

Kureem Nugent:

Hi, everyone, thank you all for joining so far, looks like we've got a couple of people coming in. If you could just write in the chat: your name, your affiliation, where you're calling in from. I'm really excited to have you all, I'm Kureem. You'll hear more from me later, but I'm from MDRC, located in New York City. If my team members could write in the chat too, that'd be great.

Kureem Nugent:

Got some New York people, people in the DMV [Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia] area, California, Williamstown, one of my favorite cities, or towns, I guess. Got people from The Ridge Project, Rochester. I'm excited we have a lot of folks from different parts of the country. Thank you all for joining in from California, I know it might be a little early, at least it'd be early for me.

Kureem Nugent:

Okay, I think we'll go ahead and get started. Thank you so much for joining us at this webinar that will introduce Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs, or SIRF. My name is Kureem Nugent, and I'm a Research Assistant at MDRC, which my colleague Dina will tell you more about later. Although I'm relatively new to the fatherhood field, I'm particularly invested in SIRF, and its goals as someone raised by separated young parents, and as someone who understands some of the challenges they faced navigating parenthood.

Kureem Nugent:

We're really pleased to be here today to share an overview of a new federal evaluation of Responsible Fatherhood programming. Before we launch into the program, I just want to share a couple of housekeeping items. Everyone on the line has been muted, but we welcome you to be in touch throughout the webinar using the chat, or the Q&A function. We'll talk more about that in just a moment, and I just want you guys to know that this webinar is being recorded.

Kureem Nugent:

If you run into any technical difficulties throughout the session, please use the chat feature to contact all panelists, as pictured on the left here. This is the default setting, we also encourage you to submit any questions at any time, that you may have about the project, or the program selection process. You can submit those questions using the Q&A feature at the bottom of the Zoom screen. If we aren't able to get to all questions today, we'll use them to inform a frequently asked questions document that we would share after this webinar.

Kureem Nugent:

We do want to note that we won't be able to answer any questions today related to the requirements of the federal grant, and we ask you that you refer to the FOA [Funding Opportunity Announcements], and the designated contact listed there for such questions. With that, I think we're ready to begin, so I'll turn it over to our Deputy Project Director, Dina Israel.

Dina Israel:

Thanks, Kureem. Hi everyone, I'm Dina. Kureem and I, along with other speakers today work at an organization called MDRC. MDRC is a nonprofit social policy research organization, that has been working with Responsible Fatherhood programs for nearly 30 years, to improve programming, and the

quality of evaluation. On SIRF, MDRC is leading a team that also includes Insight Policy Research, MEF Associates, and several other experts from the field.

Dina Israel:

We're really pleased to be here today sharing an overview of SIRF, and we really hope you walk away with a background on the project itself, and information on how to express an interest in joining the project. This project is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, or OPRE. We're joined here today by our project officers, Katie Pahigiannis and Kriti Jain. We'd like to start by turning things over to them to say a few words.

Kriti Jain:

Hi Dina, thank you so much. Well, good afternoon everybody, and morning, depending on where you're calling from, and thank you so much for taking the time to join us on this webinar. Welcome to all of you. We know you have a lot on your plates, and we're really grateful that you've made the time to be with us here today. This project, Strengthening the Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs is really important, and we're so excited about being at this point where we can share important plans, and next steps with all of you.

Kriti Jain:

As you know, or will know very shortly, the purpose of this project is to use rapid learning methods, like rapid cycle evaluation, or continuous quality improvement, often called CQI, to identify, and test promising practices for addressing critical implementation challenges in Responsible Fatherhood programs. The SIRF team will get more into this shortly, but before we get started, I wanted to express my thanks to the SIRF project team for working really, really hard to get us to this point, their continual adaptation, and making all of our project activities virtual, and also, a thank you to those of you who generously shared your time with us to talk about programmatic challenges, and how you've addressed them. With that, I'll turn it back over to Dina, who's going to want to hear more about all of you, thanks.

Dina Israel:

Thanks, Kriti. As we get started with today's webinar, I think the first thing we wanted to do was just we'd love to learn a little bit about who's joining us today, so let's do a quick poll. If you wouldn't mind answering in the next 30 to 40 seconds, what is your primary role within the fatherhood field?

Dina Israel:

Thanks Kureem for opening that poll, and we'll give it a few more seconds. Anyone wants to do a drum roll for the result, in a few seconds Kureem, I'll let you do that.

