges they face, approaches you have taken to support them in overcoming those challenges, your successes, and your ideas for better serving Black communities.

The discussion will take about 90 minutes. The information you provide during the discussion will contribute to the development of a framework and a set of practitioner resources designed to guide HMRF programs in meaningful and sustained work to make services more equitable, relevant, and supportive for Black individuals and couples, but you may not receive direct benefits from participating in the study.

We will keep your information private to the extent possible and will aggregate your thoughts with others participating in calls, so we believe there is minimal risk to you in participating in this conversation. We can't control what participants share about what they hear or think they hear today with people outside this group. But we ask each of you to ensure no one else is in the room with you and to keep things that are discussed today private. We ask that you agree not to take screenshots of the screen, recordings of the conversation, and overall agree to not divulge the contents of this discussion.

Your participation is voluntary. You are not required to meet with us or answer our questions, and you may stop participating in the discussion at any time without any consequences. While we will encourage you to contribute to the discussion, you may choose not to answer any question you wish and can leave the discussion at any time.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this information collection is 0970-0531 and the expiration date is XX/XX/XXXX.

Are you comfortable with beginning the group interview at this time?

I would like to record our conversation, so I don't miss anything. No one will hear the recording except for the study team. If you prefer that we do not record today's conversation, we will take notes instead. Is it okay if I record this conversation? Please send me a private message if you are not comfortable with recording. If you would like me to turn the recording off at any time, please let me know.

***[INTERVIEWER: PRESS RECORD and confirm by asking: "Do you give your permission for me to begin the interview at this time?"]***

## **Ground Rules for Focus Groups**

Before we begin, let me go over a couple of focus group guidelines.

- While we will ask some questions to guide the discussion, our goal is to hear from you, and for you to respond to each other.
- This discussion is meant to be informal and relaxed.
- There are no right or wrong answers. It is okay to share your opinions or thoughts even if they are different from what others have said. We want everyone to participate, and the opinions and experiences of everyone in the room are important. We want to hear different perspectives.
- Please talk one at a time so that I can hear everything that is said.
- Please remember to mute your microphone when you are not talking.
- I want to hear from all of you. Some people talk more than others, and I'll be encouraging everyone to speak up.
- You do not have to answer any specific questions you do not want to answer. If at any point, you want to pause the recording while you make a specific comment, please tell me.
- The discussion today is private. Please do not discuss or share anything you heard after you leave the focus group.

Do you have any questions before we start?

### **A. HMRP grantee program descriptions**

1. Please introduce yourself and tell us your role at the organization, including:
  - a. Your title and primary responsibilities in the organization
  - b. Please briefly describe your program service delivery model
    - i. Probe: How does the HMRP programming contribute to your mission?
2. Describe the population(s) that your program serves (e.g., TANF recipients, dislocated workers, refugees, veterans, formerly incarcerated).

Probe:

  - a. What communities do you serve?
  - b. What explains the high proportion of Black clients in your program?
  - c. What do you think brings Black clients to the program?

## **B. Program models and approaches that support the resilience of Black clients**

3. Let's talk a little bit about how you serve your Black clients. To what extent does your approach differ for Black clients? What are some of the aspects of service delivery that you consider that is connected to your understanding of the Black participants you work with?
  - a. What do you notice about serving Black clients compared to non-Black clients? (i.e., different needs, cultural characteristics, effective engagement techniques, relationships with staff etc)
  - b. What do you find works well in serving Black clients? How is this different from other clients?
  
4. What models or approaches support Black clients in successfully navigating challenges associated with parenting, co-parenting, sustaining healthy relationships, education/training and economic well-being? (Please specify partnerships, cross-system collaborations, interventions, service delivery structures etc.)

