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

Instrument 5. Community Members: Talking Circle Protocol

What are we hoping to learn from this activity?

Hear from community leaders and/or Elders who have not participated in HMRF services to learn about ways that HM&RF services might or might not meet the needs of their community.

Activity assumptions

A talking circle is a group-based methodology that offers each participant a turn to speak about a guiding question or questions, and equally elevates each participant's voice. By using a talking circle approach, we are aligning with traditional practices, which is particularly important if Elders will be invited to participate.

- Invite ~4-8 participants
- Plan for 90-120 minutes
- Token of appreciation ($50)

Pre-work

The moderator will work with contacts in the selected site to customize the opening of the circle, considering who should open the circle and how (for instance, whether that be an opening prayer, song, or story). For in-person circles, this may also include identifying a talking object and confirming the appropriate direction of the circle (passing left or right).

Instructions for moderators

You will be facilitating a talking circle. Ahead of the talking circle, work with the site to ensure the protocol is appropriate 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 request for consent to participate in the talking circle.

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 committed to improving public well-being and promoting a more equitable and just world. Today, I will be facilitating a talking circle with you to learn about your perspectives on how families are doing in your community, what services currently exist to support them, and what other services might be needed to promote strong families and community relationships. Before we move into the talking circle, 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. By participating today, you will help contribute to our understanding of how services can be strengthened to support communities like yours so we can share these lessons more broadly.

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 this talking circle, 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 90-120 minutes. We value the information you will share with us and want to make sure we capture it accurately, so my colleague will be taking notes. Only the team that is working on the study will have access to these notes. We will destroy the notes 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 talking circle. 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 first need to confirm your participation:

- Do you agree to participate in this talking circle?

Introduction to the Talking Circle Protocol

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

I would also like to acknowledge that talking circles are a cultural practice of the Indigenous people of this land that has been shared with non-Indigenous peoples. It is used to equally elevate all voices in a circle to share their stories, experiences, and wisdom. It is with gratitude to those that came before us that we use this approach today.

In-person facilitation:

- Our team worked with [PERSON] to identify [THIS OBJECT] as our talking piece. [Provide any significance, if applicable.] Shortly, I will pass this talking piece to the person to my [LEFT/RIGHT] to begin. Whoever holds the talking piece is the only person who should

speak. Everyone else is asked to listen deeply and receive all that is shared.

Virtual facilitation:

- On the screen you will see a virtual circle with our names listed around the circle. We will use a virtual icon to take the place of a physical object. I will move the icon next to the name of the next person on the circle. When each person finishes speaking, please say "Pass" and I will move the icon to the next person on the circle. Whoever virtually holds the talking piece is the only person who should speak. Everyone else is asked to listen deeply and receive all that is shared. Please also mute yourself when it is not your turn to speak.

Once started, the talking piece moves around the circle in one direction. When you receive the piece, pause and consider what needs to be shared. We are in no rush. If it is your turn to speak and you wish to pass, you may pass the talking piece to the person next to you.

We will go around the circle one time for each question. Before moving onto the next question though, I will check in to see if another rotation would be beneficial. [*IF IN-PERSON:* Additionally, we will provide our contact information on a handout if you feel like there is more you would like to share with us after the end of today's circle. / *IF VIRTUAL:* Additionally, we have attached a contact information handout document to this virtual meeting invitation if you feel like there is more you would like to share with us after the end of today's circle].

Before we begin, I would like to invite suggestions for group norms for the circle, for example:

- What is said in the circle stays in the circle

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

Do you have any questions before we start?

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 **105** 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.

Round 1: 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.

Round 2: Defining strong families

Before we talk more about the services that are available in your community to support families, we wanted to hear from you about what strong families and healthy relationships look and feel like to you, especially in Indigenous communities.

What does it feel and look like to be part of a strong family or in a healthy relationship? What do strong families do together? What values do you think are present in a strong family or in a healthy relationship?

Round 3: Reflections on families and current services

Next, I'd like to hear about how families are currently doing in your community and how they are being supported.

In your experience, how are families in alignment with or out of alignment with the way you think about strong families? What strengths do families in your community already have that can be expanded or deepened?

What specific services or programs currently exist in your community that focus on supporting strong relationships, healthy marriages, or responsible parenting? How are these services or programs supporting families to become stronger?

Round 4: Reflections on future services and supports needed

Next, I'd like to hear about other services, programs, or initiatives that are not currently offered in your community that you'd like to see in the future.

What would be helpful to offer to strengthen local families? Why might those services be beneficial? What supports might your community need to implement those kinds of services?

Round 5: Gratitude

Finally, I'd like to close in a good way, and would like to invite each of you to acknowledge something you are grateful for.

Closure

Thank you for sharing your stories, experiences, and wisdom.

[*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.

References:

https://www.globallearningpartners.com/blog/talking-circles-more-than-a-technique/

https://ied.sd61.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/112/2019/02/Circle_Protocol_by_Sarah_Rhude__Diane_Sam.pdf

https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html