Dina Israel:

Great, thank you. We have a mix — on the phone, our fellow researchers, practitioners; this is great. Thanks so much for answering that. We've organized the agenda today so you can hear from different members of our team that will be working with any program involved with SIRF. Together, we hope you'll leave this call with an understanding about why we think SIRF is an important contribution to the field, what the project's overall structure and goals are going to be, how SIRF will look on the ground as the study team partners with practitioners and fathers, when site selection will take place; and how to

nominate a program, if you have one in mind, that would be a good fit for SIRF. We also hope you'll have a chance to ask any burning questions in the Q&A box, and of course, leave the call with a better sense of next steps for the project. We have a lot to cover today, so let's kick things off. I'll first start by just sharing a little bit about why SIRF is important and add on to what Kriti's already said.

Dina Israel:

As the poll indicated, we're amongst a crowd that plays a part in shaping what fatherhood programming is, and its purposes, so we won't say much about fatherhood program goals today. Please just know that the SIRF team understands, and is also committed to finding solutions that engage fathers, and support them in their role with their children, as co-parents, and in other ways such as increasing their economic stability. These are incredibly important goals, and they've been supported by OFA [Office of Family Assistance], and the federal Responsible Fatherhood grant for many years.

Dina Israel:

The past several years of research, side by side with practice, has helped to highlight a few things. Namely, that as programs work with fathers, and help them achieve their goals, practitioners face challenges in implementing these services. For example, it's hard to reach as many fathers all the time as a program would like to, both in terms of initial enrollments, or in keeping a father engaged throughout the services given all the demands a person can have, and this is where SIRF comes in.

Dina Israel:

SIRF is designed to be an opportunity to dive deeply with programs and fathers to examine different solutions to common challenges faced during recruitment, initial engagement, and retaining fathers, and services through the life of the program. It's designed to be brief, a series of short evaluations over about one year, as opposed to what you might know well from federal evaluations as being big studies over several years. The hope is that through these three series of evaluations, this work will strengthen services locally, disseminate insights to other programs across the field, and strengthen programming in a way that is poised for additional research in the future.

Dina Israel:

Prior to SIRF, MDRC has had the opportunity to work on other federal fatherhood evaluations, such as the more recent Building Bridges and Bonds project. We're incredibly grateful to the programs and fathers who participated in these previous studies, and for the perspective they have offered in terms of how to engage fathers in their services. We're carrying these words, and advice, some of which is shown here on the screen, as we launch SIRF, and work on expanding the reach of this type of reflective thinking.

Dina Israel:

I hope as you listen today, you'll get excited about what you're hearing, and we hope also, you start to understand some of the benefits that could come to any program joining SIRF. These are listed on the screen here, and include funds to help offset any costs involved with the participation of study, time dedicated to looking really closely and deeply at forms and other data that a program might have at their disposal; professional development opportunities for staff, and across sites, and sharing across each other; as well as other technical assistance and learning. I'd like to now turn the presentation over to my colleague Oscar Cerna, who will provide more detail about what SIRF will look like in practice. Take it over, Oscar.

Oscar Cerna:

Thanks Dina, and hi everyone. I'm Oscar Cerna, I'm a research associate at MDRC here in California, and I've been at MDRC for about 12 years, and I'm really excited to be part of the SIRF team. I grew up without my father, and now myself, being a father of two, and in an active co-parenting relationship with my ex-wife, I have a particularly vested interest in strengthening fatherhood programs. I'm going to use my time today to give a broad view of what SIRF is, who the key stakeholders are, who they've been up to this point, and what we can expect in the near future for the study, and the partnership.

Oscar Cerna:

SIRF aims to work collaboratively with fatherhood programs to test big ideas and solutions to barriers commonly faced when recruiting fathers, enrolling in services, and retaining them so they can achieve their goals. Our hope is that through SIRF, there are opportunities to implement ideas and solutions in efficient and effective ways, but they are also practical to the conditions under which your programs operate. Taking a look at SIRF at a glance, we want to provide you with an understanding of how the partnership works and who's involved. Using what we like to call a learning cycle, programs will be given the opportunity to discuss and reflect on implementation challenges commonly faced, and what can be done to address them, and also assessing how well new strategies are implemented, and if other improvements are needed.