Probe:

  - a. How do you incorporate strength-based approaches in supporting Black clients navigating these challenges? Have you noticed specific talents, strategies, and characteristics of your clients that have driven them towards success?
  - b. How has your program supported Black parents in addressing parenting challenges and accomplishing their goals (e.g., childcare, child education, etc)?
  - c. How has your program supported romantic or intimate relationships of Black clients?
  - d. How has your program supported Black co-parents that may no longer be romantically involved?
  - e. How has your program helped Black clients address challenges associated with economic wellbeing? How are these programs contributing to economic independence among Black clients beyond employment (entrepreneurship, legacy building etc).
  - f. How has your program helped Black clients address challenges associated pursuing training and educational opportunities?
  
5. What have been key drivers supporting these efforts? (i.e., OFA, curriculum developers, other sources of TA etc)
  
6. Describe (or provide an example of) how your approach or services helped Black clients better overcome the challenges they are facing. How do these approaches or services help clients cope with, overcome, and bounce back from adversity and challenges?
  - a. What support systems did you help the client access (i.e., school, family, employment, church)?
  - b. What efforts did you make to help address the emotional strain on the client? (i.e., counseling, support groups, mindfulness approaches, etc.)
  - c. What partnerships did you leverage to support the efforts Black clients made to cope with adversity?
  - d. What were the most pressing sources of the challenge for the client? How does this differ from what typically occurs for clients overall?
  - e. What are the most salient sources of support in your clients' lives? How do you recognize these supports in your interactions with your clients?

7. How does the program create a space for you to understand the context of the clients that they serve?

Probe:

- a. How do you apply information about the context in which clients live in your programming?
  - b. How does the program address resources or social factors outside of the individual to support success (i.e., expanding social networks, targeting family level change, addressing systemic issues impacting clients etc.)?
  - c. How do you address barriers that Black clients are facing related to other systems or programs (e.g., child welfare, criminal justice)?
8. Have you heard of other models that you're curious about but don't know enough about yet or do not yet feel comfortable implementing? (for example: entrepreneurship, trauma informed care, couple's counseling, multi-generational approaches, family counseling, homeownership, and legacy building etc.)

What models are you particularly interested in?

- a. How do you think these models could support Black clients?
9. Describe what resources or tools could better serve your organization's ability to help clients overcome challenges.
- a. What are some conditions you would have liked to address but have not had a chance to due to funds, grant policies, resources, awareness, or support?
  - b. What other partnerships do you wish you had to better serve Black clients? For example, some programs may wish they had stronger connections to Black mental health clinicians or to services that are designed to help clients with estate planning, life insurance and other elements designed to help Black clients provide security for their children.

### **C. Efforts to culturally tailor program services for Black clients**

10. How do you tailor your program services for Black clients? How has this supported the success of Black clients?

- a. Probe: bringing in guest speakers/alumni, changing content to what's relevant for Black clients, allowing flexible program delivery, partnering with culturally affirmative organizations like churches, incorporating other family members/relatives or social network members.

11. How has your program/staff adapted curriculums, evidenced based approaches or workshops for Black clients?

- a. What changes did you make around the delivery of these materials?
- b. What methods do staff use to adapt the materials that are based on their own style and knowledge about Black culture and individuals? How do staff shift their language to adhere to the realities of Black clients?
- c. How were modifications to materials received by key funders and leadership?
- d. What are their main sources of reference in adapting material?
- e. What curriculums, materials, or workshops have been particularly helpful for Black clients?

12. What additional resources or tools can support efforts to identify or adapt curricula for Black clients? (I.e., leadership or client-facing staff cultural sensitive, tips on adapting curriculum, and strategies to improve client engagement and retention)

#### **D. Equitable approach to program decisions**

13. Describe how you have included the voices and perspectives of Black clients, community members or staff in the planning, service delivery, and evaluation of your program? How has this contributed to the resilience and success of clients participating in your program?

