



# Evaluation Findings and Implications

## Rigorous Evaluation in Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

Brief 5 | June 2020



### Introduction

As documented in earlier briefs in this series, grantees of the Tribal Home Visiting Program examined a range of outcomes (see brief 1) with support from the Administration for Children and Families and the Tribal Home Visiting Evaluation Institute (see brief 2). Community priorities and decision making also played a role in grantees' evaluation efforts (see brief 3) and provide an important lens for interpreting results. This brief shares grantees' evaluation findings and provides important context for translating implications for the fields of home visiting and evaluation.



### Evaluation Findings

Evaluations assessed child and parent outcomes, and implementation outcomes. Some grantees evaluated specific elements

The Tribal Home Visiting Program is a federally funded initiative that supports the provision of maternal, infant, and early childhood services to American Indian and Alaska Native families. Grantees that received 5-year awards beginning in 2010, 2011, and 2012 conducted local evaluations to strengthen the evidence base for home visiting in tribal communities and to answer locally relevant questions. The evaluations combined scientific and cultural rigor to ensure results that are valid for both researchers and communities.

This brief, the fifth in a series about the local evaluations, presents findings from grantees' evaluation studies and implications of these findings. The series is designed to help federal staff and leadership support tribal communities to build local evaluation capacity. It may also be of interest to other policymakers and researchers in the human services field. For more information, visit the [Tribal Home Visiting Program](#) website.

of their home visiting services, such as program enhancements and cultural adaptations.<sup>1</sup>

## Effect of Home Visiting on Child and Parent Outcomes

Six grantees noted improvements in child development, parenting skills, and service engagement.

- ◆ One grantee found that children receiving services using the Parents as Teachers (PAT) model showed improvements in communication, fine motor, and personal social skills compared with children not receiving these services (\*).

Three grantees measured the effect of home visiting on parental knowledge and coping skills.

- ◆ One grantee found increases in the quality of support and stimulation for children receiving home visiting services compared with a comparison group of similar children not receiving services (†).
- ◆ Another grantee reported that parents receiving home visiting services felt more empowered to manage daily family situations and their relationships with service providers compared with parents in a control group (†).
- ◆ A third grantee, using a within-person comparison, found a link between stress management techniques and reductions in parenting stress before versus after the intervention (n/a).

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation findings described within this brief fell into three categories (symbols are provided throughout for ease of interpretation): \* = statistically significant finding ( $p < .05$ ); † = group difference with no statistical significance; n/a = statistical significance was not applicable because the finding was qualitative in nature or a single-case design finding.

## Effect of Program Enhancements on Service Delivery and Engagement

Grantees also explored the effect of program enhancements on service delivery and engagement.

- ◆ One grantee found, using historical comparison data, that mothers who received the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) model with enhanced engagement strategies received more service referrals (\*) and had higher service completion rates compared with preintervention rates (†).
- ◆ Another grantee found that distributing incentives across the service period promoted engagement in the first 6 months compared with providing a single, larger incentive after 12 months (\*).

## Effect of Cultural Adaptations on Child and Parent Outcomes

Twelve grantees evaluated the effect of cultural adaptations such as recruiting tribal community members as home visitors; engaging elders in home visits and group sessions; and integrating traditional songs, language, activities, and customs into home visiting services.

- ◆ Eight grantees reported improvements in child and parent outcomes, including retention, parenting, and cultural connection. Two of these eight grantees, for example, found that parents receiving a culturally enhanced version of PAT stayed enrolled longer and attended more visits than parents receiving “services as usual” (\*).
- ◆ Three grantees reported that cultural enhancements increased parenting knowledge and skills (†).

- One grantee found that parents receiving the Nurturing Parenting curriculum enhanced with cultural activities reported increased parenting skills and decreased parenting stress compared with those in a comparison group (\*).
- Similarly, another grantee found through qualitative interviews that a culturally enhanced version of PAT strengthened parenting skills by providing parents with critical resources to manage stress and child behavior (n/a).
- A third grantee, using a within-person comparison, found that parents receiving the Positive Indian Parenting curriculum showed an increased level of self-efficacy and parental responsiveness over time (n/a).

Three grantees measured the impact of cultural enhancements on cultural connection and engagement, such as parents' confidence teaching children Native languages and using traditional childcare practices.

- ◆ One grantee reported that parents receiving a culturally enhanced parenting curriculum felt more connected to their culture than they did prior to receiving the content (\*).
- ◆ Another grantee, using a within-person comparison, found that cultural enhancements to the PAT model increased cultural engagement (n/a).
- ◆ One grantee found that families receiving culturally adapted services reported, through qualitative interviews, the importance of teaching others about culture (n/a).



## Implications

Grantees reviewed their evaluation findings and noted various ways to improve both home visiting and evaluation and research practices based on study results. Contextual factors influenced grantees' interpretation of evaluation findings. Grantee priorities often focused on—

- ◆ The degree to which evaluation findings provided meaningful information about what Native families and communities found valuable about home visiting programs
- ◆ Home visiting's potential for increasing connectedness to programs, communities, and culture
- ◆ Which program elements contributed to positive changes in health and well-being among families and communities

### Implications for Home Visiting Practices

Suggested practice changes ranged from establishing or extending existing program components to promote early engagement to creating new staff positions to address participants' case management needs.

- ◆ One grantee credited its evaluation findings for providing information on using incentives to better engage clients early, when they are at increased risk of dropping out of the program.

The same grantee noted it would explore whether other social services programs could use the same incentive structure in the community.