Oscar Cerna:

Beginning next year, SIRF plans to partner with up to 10 fatherhood programs to design and try out these learning cycles. A little later, my colleague Donna will be going over how SIRF will be selecting and nominating these programs. The funding support for SIRF has been possible through the Administration for Children and Families of the US Department of Health and Human Services. As mentioned earlier, SIRF is being coordinated by MDRC in partnership with MEF Associates, and Insight Policy Research, and certainly we couldn't do this work without partnerships with programs like yours.

Oscar Cerna:

The SIRF study builds on important work that was done on Responsible Fatherhood programs by examining ways they used to support fathers effectively. In earlier studies, we've learned a great deal about how to best implement these programs, but certainly more can be learned, and shared for the field. Our bottom line for SIRF is to really have an understanding of how to identify and address challenges, so that programs can strengthen their efforts, utilizing reflective and informative approaches, and in a minute, we'll explain how we can do this.

Oscar Cerna:

As we've been saying, there's been a number of stakeholders at SIRF including to strengthen efforts for Fatherhood programs. The most important stakeholders are fathers themselves, as they provide programs valuable insights on what they think is most useful to them, what support they need, and what areas of improvement can be made to better serve them. SIRF also engages subject matter experts from the fatherhood field to help draw attention to the key factors that most influence behaviors of fathers, and families both in and out of these programs.

Oscar Cerna:

We're also engaging policymakers and funders to help SIRF receive the necessary resources to develop strong program activities. Of course, we all know the importance of having program staff, both as administrators, and frontline staff, to give voice for solutions for engaging Fatherhood participants, and strengthening their overall program operations. Finally, there's us as researchers tasked to investigate how stakeholders are working together to improve these programs, and to offer ongoing technical assistance that helps these programs implement policies and practices that we all think are important. You can see that there's a very interdisciplinary and collaborative endeavor through SIRF.

Oscar Cerna:

The first step in the SIRF approach is to identify the implementation challenges that programs like yours commonly face. Starting in January of this year, the SIRF team engaged in a series of activities to better understand implementation challenges with programs, and to discuss promising approaches for addressing these challenges. This included talking to practitioners, fathers, and others in the field, as well as doing a literature scan. Through all this, we learned a lot of valuable information from these activities, and really greatly informed the design of our survey approach.

Oscar Cerna:

As we've been talking with programs, partners, and experts about potential solutions, it's helping us to design how we plan to work with the selected SIRF programs. Again, Donna will be walking through some of the specifics about how these programs be nominated, and selected a little bit later. But in short, the SIRF team will use a multiphase approach to identify fatherhood program applicants with strong potential to be successful sites, and to submit them to OPRE for approval.

Oscar Cerna:

In early 2021, we'll begin working closely with the SIRF sites to learn from one another, and to work together to develop individual learning cycle work plans. Our aim for this is to really partner with them on these learning cycles, and to co-design activities that cater to each site's strengths, and areas of need. These plans will vary in design, time frame, and level of staff involvement, but across all sites, there is going to be a sense of collaboration in creating these plans.

Oscar Cerna:

The process includes funding from SIRF sites to examine program data that support strong implementation of new or improved program activities, and technical assistance will be provided to support sites for implementing these chosen activities, as well as examine how implementation has gone, which can help decide on the next steps for the work. We want to make sure that these valuable lessons are received from addressing implementation challenges, and developing solutions, and that it goes beyond just what the sites learn, and what sites gain as participating in SIRF.

Oscar Cerna:

This is a chance to provide lessons to the larger field of fatherhood, and to share how well these learning cycles can provide a framework for informed decision making. Over the last few months, the SIRF team gathered insights from various Fatherhood experts and stakeholders, including practitioners, and fathers. From this fatherhood literature, and through these discussions, and this understanding of the literature, our SIRF team really started identifying hundreds of unique approaches, and then narrowed

these down to five categories that are listed here, with some examples of what some of those strategies may look like.

Oscar Cerna:

You can see that for each of these five areas, or strategy, we have an example that can really ground on how things look at sites. Now we're going to take another poll on program strategies, and just ask what do you think is the one strategy that you find to be the most relevant for your program? What would you think your program would most want to focus on strengthening? I'll give you a little bit of time to select your strategy.

Oscar Cerna:

Okay, and Kureem, could we have the envelope please?

