

**National Position
Paper on Fatherhood,
Marriage & Family
Innovation Fund.**

Strengthening Fathers, Strengthening Families



fathers&families
COALITION OF AMERICA

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Abstract

During the last two decades of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century there has been increased social and public policy development on responsible fatherhood. These policies address how the emerging field of practitioners should effectively address responsible fatherhood. Furthermore, the policies affect how men see themselves as fathers, and encourage father involvement in the lives of children. President William Jefferson Clinton initiated policies on responsible fatherhood when he worked on national reform of public assistance in 1995. The passage of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)* in September 1996, led to the increased interest in the effects of father's contributions on child and family well being within welfare caseloads. A number of demonstration projects and legislation efforts were designed to address the then 28,000,000 children without fathers in their home to make those fathers become accountable for economical support through *Child Support Enforcement Agencies* nationwide. In the meantime, limited research analyzed the effects of fathers on children's well being. Research efforts expanded not just within the United States but also internationally. Documented studies demonstrate the effects of the modern father's absence and involvement with their families leading to an introduction of international efforts to address advanced research, policy and program development. Discourse of fatherhood gave rise to clear policy prescriptions and in 2006, President George W. Bush implemented with U.S. DHHS the provision of \$150 million dollars, annually, in grant funding for healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood initiatives. In 2010, proposed *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovative Fund by President Barack Obama* **proposes \$500 million** in funding and an alteration of program services for fathers and relationship skill building. Fathers & Families Coalition of America (FFCA) based on over fifteen (15) years of expertise concurs with this initiative as necessary for effective Fatherhood, Marriage, Family programs. However, based on FFCA's collective expertise, this proposal limits itself to only eight locations and will not have a national impact of services on fatherless households, employability of low-income fathers, child outcomes and building and strengthening healthy relationships and marriages. ***FFCA provides recommendations*** for the development and implementation of a new blueprint of services, evaluation, and policy based on our experience and expertise in providing services to fathers and families in partnerships between community and faith-based organizations and state governments.

Recommended Considerations for the Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Innovation Fund

The Fatherhood, Marriage, Family Innovation Proposal resonates with Fathers & Families Coalition of America's mission of strengthening and bonding families in underserved communities that are splintered by rejection, abandonment and other disruptions of relationships. The Fatherhood Initiative presents the balancing act of the Marriage Initiative. So as not to polarize these most important relationship-bonding entities, we must make intentional the ultimate vision of healthy parenting relationships for all children, with an emphasis on inclusion vs. exclusion. Based on over a decade of expertise in family development we find that it is critical that all services should have a relationship skill building component. Therefore, one of the challenges we welcome explicitly or implicitly posed by a mixed-methods approach for funding, professional development, technical assistance, and accountability. Interviews of professionals combined with experiences from FFCA and other professionals at all levels there are concerns on the continued advancement of Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Innovative Funding Programs. We believe the FMFI *funding must go through* the U.S. Department of Health & Human Service – Administration for Children & Families in a new program office. That office should be called *“The Office of Fatherhood - Family Strengthening Assistance,”* reporting directly to the Assistant Secretary *as a concerted demonstration* from the *White House* on the importance of fatherhood, healthy relationships, strengthening families and communities.

RECOMMENDATION 1: TANF supported programs should be limited to low income individuals and families. The services provided for fatherhood and relationship education should be limited to those on or eligible for TANF or for those whose incomes do not exceed 200% of the Federal poverty level.

RECOMMENDATION 2: FFCA strongly urges that the proposed Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovation (FMFI) funding should not go to state agencies. This funding for families should be available to community, non-profit and faith-based entities in open competitive grants.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The proposed funding of only eight states would severely limit the impact of the Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Innovation Fund. A concern of only “8” states funded; state consortiums and or a lack of discretionary funding to community based

organizations would limit full impact of services. Funding should be open to all non-profit agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 4: We believe the FMFI funding must be administered by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Service – Administration for Children & Families in a new program office, “*The Office of Fatherhood - Family Strengthening Assistance,*” reporting directly to the Assistant Secretary.

