

Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) Evaluation

Project Description

Fathers play a unique role in their children's lives and development, but some fathers face barriers to positive involvement with their children. Responsible Fatherhood programs aim to improve the well-being of low-income fathers and their children by addressing these barriers. There is great interest in identifying effective strategies that provide fathers with the capacity to support their children both emotionally and financially.

The Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) study will partner with Responsible Fatherhood programs to identify high priority questions for the field and design and conduct evaluations that test the effectiveness of strategies to support parenting and co-parenting skills and to advance the employment of low-income fathers. Programs use a number of promising models to work with fathers, but rigorous studies have not yet shown which are effective and worth expanding or replicating. B3 is one of several evaluations that will provide evidence aimed at understanding the effects of these programs and informing future directions.

Agenda, Scope and Goals. On behalf of the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), MDRC has assembled a team of leading experts in the field with experience designing rigorous evaluations and providing programmatic technical assistance for demonstration projects.

B3 seeks to inform policymakers and program operators about the most effective ways to engage low-income fathers and help them become increasingly self-sufficient, responsible parents in healthy relationships. It is designed to test innovative, evidence-informed approaches to the three core components of fatherhood programs: parenting and coparenting, healthy marriage and relationships, and self-sufficiency. The proposed study will also test new strategies programs can use to improve participant recruitment and engagement. The approaches to be tested will reflect the latest developments in behavioral science, adult skill-building, and other relevant disciplines. It is anticipated that B3 will include six local program sites that serve low-income fathers.

Design, Sites and Data Sources. To measure program effects, B3 plans to use a random assignment research method, which is considered to be the most accurate method for studying program impacts. The proposed study will investigate how well different pieces of the program work by providing one group of fathers with enhanced services and another group of fathers with less intensive services, and then comparing fathers' outcomes after several months. The study also includes an implementation analysis that will describe who participated in services, how services operated, the challenges staff faced, and emerging lessons for the field. We anticipate that data will be collected from multiple sources, such as surveys, program participation information, and information from government agencies.

Project Timeline. Study enrollment and data collection is proposed to begin in 2016. We expect to release interim reports to the field on an ongoing basis throughout the course of the project.

Key Partners. OPRE awarded a five-year contract to MDRC, with partners MEF Associates, Abt SRBI and leading experts in the field. For more information please contact: Dina Israel (dina.israel@mdrc.org) or Anna Solmeyer (Anna.Solmeyer@acf.hhs.gov).

NOTE: The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This collection of information is voluntary and will be used 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. 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. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Anna Solmeyer; anna.solmeyer@acf.hhs.gov; Attn: OMB-PRA (0970-0356).