Kureem Nugent:

Yes, and give it a nice countdown: 10, 9 ... I'll give it five more seconds. Okay, sharing the results.

Oscar Cerna:

Okay, so as you can see, there's a lot of variance, and evenness around the different types of program activity, and program improvements that you all would want to focus attention to, so that's great. I feel like we're picking the right pieces to work on. Now that we've given you an overview of what the source project goals are, I want to give you a look at what those program activities would be over the course of the study's lifeline.

Oscar Cerna:

You see in August and October this year, we're in this nominating process to really share with you what it will look like, and what is expected. Then later on in the year, we'll start having more discussions with programs that are interested in joining SIRF, and really getting a better understanding of how they work, and how the SIRF approach aligns with what they would want to gain.

Oscar Cerna:

Then early next year, we'll have that site selection, and plan for the study, so that we can start thinking about these learning cycles in a more customized way. Then later on, in the spring of next year through March of 2022, we're going to take that year to really implement those learning cycles with sites, and to have a good understanding of what those learning cycles have been able to show sites what they're doing.

Oscar Cerna:

Next slide, please. Now we talked about what SIRF looks like in action, and what we think that it will become, throughout the next year and a half, and how we plan to work with fatherhood programs, so we're going to now step into getting into more detail about what these learning cycles look like. So, if we go to the next slide, this is an image that we've come up with that will help describe what these certain learning cycles are. We'd like to think of them as cycles as having three key stages, to learn, to do, and to reflect.

Oscar Cerna:

If you become part of SIRF, you'll hear a lot about the “Learn-Do-Reflect” process, and you can even see that this concept is included as part of our project logo, the flow of it. We're going to spend the next few slides talking about the details of what happens in each of these stages.

Oscar Cerna:

The first step in the learning cycle to do just that, to learn, creating a service implementation plan involves understanding how your programs work, and finding out where the key areas of challenges exist, and how to mitigate these challenges. An important step of this learning is identifying, and training staff about the search strategy, and how it aims to help their work, and what their roles, or responsibilities would be as part of it.

Oscar Cerna:

After a plan has been created at the site, and has been understood by the program staff, it's really time to carry [it] out and make it happen. This means working together to carry out the given strategy that your program has been selected to employ.

Oscar Cerna:

Then finally, as we work through how to do the work, we're reflecting on what's happening, how it's happening, and whether it's happening in the way that it was intended. It'll give a closer look at when things are working well, when things are not working as well as we thought, and where things may need to change. So, analyzing the program data, and other information, as part of the process will help us find out what's happened, and to think about what we might change for the next cycle. I'm going to turn it over to Katie who will talk a bit about how SIRF will work with CQI, and local evaluations included as part of the federal grant, so Katie, take it away.

Katie:

Thank you, Oscar. Hi everyone, I'm Katie Pahigiannis, and from OPRE as Dina mentioned earlier, one of the project officers on SIRF. What Oscar has been describing is how the SIRF project will work with programs to iteratively and systematically test approaches to improving recruitment, retention, and engagement in services. One aspect of this project that I find particularly exciting is that approachable both ways to program improvements for the site to participate, but will also lead to important research findings that we can share broadly in the field.

Katie:

It's because of this research project's close connection to program operations that we thought it would be helpful to explain some of the distinctions and potential overlap with some of the other program improvement and research activities that programs may be undertaking in parallel. The first activity listed on this slide is continuous quality improvement, or CQI, which as many of you know, is a similar type of ongoing data driven program assessment. It can be defined as the process of identifying, describing, and analyzing program strengths and problems, followed by testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions.

Katie:

CQI is part of a program's ongoing monitoring and improvement work, really tied to the program's particular mission, services, and metrics. All federally funded grantees, including those who participate

in SIRF will be undertaking CQI activities as specified in the grant requirements, and with the support and guidance from ACF [Administration for Children and Families], and its contractors. The second activity listed here is another research activity that may be ongoing at the local level, so local evaluations, as many as you know are single-site research projects designed by programs and their evaluation partners to study an outcome of interest to the program. A subset of federally funded grantees will also be conducting local evaluations.

