

A Tool to Support Culturally Responsive Evaluation Planning in Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Programs

Deana Around Him*, Rachel Powell*, Lindsay Anderson**, and Sydney Briggs**

Evaluation is a process that involves the systematic collection, analysis, and use of information to understand and improve the effectiveness of a program's services and activities. Culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) is a framework that aligns evaluation efforts with a program's values, beliefs, and context. CRE helps ensure that evaluation results accurately reflect how the program's services and activities support the achievement of relevant outcomes for the intended population.

CRE can help account for the variety of populations served and the outcomes of interest to healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs by engaging a range of perspectives in the evaluation process. HMRE evaluation teams composed of program staff, external evaluators, program participants, and community members can apply the CRE framework to inform the design and implementation of evaluations in various contexts to strengthen the relevance, trustworthiness, and, ultimately, the usefulness of evaluation findings.

This worksheet provides HMRE evaluation teams with a brief explanation of and guiding questions for each step in the CRE framework (Figure 1). As evaluation team members discuss the guiding questions, they can use the Notes sections to begin documenting key considerations for implementing each step.

See this [corresponding brief](#) for an overview of the foundational concepts of CRE, a description of why these concepts matter for HMRE programming and evaluation, a discussion of how CRE can be applied in HMRE program evaluations, and more information about other evaluation approaches that complement a CRE approach.

Figure 1. Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework



* Equally contributing authors; ** Equally contributing authors

Worksheet: CRE Steps and Guiding Questions for HMRE Program Evaluation

STEP 1: Prepare for the evaluation

Examine the context of the HMRE program, including the characteristics of the organization, its location and community history, and the people involved. Begin forming an evaluation team with the skills and competencies needed for basic evaluation and the lived experiences that promote genuine connection with the local context.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 1 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- What are the stories of the HMRE program and community? Who is telling them, and what are the communication and relational styles represented in them, especially those that highlight formal and informal power dynamics?
- What dimensions of diversity are relevant for the HMRE program and essential for the evaluation team? Whose voices are missing?
- How can external evaluation team members respectfully enter the evaluation partnership?

Notes

STEP 2: Engage partners

Identify potential partners who have a deep understanding of the community's norms, values, traditions, and beliefs. Partners should include those directly and indirectly impacted by the HMRE program and those with differing status, power, and resources. Solidify a diverse group of partners who will formally join the evaluation team or serve in clearly defined supporting roles. Establish meaningful roles and activities for all partners (e.g., that match skills and contribute to the evaluation goals), especially community members with an interest in the program (e.g., HMRE program participants), and engage all partners in ways that cultivate and model trust and respect.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 2 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- What may potential partners perceive as the likely benefits of participating in the HMRE evaluation, and what concerns are they likely to have? How can this information inform initial outreach, training needs, and sustained engagement of partners?
- Which potential partners are uniquely equipped to support specific components of the evaluation (e.g., educating the evaluation team about the HMRE program's history, the community's context, developing appropriate and respectful data collection strategies)?
- How will HMRE program participants be engaged, and what resources or trainings must be in place to support their engagement?
- What are the appropriate ways to acknowledge partners' time and contributions to the project (e.g., compensation, titles, authorship)?

Notes

STEP 3: Identify the purpose(s) of the evaluation

Define the motivation and aspirations for the evaluation and consider how the stated purpose maintains or challenges existing power dynamics within the HMRE program and community context. Consider the priorities of different members of the evaluation team (including all partners) and how to navigate potential conflicts.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 3 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- Why is the evaluation being considered? Is it required by an external entity (e.g., funder) or being conducted as an internally motivated effort to improve implementation or outcomes of the HMRE program?
- Is continuation or expansion of the HMRE program, or components of the program, contingent on the evaluation results?

Notes

STEP 4: Frame the right questions

Draft, revise, and refine the evaluation questions with partners and agree which questions to prioritize with the available resources.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 4 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- Are the questions aligned with the purpose of the evaluation?
- Are the focus and wording of questions appropriate for the culture and context of the HMRE program and community? For example, is it important to have strengths- versus deficit-oriented questions? Will answering the questions lead to actionable next steps?
- Are the questions attentive to the perspectives and experiences of the HMRE program recipients?
- Will the intent conveyed in the questions potentially limit or expand what can be learned from the evaluation?

