Advancing Best Practices and Cultural Relevance of HM&RF Programs for Indigenous Communities (I-HMRF)

Instrument 3. HM&RF and potential participants: Focus Group Protocol

What are we hoping to learn from this activity?

(1) For sites where HM&RF services are currently offered, this data collection activity will engage current HM&RF participants—couples, fathers, and/or young adults—to provide insights into the benefits of HM&RF services and current barriers to service participation.

(2) For sites where HM&RF services are *not* currently offered, this data collection activity will engage potential HM&RF participants—people who are participating in other human service programs that might be eligible for HM&RF services—to provide insights into the benefits of these other community services and current barriers to service participation, as well as learn about ways that HM&RF services might or might not meet the needs of their community.

Activity assumptions

A facilitated group interview guided by a flexible set of key questions.

- Invite ~4-8 participants
- Plan for 60-90 minutes
- Token of appreciation ($50)

Pre-work

The moderator will work with contacts in the selected site to customize the opening of the Group, considering who should open the Group and how (for instance, whether that be an opening prayer, song, or story). Additionally, the moderator will create a copy of the protocol for each group that customizes the questions for the invited participants, depending on whether participants will be current or potential HM&RF participants.

Instructions for moderators

You will be conducting a focus group. You may need to skip some questions in order to focus on the questions that are most relevant to the participants. Ahead of the focus group, tailor this protocol based on the invited participants.

Before you begin, read the verbal consent script below to describe the study to respondents, and ask each participant to respond to the two requests for consent: (1) for participating in the focus group and (2) for permission to record the focus group. Do not start recording until after the participants consent.

Do not record the focus group if you do not have the participants' consent to do so. If this happens, be prepared for the notetaker to take detailed notes.

Introduction and consent script

Thank you for sharing space with me today. My name is [NAME] and I work for an organization called Mathematica. Mathematica is an organization that is committed to improving public well-being and promoting a more equitable and just world. Today, I will be facilitating a discussion with you to learn about your experience with receiving [*IF HM&RF*: healthy marriage/responsible fatherhood] services from [PROGRAM] [*IF NON-HM&RF*: or other programs like it], such as what has been most beneficial and what has been challenging for you. Before we move into the discussion, I would like to share some information about what you can expect and confirm your consent to participate today.

This conversation is to support a project called the *Advancing Best Practices and Cultural Relevance of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Programs for Indigenous Communities* project, or what we call I-HMRF. This project is sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Your participation in the conversation is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions you don't wish to answer or stop at any time. If you participate in the focus group, you will receive $50 to thank you for your participation. There are no known risks to joining today's conversation, and there is no penalty or consequence for deciding not to participate. There are also no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask; we just want to hear your perspectives based on your experience. We will use the information you share with us to write a summary of what we learned, but we will not attribute any of your comments to you in our reports.

We expect this discussion to take about 60-90 minutes. We value the information you will share with us and want to make sure we capture it accurately by recording it. Only the team that is working on the study will have access to the recording and transcription. We will destroy the recording and the transcription at the end of the study.

Do you have any questions?

You should have received a form today that has all the information I just mentioned about participating in this focus group. If you think of questions after we are done today, you can call the number that's provided on the form. If you didn't get a form, just let [PROGRAM] know and they'll give you one.

Before we can begin, I need to confirm your participation by asking you two questions:

- Do you agree to participate in this interview?
- [*If yes*] Do we have your permission to record the discussion?

Introduction to the focus group

I would like to start by acknowledging this land and the people who reside on it. [Insert

acknowledgement].

Next, I'd like to agree on some shared norms for our discussion.

- This will be an informal discussion. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. We are interested in learning everyone's perspective.
- There may be times in the discussion when you have different opinions than other people do, and that is okay. We want to hear all opinions.
- There will be no formal breaks, so please feel free to step away whenever you need to.
- We would like one person to talk at a time so we can understand everyone clearly, but we hope each of you will share your thoughts at some point.
- We also ask you to respect each other's privacy and not share what we talk about here with anyone else.