Katie:

And of note, I think there may be components, or goals of these evaluations that relate to the kinds of things that could also be addressed in CQI work, and/or SIRF rapid cycle studies. Then lastly, of course, what we're talking with you about today is SIRF, which is one of our federally led evaluation projects. As the team has mentioned, the project will use data to systematically, and in an iterative fashion, test solutions with a focus on common challenges related to recruitment, retention, and engagement. A set of program sites will be selected to participate in SIRF, which will involve a nomination process, including self-nominations. You'll hear more about this from Donna in a little bit.

Katie:

Through that process, the study design will be developed in partnership between the program staff, and the SIRF project team, based on some key priority areas, that you just heard about that they've been identifying in the early work of this project, and tailored for the program's particular context, and setting. These learning cycles will occur during a defined study period, and as you've been hearing, in addition to some of the program benefits, there are also some research-related goals of producing broadly applicable lessons on ways we can strengthen programs for future large-scale evaluation studies.

Katie:

One overarching point that I wanted to try to drive home on this slide is that, for all of these activities, ACF will be working very closely with the SIRF team to make sure that we're coordinating, and streamlining across these activities. Our goal really is to make sure that we're being synergistic where needed, and not being duplicative, or interfering with any of the other important activities that programs will be undertaking at the same time, or in parallel. That is all I had to say on this slide, I'll pass it back to Oscar now.

Oscar Cerna:

Thanks so much, Katie. Obviously, we've been throwing a lot of information out your way already, and might have really prompted a lot of questions that you might have, and so we want to spend some time now to hear from you, and to help answer some questions you may have about anything we shared so far, so we want to take some time to do that.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Oscar, we've got a question. This is Donna, hey. One question is how much staff time do you estimate this will require from participating programs, [is there a] general sense of that?

Oscar Cerna:



I think, depending on how activities are designed, and the type of goals that sites will have to make improvements, or to strengthen, and enhance things that are working well, it's going to be dependent on that. This is why I think it's important that as part of the learning cycle process, we'll have folks who really discuss that, and talk about their ambitions, and aims for the goals, but then also to really think about who needs to be involved, and how much time and level of effort is going to be required. Example — we have a couple of phone meetings with certain fathers, and we'll be brainstorming workshops that we can learn more about sites and organization. Part of that process is to really get a better understanding of the programs and understand the type of capacity that they'll have to undertake, whatever activity they decide to do.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

We actually have another question, Oscar, we have a question about COVID, and whether COVID has affected the research, and the nomination process at all.

Dina Israel:

I'm happy to take that Oscar, this is Dina.

Oscar Cerna:

Go for it, Dina.

Dina Israel:

Okay, great. That's a great question, because as we were, this project was unfolding, a lot was happening in the world. I'll just say that we had in mind these factors like COVID, and felt like in looking at the five categories that we were placing them broadly enough that they would allow for incorporation of adaptations, and thoughts that you all would be responding, programs would be responding to, and to address these kinds of concerns. Broadly speaking, we think that, we're hoping that the categories that we hope to focus in on, the strategies will allow us to be mindful of all of these shifting concerns.

Dina Israel:

I think also, I'll just add one other thing which is, the multiphase process for getting to know programs, I think will also allow us to intentionally consider the way COVID is affecting the current context at a local level.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Thanks, Dina. I'll touch on that a little bit later on also, as we talk about the nomination process. We've got a couple more questions, and I think maybe we can take these, and then flip back to the presentation. There will be another opportunity in a few minutes for additional questions. The next question is about coordination, and it's asking whether we can say more about coordination between SIRF, and local evaluation plans, some more to say there.

Katie:

Hi, Donna, this is Katie. I can take that one. We don't have specific guidance just yet on how we will handle these situations where grantees who propose local evaluations are also selected for the SIRF project. I think it will depend a bit on the study design, and how the goals of the local evaluation may relate to the things being studied in SIRF. My understanding now is that this will be a case-by-case

decision, in terms of whether the grantee continues with both evaluations, or just one or the other. We will be working closely with OFA on these decisions, and more guidance will be available after the grants are awarded.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Thank you. Then, just one final question before we move on. Again, we don't want you to stop asking questions. Please put them in the Q&A, or chat section, and we'll certainly respond, and get back to you after the webinar. The final question, the study requires a year commitment, correct? Will support be ongoing post-that-timeline?

Dina:

This is Dina, I can help to answer that, I think. We're hoping that through the course of this project, the support that we're building capacity for this having a life of its own thereafter, and so project funds might be limited during the time period. But we think that the techniques and approaches that we'll use together would generate some ability to maintain, and hopefully support ongoing work.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Okay.