- ◆ Another grantee indicated it may integrate more stress management activities for families with older children based on decreases in parenting stress during child infancy after similar activities.
- ◆ Two grantees shared that their findings would lead to a more structured process for assessing client readiness to participate in their programs. Suggested improvements included providing preservice case management to stabilize families and to help them prepare for home visiting services prior to enrollment.
- ◆ Three grantees focused on home visitor process and program improvements to be made based on their findings.
  - Two grantees said they would focus on home visitor data collection skills to improve the quality of service provision and their ability to demonstrate value to their communities.
  - Another grantee shared that its results provided important information on how to move forward in establishing formal quality improvement processes.

Grantees also used evaluation findings to influence decisions regarding maintaining components of their home visiting programs.

- ◆ Two grantees indicated they would continue implementing NFP based, in part, on findings suggesting it was a good fit for their respective programs and communities.
- ◆ A third grantee noted it would continue collecting data on key child development factors (e.g., communication, literacy, comprehension skills) as a result of evaluation findings.

Similarly, six grantees noted that evaluation findings related to their cultural enhancement work reinforced their commitment to ensuring local culture is embedded in home visiting practices. Grantees reported that findings about the salience and benefit of cultural elements would lead to continued work refining enhancements, developing or finding measures to better capture positive changes, and improving accessibility and relevance to their broader community.

“While culturally tailored home visitation modules took considerable time and effort to develop, they also provide the most current research findings, AI/AN [American Indian and Alaska Native]-specific supports, and aspects of AI/AN culture that—based on the qualitative findings—appear to resonate with parents of AI/AN children regardless of their own cultural knowledge. No other home visitation curriculum currently provides this information to parents or home visitors.”

—Tribal MIECHV grantee

## Implications for Evaluation and Data Practices

Grantees also reflected on their experiences conducting evaluation studies in their communities and identified several lessons for other tribal or small communities.

**Thoughtful planning, training, and engagement of staff requires sufficient time early in the evaluation process.** Grantees learned the importance of ensuring adequate time at the beginning of the study to decide how the study will be staffed and to train and prepare staff accordingly. They found that involving the evaluator early and consistently proved critical to the success of their study. One grantee also recommended quality assurance efforts be built into the evaluation process from the start.

**Tribal grantees are capable of conducting rigorous evaluation studies using innovative evaluation designs.** Grantees successfully used innovative study designs, notably single-case and mixed-methods designs, for their evaluations. Grantees felt single-case designs worked well for small communities, while mixed-methods designs generated useful, well-rounded information and rich narratives on meaningful topics.

Grantees shared the following lessons learned about study design and data collection:

- ◆ Be aware of potential challenges using administrative data and medical records data.
- ◆ Some instruments may not be appropriate or specific enough to meet program evaluation needs.
- ◆ Evaluations should include outcome variables that are sensitive to change in a short-term study.
- ◆ Longer evaluation study time frames are beneficial and may yield larger sample sizes.
- ◆ Retention for a longer study (12 months or more) may be challenging because of changes in family situations.
- ◆ Competing needs of families and home visitors may make data collection challenging.
- ◆ Reliable data collection methods and data systems are critical to a successful evaluation.
- ◆ Contacting participants multiple times and through multiple means may help with study attrition.
- ◆ Gift-giving may improve study retention, as it is a common practice in many tribal communities.

**Community guidance and involvement are imperative to a successful evaluation.**

Grantees learned it was important to ask evaluation questions that matter to the community and tribal leaders and to use evaluation processes and criteria that validate and resonate with indigenous perspectives. Grantees noted that evaluation should be responsive and relevant to the community first and the project second. One grantee suggested both (1) educating community members on evaluation and its importance and (2) customizing studies to adhere to cultural priorities; this dual approach can help communities feel more open to gathering data and that their input is appreciated.

The evaluation process can be a positive, learning-centered process for program staff, communities, and participants. Many grantees indicated their evaluation studies were a source of pride and increased capacity for the home visiting program, organization, and tribe. One grantee, for example, felt the evaluation was a powerful motivator for staff to understand how data can demonstrate their work’s impact on families. For some grantees, this was the first time their organization had conducted a rigorous evaluation; one such grantee credited the inaugural experience for growth in the organization and a broader interest in research and evaluation in the community.

Another grantee noted the organization would strive for more comprehensive evaluation processes in the future. Still another grantee found that the focus group experience was meaningful for evaluation participants. These combined reflections indicate how evaluators and program teams can work with communities and tribal leadership to change perceptions about evaluation and ultimately build support for evaluation and research.

“Building consistent and ongoing evaluation partnerships between Western scientific communities and tribal communities (that are inclusive, collaborative, reciprocal, culturally informed, and strengths based) enriches Western scientific approaches and can mitigate historical distrust in tribal communities to support the improvement of services and stronger outcomes.”

—Tribal MIECHV grantee

# Key Takeaways

This brief presents findings from evaluation studies conducted by Tribal Home Visiting grantees and the implications of those findings and experiences for the fields of home visiting and evaluation.

Key takeaways from evaluation findings include:



Tribal home visiting grantees demonstrated effectiveness in improving parent and child outcomes. These improvements were connected to the delivery of home visiting services as well as grantee-developed cultural adaptations to those services.



Grantees used program enhancements to improve service delivery and caregiver engagement.

Federal program staff and leadership working with tribes and tribal communities may benefit from considering the following when designing and overseeing interventions and evaluations in this context:



Federal staff overseeing evaluation studies in tribal communities should be familiar with the contextual factors that may influence how study findings are interpreted and set evaluation expectations appropriately.



Federal staff and technical assistance providers should encourage tribal grantees to engage staff and community stakeholders in interpretation of their evaluation findings. For example, grantees can include program staff's perceptions of findings in the overarching study results.



When program staff are engaged and well supported by local evaluators and technical assistance, evaluation efforts can be meaningful, positive experiences for those involved.

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