RECOMMENDATION 5: We propose a National Capacity Building Assistance program. Many organizations lack the infrastructure, cohesive focus, strategy, and skills to effectively deliver fatherhood and relationship building services. All funded grantees should have an assigned Capacity Building Assistance Provider who has extensive expertise working with fathers and relationship skill building.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Training & Technical Assistance should not be limited to a sole provider but can be built on the Head Start Quality Improvement Centers (QIC) model. Developing a Multi-Ethnic Fatherhood Marriage Family QIC national training & technical assistance provider operated by proven experts in the fatherhood and marriage profession will improve the overall accountability and quality of services. Service providers that generate revenue through the sales of their fatherhood, marriage, family products are not eligible as a training and technical assistance provider to avoid conflicts of interest.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Mandated collaborative opportunities for all states, CBOs or faith-based organizations that receive funding under the final Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Innovative funding. Funded organizations should have formal agreements beyond domestic violence consortiums. The additional formal working collaborative must include at the collaborative agreements with workforce providers, substance abuse providers, and multi-ethnic providers reflective of the community.

RECOMMENDATION 8: FFCA encourages Fatherhood Program Specialist for all states, regions and or county child support, child welfare, and JOBS divisions as a liaison to the community providers and customers. FFCA conducted an analysis to learn the ways that the federal government has attempted to bridge the goals of child support, child welfare, and even the JOBS program with the demands of those who implement programs in communities.

Our Story

In 1996, *Arizona Fathers & Families Coalition* started as a grassroots consortium in response to welfare reform proposals and the professional development of staff throughout Arizona. The motivation to create and incorporate Arizona Fathers & Families Coalition, Inc. had its genesis after our group was awarded a statewide Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Young Fathers grant, a Basic Education/Life Skills TANF grant, Federal Job Reverse Access Commute grant, three county TANF grants, Statewide TANF Career Preparation grant, and a TANF Character Education grant for K-12 youth. The services developed by Fathers & Families Coalition were provided to diverse populations throughout Arizona.

In 1996, Arizona was *one of eight states to utilize Temporary Assistance for Needy Families resources to establish Young Father's programs for low-income fathers.* However, many practitioners and policymakers were reluctant to change their view of fathers' parenting role. Many of the practitioners did not have skills to work specifically with fathers. There was a lack of organizations offering family-centered services that were inclusive of fathers, which inspired our grassroots group to host our Inaugural Fatherhood Conference in February 2000. Over the past decade our organization has provided direct services to both mothers and fathers who receive TANF resources. In addition; provided and training, technical assistance, capacity building assistance and program support to well over 8,000 individuals on fatherhood best practices.

Our impact to advance both organizational responsiveness and practitioner abilities to work with fathers and families is felt across the nation not only through our annual conference, but also through presentations, technical assistance, training and our summer institutes provided throughout the United States. This assistance includes international assistance to fatherhood practitioners as far away as Ghana, Micro Indonesia, Japan, Guam, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the United Kingdom. We solicit support and involvement from the faith-based communities to further strengthen our capacity to serve local, statewide, tribal nations and federal government agencies that serve fragile families.

A study of **our vision** and purpose led to our **name change** from Arizona Fathers & Families Coalition to ***Fathers & Families Coalition of America (FFCA)*** to more aptly reflect our contributions, service providers, and trainers. These actions also led to the creation of affiliates with a membership component to FFCA. In 2007, a business plan developed from a Chicago based firm outlined a goal of five (5) Fathers & Families Coalition Affiliates by the end of 2009 and ten (10) by the end of 2010. However, FFCA's national relationships allowed us to exceed our established goal with current affiliates in the following communities: Arizona Statewide, South-Eastern Arkansas, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Lancaster, CA (emerging in San Bernardino, Bakersfield, and Sacramento), Denver, Houston, Chicago, Detroit, Delaware Valley, Tampa Bay/St. Petersburg, Raleigh, Utica, Bronx, Utah Statewide with pending FFCA in Albany, West Virginia, Ohio, Milwaukee, Long Island, New Paltz, NY and Trenton. Moreover, FFCA has more than 100 organizational memberships who utilize our training and technical assistance services. These

member organizations as an example, include colleagues from an array of professional fields such as, Healthy Marriage Responsible Fatherhood funded programs; Head Start; Early Head Start; Healthy Families; Institutes of Higher Education; Juvenile Justice; Tribal TANF programs, and many other diverse fields.