Probe:

- a. How has their perspective informed program decisions?
  - b. How else have Black clients' perspectives, experience, and voice been lifted (e.g., participation in conferences, outreach, testimonials, training of staff, involvement in collaboratives, board meetings, etc.)?
  - c. What activities have been most successful in lifting Black clients' voices?
  - d. How have activities around lifting Black client voices been helpful or beneficial?
  - e. What tools and resources have you found to be most effective in helping your program undertake the work you have described?
  - f. What have you learned from these efforts that could help improve your approach with Black clients?
14. How has your program used data to inform how Black clients have the opportunity to access services or are impacted by the services being offered by the HMRF program?
- a. How have you assessed the degree to which Black clients are offered or have the opportunity to access all services and programmatic supports?
  - b. Have you noticed disparities in program access or utilization among Black clients? If so, what factors do you think contribute to the disparities?
15. What supports or resources do you need to better engage Black clients and to create a platform for their input? What additional supports or resources would help you best in using a data-driven approach to serving Black clients?

#### **E. Culturally informed staffing and professional development**

16. How have your hiring decisions been informed by the needs of Black clients? How do you think these hiring decisions have contributed to the resilience and success of Black clients?

Probes:

- a. To what extent have you hired program graduates or other individuals that mirror the service population? How do you select program candidates? What qualities would make them a good fit for a staffing position? What positions would they typically fill? How do assess their qualifications? What sources of data do you use?
- b. What are the key qualifications for client-facing staff? For leadership? Do you prioritize lived experience or understanding of Black America when making hiring decisions? What other qualities outside of lived experience/understanding do you prioritize in staffing HMRF programs?
- c. What are best practices in hiring staff for HMRF programs? Are there any hiring efforts you're particularly proud of? What do you struggle with in hiring staff to support Black clients?

17. To what extent are Black community members represented in leadership roles and positions of power?
  - a. *[Ask only if not already clear.]* Are there Black individuals in positions of leadership at your organization? Who are they, and what positions do they hold?
  - b. What degree of influence do Black individuals have at your organizations? Can you provide examples of how this has shaped the way the HMRF programs are designed and implemented?
  - c. How has having Black individuals in positions of leadership helped the organization be responsive to the needs of Black clients?
  - d. *[Ask if leadership is mostly non-Black]* Are there ways in which the composition of your organization's leadership have limited the ability of the organization to be responsive to the needs of Black clients?
  - e. Are there resources that have helped develop your organization's ability to ensure Black representation in leadership positions? Are there resources that you need to strengthen your organization's ability to do so?
18. What training or professional development do you provide to staff to support Black clients? How have these professional development opportunities contributed to the resilience and success of Black clients?

Probes:

  - a. To what extent do you provide staff opportunities for training in cultural awareness and affirmation, socio-cultural contexts, social justice, social conditions contributing to client experiences Black clients etc.?
  - b. How have you evaluated training and professional development outcomes for staff?
  - c. Are these trainings mandated or voluntary? Are mandated trainings different for client-facing staff and for leadership?
  - d. What training or professional development resources would better assist staff in serving or recruiting Black clients?
19. How does the program create a space for staff to understand the context of the clients that they serve?

Probe:

  - a. How do you account for the context in which clients live in your programming?
  - b. How do you avoid focusing on the individual only (independent of their context)?
  - c. How do you address barriers that Black clients are facing related to other systems or programs (e.g., child welfare, criminal justice)?
20. What efforts have you or the organization made in supporting and leveraging Black staff or other staff of color?

Probe:

  - a. What efforts do they have to support Black staff's well-being (e.g., counseling, flexible scheduling, managerial support)?
  - a. How have you recognized and leveraged your staff's strengths and experiences in coping with and overcoming adversity?
21. What training and professional development resources are needed for staff, supervisors, directors, administrators, facilitators, case managers, recruiters etc?

22. What tools, resources or supports can help you better, hire, train and support ongoing professional development in understanding the context, barriers and strengths of Black clients?

**F. Closing**

23. Are there other materials, tools or resources that can best help you and other HRMF grantees serve Black clients?

24. Before we end, is there anything else you would like to say that you wanted to say earlier, but didn't get a chance to?