There is a lot we look forward to asking you about, so I may change the subject or move the discussion ahead from time to time, just to keep the conversation moving. Please know that if we do this it is only to make sure we can cover all questions today. But if you feel like after there is more you would like to speak about on a particular topic, please feel free to reach out to us. [*IF IN-PERSON:* We will provide our contact information on a handout. / *IF VIRTUAL:* We have attached a contact information handout document to this virtual meeting invitation]. Your thoughts matter to us.

Anything else to add to our shared norms before we begin?

Do you have any questions before we start?

[If permission granted by all participants, start recording].

Now, before we get to the questions, I am going to read a statement required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, which is a law that describes how federal agencies can collect information from the public.

This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to inform future program development related to HMRF Indigenous grantees. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average **75** minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. 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 and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: 0970-0531, Exp: 9/30/2025. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Lauren Tingey; LTingey@mathematica-mpr.com.

Participant Introductions

Please introduce yourself to the group by sharing your name, your Tribal affiliation or ancestry, and

what roles you hold in your community. When I say role, I invite you think of any role that is important to you, whether that be professional or personal.

Defining strong families

Thank you all for these introductions! Before we talk more about the services you've participated in, a foundation of what we're hoping to learn about in this project is how programs like [PROGRAM] can better support strong families and healthy relationships, especially in Indigenous communities.

1. I wondered if each of you might be willing to share an example of what comes to mind when you think about a strong family with healthy relationships. What activities do strong families do together?
    a. *Probe*: What values do you think are present in a strong family or in a healthy relationship?
    b. *Probe*: What does it feel and look like to be part of a strong family or in a healthy relationship?

Description of involvement with services

Next, I'd like to hear about your participation with [PROGRAM].

2. What activities have you participated in as part of [PROGRAM]?
    a. *Probe:* [If needed, provide a list of known [HM and/or RF] services the program offers for participants to confirm]
    b. *Probe:* What supports does this program provide for you to make it possible for you to participate? [If needed, provide a list of examples of supports for participants to consider]
    c. *Probe*: What priorities do you think this program has? How have these priorities played a role in your experience?
3. How did you hear about [PROGRAM]?
    a. *Probe:* What was the recruitment process like?
4. What about [PROGRAM] interested or motivated you enough to join?
5. What were your goals when you entered the program?
    a. *Probe:* What did you hope you would learn from these activities?

Current benefits of or gaps in services

6. [*IF HM&RF*] Thinking back to your image of a strong family or a healthy relationship, has this image changed because of your participation in this program? How so?
7. [*IF NON-HM&RF*] In your experience, does [PROGRAM] focus on supporting strong families

and healthy relationships?

   a. *Probe*: If so, has your image of a strong family or a healthy relationship changed because of your participation? How so?

   b. Probe: If not, do you wish [PROGRAM] had that focus? Would you want to participate in a program with that focus?

8. Have the services you've participated in so far helped you make progress towards strengthening your family or relationships? If so, how? Can you think of a time when you noticed this change?

   a. *Probe:* This could include improving your parenting skills.

9. Have you experienced other positive benefits in your life form being in this program? If so, please describe a specific example.

   a. *Probe:* For instance, in employment or in meeting financial goals?

10. Are there aspects of the [*IF HM&RF*: HM and/or RF] services that have *not* been helpful for or relevant to you? Please tell me about them.

11. Are there any services [PROGRAM] doesn't currently offer that you or your family would benefit from?

   a. *Probe:* What feels like it might be missing from the activities or supports?

Reflections on ease of participation

Participants often encounter factors outside of their control that make participation easier or harder.

12. What are aspects of the program that makes it easy for you to participate?

   a. *Probe:* For instance, if the program offers support such as transportation or childcare, or if the scheduled activities align with your work schedule.

13. What aspects of the program make it hard for you to participate?

   b. *Probe:* For instance, if the program does not offer transportation or childcare, or if the scheduled activities overlap with your work schedule.

Closure

Those are all the questions I have today.

14. Any final comments, thoughts, or questions anyone would like to share before we wrap up?

[IF IN-PERSON: We will provide our contact information on a handout; / IF VIRTUAL: We will share a link in the chat] to provide optional anonymous feedback if you have anything else you would like to share with us after the session.

Thank you for sharing your experiences!