OUR MISSION

FFCA has a mission to enhance the capacity of service providers throughout the nation, so they will be better equipped to effectively serve fathers, mothers and children.

OUR VISION

We do this by providing professional development training. Our goal is to improve the outcomes for children, through healthy fathers and family interaction. **We differentiate ourselves** through our distinctive capacity to connect to diverse organizations and populations nationwide. This is also done through unique networking forums during our national conference and other professional development venues. These events are intended to empower providers through building existing services, policies and collaborations, with a focus on fathers, mothers and children. While we understand the needs of divorced fathers and never married fathers, we do not provide those direct services. Strategically our proven methodology to work with organizations and practitioners has transformed thousands of colleagues and organizational leaders to embrace the importance of fatherhood nationally and internationally. Through our collaboration efforts we have developed Fathers & Families Coalition Affiliates who are extensions of FFCA assisting providers and families. FFCA has served as an official Fatherhood Professional Development Trainer for the National Head Start Association. More recently, FFCA is a technical assistance/trainer for ICF and is engaged in expanding best and promising practices for fatherhood practitioners and family service agencies.

Our Diverse National Reach

As previously mentioned, FFCA is unique from many other national fatherhood and/ or marriage entities in our local, state and regional support through our FFCA Affiliates and our active Board of Directors who effectively provides direct training and technical assistance to individuals and organizations in an approach that compliments staff and consultants. Furthermore, FFCA has one of the more diverse professional, multi-ethnic and racial, topography and expertise of Fatherhood, Marriage and Family professional development practitioners. The senior leadership of our National Board of Directors and Affiliate Directors provides a mutual effort to achieve the overall goal of enhancing the abilities of practitioners and organizations to effectively provide services to fathers, mothers, children and community development. Our FFCA Affiliates are unique in that they also serve on the Advisory Council of the Board of Directors.

Challenges

There are several challenges for today's fathers, including the high birthrate among unmarried partners that continues to rise across America. Poor health outcomes, lack of knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases, and under-education also continue to be problematic among high-risk groups within our society. Insufficient fatherhood programs, inadequate culturally relevant interventions, and insufficient policies, economic opportunities, and poor parenting skills are additional challenges to both fathers, children, families and the service providers designated to help.

The need to educate practitioners and service providers on cultural distinctions, outreach, language differences, and the importance of eliminating myths, stereotypes, and biases towards fathers of color can help to reduce fatherlessness as well as improve child outcomes. Research substantiates that when fathers engage with their children during the first two years of their children's life, that 80% of the fathers will stay involved. Furthermore, social predictors suggest that with higher levels of father involvement children benefit with higher levels of child wellbeing and improved co-parenting relationships. When a father has a healthy relationship with his children, his children are usually physically, emotionally, and mentally healthier.

Barriers

Programs serving families and society continue to experience barriers for father involvement. Many of these barriers are reflected in racial stereotypes, myths, language, economics, policy, unemployment, and under-educational achievements, negative and hostile relationships between biological parents, child support, forensic issues, transportation, unstable housing, and even paternity. The unmet needs of fathers, lack of access to services and resources, fear and distrust of service providers must be addressed in order to remedy the problems that confront many fathers. Many fathers want and need services. However, our society historically has negated the needs of fathers in favor of the mother and child, leaving the father underserved without social and emotional support and disengaged. When this happens there are poor outcomes for all family members.

Fathers do make a difference in the lives of their children. Fathers are important to the physical, emotional, and social development of their children. Father presence adds to the quality of life and positive child outcomes. Fathers & Families Coalition of America is striving to help improve provider services and policies so that fathers can stay involved in the lives of their children. We are committed to mothers, children and fathers and will continue to work towards strengthening families to reduce the negative outcomes of fatherlessness.

Programs should provide opportunities to join develop supportive networks within the community, access to diverse experts for quality improvement and training and technical assistance from federal, state and recognized capacity building assistance organization such as services provided by Fathers & Families Coalition of America. Barriers that limit father involvement are presented at various levels from public policies, organizational responsiveness, and staff ambivalence, gate keeping by maternal family members, and mothers and fathers themselves. In order for family-centered practices, policies, and program development to improve services for children and families, the role of fatherhood needs additional examination. The responsiveness of effective fatherhood services to fathers increases opportunities for father involvement in the lives of their children.