Oscar Cerna:

All right.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Throwing it back to you, Oscar.

Oscar Cerna:

No, I think that was great, and hopefully that helped address some of the questions that folks have had on the webinar. And certainly there's more questions that will be had, and we'll be talking about how we can share some of the answers, or provide more clarification down the line. But for now, I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Donna to spend a few minutes talking with you [about] the program nomination and selection process, so Donna, all yours.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Oscar, thank you. Good afternoon, and good morning, depending on your time zone. My name is Donna, and I'm from MDRC as well. I'm interested in SIRF because of the important role that my father played, and continues to play in my life, and the desire for everyone to have a strong, positive influence from a father as I have over the years., My dad has played a very strong role in my life, and I wish that for everybody. In addition, I was part of the technical assistance team for earlier Responsible Fatherhood initiatives sponsored by OFA, and I look forward to bringing to SIRF what I learned from the different practitioners I met and worked with there.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

For the next couple of minutes, I'd like to give you an overview of how we plan to identify programs for participation in SIRF. Then we'll respond to a few questions again — perhaps others will surface in your minds as we talk for the next few minutes, and then we'll wrap things up. Next slide please.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Although this image that you can see on the left may be difficult to read — we know it's small, but we wanted to put it here — so that you will know the SIRF nomination process form when you see it. This is the front side of the form that outlines the process for nominating programs for SIRF, and it's available right now, both on OPRE and MDRC's websites. The form provides guidance on how the SIRF nomination process will work, including the timeline which Oscar touched on previously.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

While we're not going to review the entire form in detail right now, there are a few important items that we want to highlight for you. First and foremost, we invite any, and all fatherhood programs to seriously consider SIRF. This includes both Fatherhood FIRE [Family-focused, Interconnected, Resilient, and Essential Grants], or Responsible Fatherhood grantees, and non-grantees. All that means really that selection as a Fatherhood FIRE grantee is not a SIRF requirement. Nominations can take the form of self-nominations, or you may choose to nominate another program that you know of, or work with that you believe would benefit. We encourage all kinds of submissions, so think beyond your own program, and consider speaking with folks in your network, others that you know that you think would benefit from SIRF. Nominations are open as of right now, and as we are calling them expressions of interest, which we'll discuss in a minute will be accepted until the fall — Friday, October 9th, at 5 p.m., to be specific.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Okay, next slide, please. Okay, so on the right-hand side of the slide, we're now looking at the back side of the form, where you'll find more details about the process. Rather than a traditional application in which you respond to an often exhaustive list of questions, our goal in creating a nomination process was to try to get to know programs in a different way. We're asking interested programs to express interest in SIRF by sharing their thoughts with us in a few key areas. We want to gain insight into how you are currently viewing your services, and also, given SIRF's goals, how you think this initiative can help you support fathers in meeting their goals. As you nominate your program, or nominate another program, keep these things in mind.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

We'd like to know about the goals you have for your organization, and goals specific to your Responsible Fatherhood program. We'd like to know about any upcoming changes to programming you're considering, and importantly, let us know what conditions, or circumstances these changes are responding to. We're really interested in understanding the impetus for changes that you're considering making, and related, and this came up in one of the questions, it would be important for us to see how you may be making changes brought on by, or that are in response to, current national issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic; and conversations; and activities about racism or social justice. Again, to touch back to the question, this is something we're expecting sites to talk about, to share with us how these things are affecting their programs, their fathers, et cetera. We absolutely expect and encourage conversations around them, because your programs are obviously responding to those issues.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Importantly, we're also really eager to hear about any questions you might have for the study team, as any questions that you have are really going to help us understand where to begin any follow-up conversations we have. The bottom line is at the back of this form, which you can get immediately after the session, goes into some detail with the kinds of broad topics that we'd like you to respond to, by way

of expressing interest. It's again, your goals, changes you're making to your programs, and importantly, what is motivating the change, response to national issues no matter what they are, but even beyond the two that I mentioned, and we want to hear any questions you have, those are going to be really important for us to hear.

Oscar Cerna:

Thanks, Donna.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

That's just a high-level overview of the process. Again, the form explaining how to respond to detail deadlines, those broad areas in which we'd like to hear you talk about [is] available on our websites; we'll have those website addresses up at the end. But let me stop here, and see if there are any questions.