Notes

STEP 5: Design the evaluation

Decide on the types and sources of information that will be collected, how the information will be collected, on what time frame, and how it will be analyzed. Consider the questions the evaluation seeks to answer, the types of evidence partners and community members with an interest in the HMRE program will value, and the cultural values of the HMRE program.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 5 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- What types of information will be collected to answer the evaluation questions? Do partners and other community members interested in the HMRE program value and use these measures and sources of information?
- Does the timeline allow time to build relationships with partners and key community members interested in the HMRE program? Does the timeline allow for engaging these individuals in the evaluation steps?
- Do elements of the evaluation design (e.g., randomization, quasi-experimental) align with the values, perspectives, and context of the community?
- How will the evaluation benefit the community served by the HMRE program?

Notes

STEP 6: Select and adapt instrumentation

Assess whether existing instruments, such as scales, are valid to use with the cultural group(s) in the HMRE program. Consider whether instruments can be adapted or translated to be culturally specific or whether developing original instruments would be more meaningful.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 6 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- What populations were used to validate existing instruments and in what context?
- Does the evaluation team have the resources and expertise to develop original instruments?
- What form of data collection instruments should be used with HMRE staff and participants? For example, are written surveys appropriate or is oral data collection preferable?
- Is the language and the order of questions or topics in data collection instruments appropriate for HMRE participants, the HMRE program, and the community context?

Notes

STEP 7: Collect the data

Learn how culture influences with whom to speak during data collection, in what order to speak with people, and the type of relationships necessary for information to be shared freely. Consider how evaluators' identities and lived experiences may influence their perception and interpretation of all information. Determine whether data collectors can be trained in the relevant cultural dynamics and context of the HMRE program or whether lived experience is necessary for data collection activities.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 7 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- How can evaluators build relationships, establish trust, and promote valid understanding with individuals providing information?
- Who should collect the data? What training or experiences do data collectors need to understand the cultural context of the HMRE program?
- How can burden on participants be reduced (e.g., length of time commitment/questions, use of familiar software platforms)?

Notes

STEP 8: Analyze the data

Involve partners and other cultural interpreters from the community in data analysis to promote accurate understanding of the information within the cultural context. Go beyond average outcomes by considering meaningful ways to disaggregate data and explore what can be learned from positive and negative outliers and even unintended outcomes.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 8 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- Who will be involved in analyzing and interpreting the data, and how will they be engaged? Will sessions be held with program participants to interpret and make meaning of the data? Are trainings needed to promote capacity building and ethical use and interpretation of the evaluation data?
- What subgroup analysis will be most meaningful for the HMRE program?
- What structural, historical, or current contextual factors may contribute to differences observed for subgroups?

Notes

STEP 9: Disseminate and use the results

Integrate partner and community reviews, including reviews by HMRE program participants, to provide perspectives on findings before developing dissemination products. Consider which communication formats are most appropriate for sharing findings with a broad range of audiences, especially HMRE program participants and other community members with an interest in the HMRE program. When making dissemination decisions, prioritize options that have the potential to benefit the program and community that participated.

Guiding Questions for Applying Step 9 to HMRE Program Evaluation

- How will the knowledge and products being disseminated benefit the HMRE program and community?
- Which dissemination formats and styles (e.g., brief, report, video, town hall) are most appropriate for different audiences and evaluation participants?
- Are the languages and terminology used in dissemination products appropriate for the intended audience(s)?
- What role should the evaluation team and other community partners have in disseminating evaluation findings and products?

Notes

Note: The framework and guiding questions presented in this worksheet are adapted from Hood, S., Hopson, R., & Kirkhart, K. (2015). Chapter 12: Culturally responsive evaluation: Theory, practice, and future implications. In Newcomer, K., Hatry, H., & Wholey, J. (4th ed.) *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, p 287-296. <https://nasaa-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CRE-Reading-1-Culturally-Responsive-Evaluation.pdf>

Suggested citation: Around Him, D., Powell, R., Anderson, L., & Briggs, S. (2022). A tool to support culturally responsive evaluation planning in healthy marriage and relationship education programs. Marriage Strengthening Research & Dissemination Center. <https://mastresearchcenter.org/mast-center-research/a-tool-to-support-culturally-responsive-evaluation-planning-in-healthy-marriage-and-relationship-education-programs/>

The Marriage Strengthening Research and Dissemination Center (MAST Center) conducts research on marriage and romantic relationships in the United States and healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs designed to strengthen these relationships. The MAST Center is made up of national experts in marriage and relationship research and practice led by Child Trends in partnership with the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University. The MAST Center is supported by grant #90PR0012 from the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The MAST Center is solely responsible for the contents of this brief, which do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