Recommended Fatherhood/Relationship Program Requirements

Over the past few decades, many family service organizations have implemented fatherhood program designs and frequently embedded within the overall organizational mission. In many instances these programs are newly and or developed by agencies new organizations to serve fathers. There are limited tools as comprehensive as the ***Practitioner Effective Fatherhood Services Survey (PEFSS)*** to help organizations identify domains to improve services. Fathers & Families Coalition of America recommends all federal and non-federal funded Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovative programs are required to conduct a formal assessment on their organization's capacity in working with fathers. The process to ensure a promising fatherhood practice involves on-site interviews, production of a self-study, and thorough documentation of program Organization Performance Measures.

FFCA designed the PEFSS tool over the past decade as a foundation that should be used in conjunction with the Capacity Framework that FFCA provides through technical assistance, assessment, program evaluation (both through review of documentation and interviews of staff, parents, and community partnerships), which explains the seven elements of organizational capacity and their components. The PEFSS asks the reader to score the organization on each element of organizational capacity, by selecting the text that best describe the organization's current status or performance. The framework and the descriptions in the PEFSS were developed based on our Fathers & Families Coalition's collective experience designing and evaluating services for fathers, adaptation of father friendly resources, as well as the input of many nonprofit experts and practitioners.

FFCA's expertise recognizes a national need for organizations developing a process for improvement through both self- assessment and accreditation using the baseline

assessment, such as, the *Practitioners' Effective Fatherhood Services Survey* is a valuable tool for determining how an agency's policies, procedures and practices compare to recommended practices identified by nationally recognized experts in the field of fatherhood, relationship skills building and family development. *Fathers & Families Coalition of America* developed this tool designed help nonprofit organizations assess their organizational capacity in the provision of services to fathers. This tool and or a tool developed specifically to analyze organization performance measurements working with fathers, marriage/relationship skills building and families. The benefits of Organization Assessment & Program Evaluation:

- (1) Improves Effectiveness;
- (2) Identifies Operation and Management Needs;
- (3) Promotes Team Work and Staff Development;
- (4) Identifies Replication and Wasted Effort;
- (5) Promotes Public Awareness;
- (6) Increases Outcomes for Children, Fathers, and Mothers;
- (7) Promotes Community Development; and
- (8) Prepares For Agency Accreditation.