Oscar Cerna:

So Donna, one of the questions that's come up is, and others on the team, feel free to also chime in, but due to COVID-19, programs are having a hard time with recruitment. I'm wondering how we all will deal with this, and any suggestions that are something that could really warm recruitment in this new normal that we're living under.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

I think we would expect a program interested in SIRF, who is facing that to talk about it, and hopefully recognize participation in SIRF as an opportunity to focus on that. The ways that we talked about up front are some of the benefits of participation in SIRF, an opportunity to delve deeply into one's data to get support from technical assistance folks. We might even go back to that slide, and we could perhaps touch on how someone struggling with enrollment as a result of COVID might benefit from participating, but that might be something that you talk about as you express interest.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

I guess all that to say, we're looking for sites to speak realistically, in a transparent way about the context in which they're operating. The context is different now than it was six months ago, a year ago. So we'd expect to see that as you respond. It's not a deterrent, it's something that would be the focus of the intervention that we would co-design. Enrollment is one of the priority areas that has been identified for SIRF, so I'd encourage self-nomination.

Dina Israel:

This is Dina, I'll just add a couple examples to what Donna's saying. So it's true, recruitment is one of the challenge categories that we're hearing from others, that it would be a good priority for SIRF, and so in response to say COVID, I'm sure many programs are thinking about new methods for recruitment, and reaching people when you can't do work on the ground, so that's an example of testing some new approaches to recruitment, and working with new referrals, or recruitment sources might be a response, and something to work on with SIRF. Updated messaging, and honing in on different methods for exciting, and engaging people to come in to services. All of these are examples of the way it could play out in a learning cycle.

Oscar Cerna:

Great, thank you. Another question that was posed is, "What makes a strong candidate to participate in SIRF? What do we think would be a strong candidate?"

Donna Wharton-Fields:

I can take that, and talk broadly about some emerging criteria that we're trying to solidify as we approach the process for making decisions. It's a few months away, but we're really focused on a few broad areas. We're going to be looking at organizational stability, that is, the ability of a site to be able to provide a consistent programming experience during the SIRF period. We're going to be looking at operational fit. And what we mean by that is, we're going to be taking a look at the site's target population, numbers served, the structure of services that will allow the SIRF to implement a test, so operational fit has got to be there as well.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

As Dina was just focusing on, operational challenges; we're going to be looking for alignment there with the SIRF priorities, and broadly speaking, they are recruitment engagement, and retention types of challenges. That's a big one for us — just alignment with priorities between the initiative, and what you're facing. Then finally, we're going to be looking at an organization's ability, or readiness that is, to participate in a rapid learning test, and not only their readiness, but their interest, specifically looking at whether the organization has the infrastructure in place to manage this type of evaluation. Four broad categories organizational stability, the operational fit, alignment between the SIRF organizational challenges that will be a focus of the initiative, and then readiness, and interest in rapid learning, rapid cycles. I hope that covers it for who asked that question.

Oscar Cerna:

Yeah, thank you. I think it covers it well., And just actually, as a follow-up to what you're describing, another question came in about, "Are you looking for fairly new programs, or more experienced, and established programs to be part of it? How do you — how do we — think that fits in with the criteria part?"

Donna Wharton-Fields:

This is Donna again. I don't think it matters; I think we're going to be taking a comprehensive look at organizations. My colleagues have referenced a multistage process that will allow for dialogue, and mutual learning, not only about SIRF — about organizations, and the fit with the work, with the initiative overall. I'm sure it will occur to us, and be very clear what someone's experience has been, the tenure of their program. It's not an overriding feature, or character of a program that will determine yes or no. It's going to be a variety of factors. I think whoever makes the case, where there is synergy and alignment with the SIRF goals, is what's going to really carry the day. It's not about whether you're a new organization, or not, or one that's got significant experience.

Oscar Cerna:

Thanks, Donna. Another question, the last question that we'll [answer now]. But again, we can collect all questions that are coming up and will be addressed. But for now, and this is for the team to really be reflective on, "What are we thinking about the fact that we're opening nominations now, but new

fatherhood programs from ACF won't be known until September, or October? How can we address that?"

Dina Israel:

Want me to answer that one, Donna?

Donna Wharton-Fields:

That'd be great, thanks!

Dina Israel:

Yeah. That's in part why October 9th is on our mind. We thought about the fact that we don't know when the grant announcements will come, but they will come, and so we wanted to leave time, and enough time for that knowledge to be known, in the hopes that it comes out in that period.

Oscar Cerna:

Okay, well, we covered a lot of ground there, and hopefully it clarified some of the things that we're thinking about as far as the nomination selection process for you all. Let's just get back, and wrap up with what we think are the next steps for this work, and go back into our slides.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Okay, just a couple of words from me, it's Donna again, and at this time, just want to thank folks for joining us today from all across the country. It's been important for us to share a bit about our upcoming work with you, and by virtue of your participation, learning more about who might be interested in it, as well as the kinds of questions that it's bringing to mind; and we will take stock of all the questions that have been asked, and we'll get written answers written up and distributed as soon as we possibly can.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

But as mentioned, one of the next big steps at this point is for interested programs to review the nomination information available on MDRC, and OPRE's websites. Definitely take a look there. As Dina just mentioned, the deadline — 5 p.m., October 9<sup>th</sup> — I think that's a Friday. Between now and then, as you express interest, talk to us about the response to the issues that we're interested in learning more about that are on the form. Don't hesitate to reach out to us with any questions. We're always going to be available. I think our next slide, once I get to it, has our email address, and we're happy to entertain any kinds of questions that may come up as you again, as you think about nominating yourself, or any other organizations that you think would benefit from SIRF.

Dina Israel:

Donna, I just had another thought relative to this question about new fatherhood programs. I think it's okay, because we're using a multistage process for getting to know, and assessing alignment with goals. I think it's okay if you have an interest to nominate yourself without knowing what the future will bring, because there is opportunity to assess whether it still works, say if we reach out in the fall, and you've changed your mind. That's an example where if you have a thought, and you want to raise your hand, go ahead, and through conversation, we'll figure out what works best.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Sounds good. Okay, so again, deadline October 9th, and from there, our team will be following up with select programs to learn more about your work, so that we can, as Dina just said, jointly assess whether there's a good fit for a project, like yours, and ours. As always, I'm just repeating myself, one of the most important next steps is to reach out with any questions. We're available to speak with all of you. We want to be sure that you have all the information you need as the nomination process gets underway.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

I'm actually going to ask whether anyone has any additional questions. We're ahead of time, and we can entertain another question, or two if anyone has one. You can see here as I mentioned, the email address where you should send any questions — [SIRF@MDRC.org](mailto:SIRF@MDRC.org) — and we've got contact information here for staff both at OPRE and MDRC.

Oscar Cerna:

Donna, so another question has come in, and I think we've addressed it somewhat, but we can ask it anyways, and further elaborate, but one of the questions that came in was, "Will location have a bearing on taking part in the study?"

Donna Wharton-Fields:

No. We're open to anyone anywhere in the United States. There is no preference for a region, a time zone, so hope that answers your question. There is no regional, or coast preference. Open to everyone.

Oscar Cerna:

Great. Yeah, we encourage any other questions, since we have the time we can certainly address them, or any comments folks have.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Dina, any last minute remarks to close things out?

Dina Israel:

No, maybe I'll just say one, go through the list of priority areas that Oscar's shared earlier just to leave that, leave you all with some ideas, and thoughts about these areas. One area we had identified through conversations with everyone — thank you for going to that slide — are new ways, and promising solutions for identifying, and meeting fathers' needs that they're expressing. Another area is focusing in on questions about how to foster peer support, and networks. Another area is ways to develop staff capacity, delivering flexible services — and you can imagine that COVID-19 relates particularly there as well — and then recruiting fathers to participate. These are potential SIRF areas of focus, high priority areas. We're open to any, and all ideas, in these areas, and new ones if you have other things in mind.

Oscar Cerna:

Thanks Dina, we got another question in: "Will this presentation be shared with those attending the call?"

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Yes, we're going to certainly post this to MDRC's website.

Oscar Cerna:

Great.

Donna Wharton-Fields:

Okay. If there are no additional questions, we can close it at this point, and we will certainly distribute all questions, and responses to attendees, we're likely to create a FAQ, or frequently asked questions document, so that everyone can see what the questions were. Thank you very much for joining us today, have a good afternoon.

Oscar Cerna:

Thank you everyone, appreciate your attendance.

Katie Pahigiannis:

Thank you everybody.