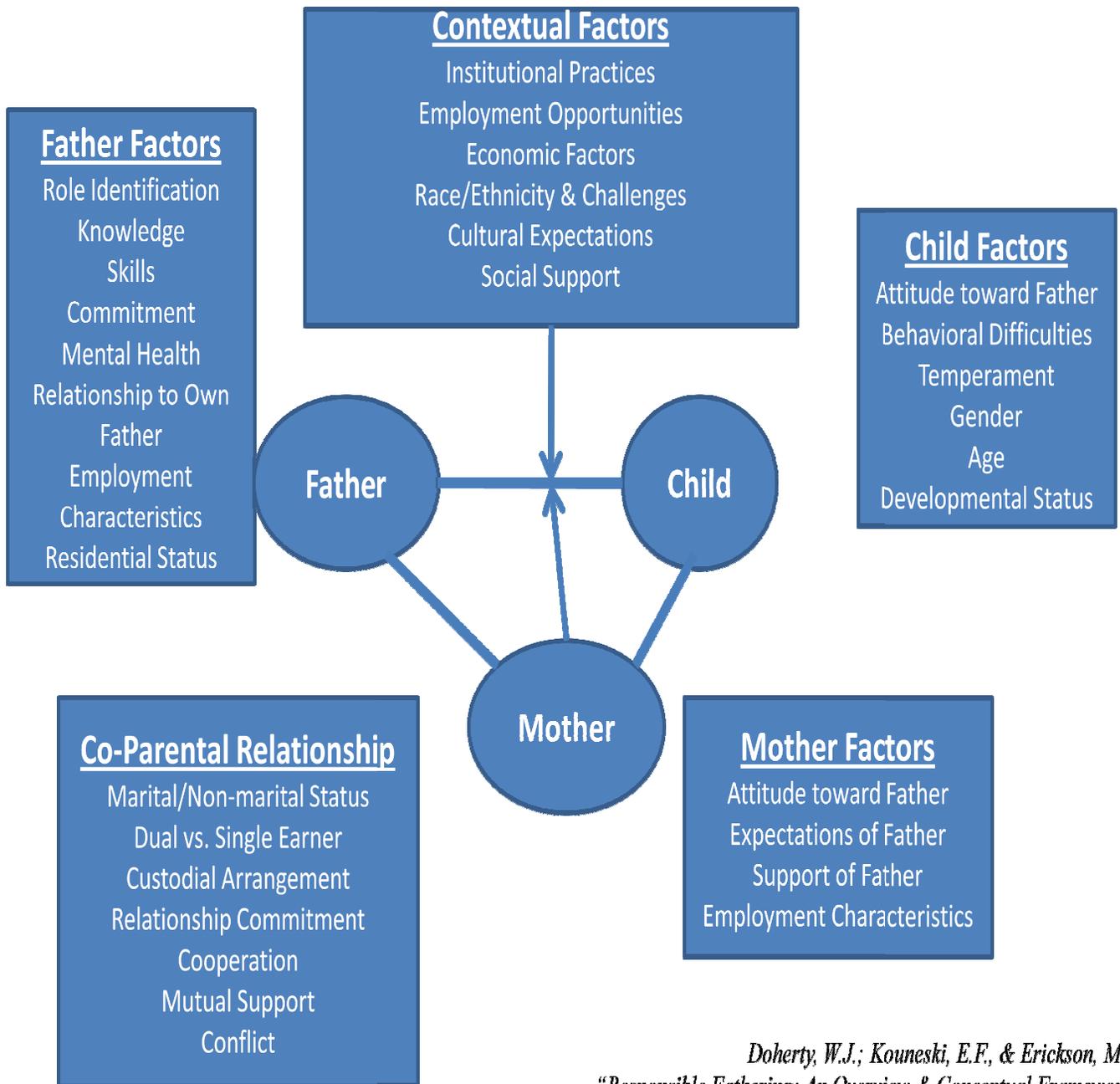
FFCA has developed a model of accreditation based on experience providing multi-ethnic capacity building assistance to fatherhood and relationship skill building organizations. The purpose of the accreditation program is to provide a means of formally verifying and recognizing public works agencies for compliance with the recommended practices. It is a voluntary, self-motivated approach to objectively evaluate, verify and recognize compliance with the recommended management practices. The objectives of the accreditation program are: to create impetus for organization self improvement and stimulate general rising of ***Organization Performance Measures developed by FFCA*** based on best practice capacity building strategies. The FFCA Accreditation is offered voluntary evaluation and education program rather than government regulated activity recognize good performance and provide motivation to maintain and improve performance improve fatherhood, relationship skill building and family development service performances.

Programs need to know how to gather and use information to improve program functioning and undertake meaningful efforts to measure and document their success. Fatherhood programs should have in place an ongoing process of self- assessment and outcome measurement that includes descriptive data, outcome data, and evaluative measures. This process of self-monitoring should have a plan to solicit and evaluate

participant feedback. A program evaluator with both organizational development experience and working with fathers should be engaged.

FFCA collaborative partnerships with ***workforce development experts*** such as *Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC)* who's over forty-years of assisting fathers obtain meaningful skills is an example of community building partnerships. OIC has provided training to over 3 million (primarily low-income) individuals and has successfully placed over 2.5 million individuals into sustained employment. FFCA believes that similar skills are necessary for direct service providers, which should be embedded in promising practice fatherhood programs and their organizations. Fatherhood programs should offer extensive support and a variety of opportunities for fathers to develop the skills knowledge, and competencies required in the workforce. Programs should provide opportunities for fathers to connect successfully with employers and employment resources within their community. Inclusion of pre-work maturity soft skills assists fathers make the connection between learning and working with many low-income fathers challenged by limited adult education; skills that expand occupational exploration into the workforce; and skills development opportunities. Fathers & Families Coalition of America suggests the following program model that involves the providing relationship skills to fathers and mothers as germane for effective outcomes for children and enhancing sustained employability for fathers (below).

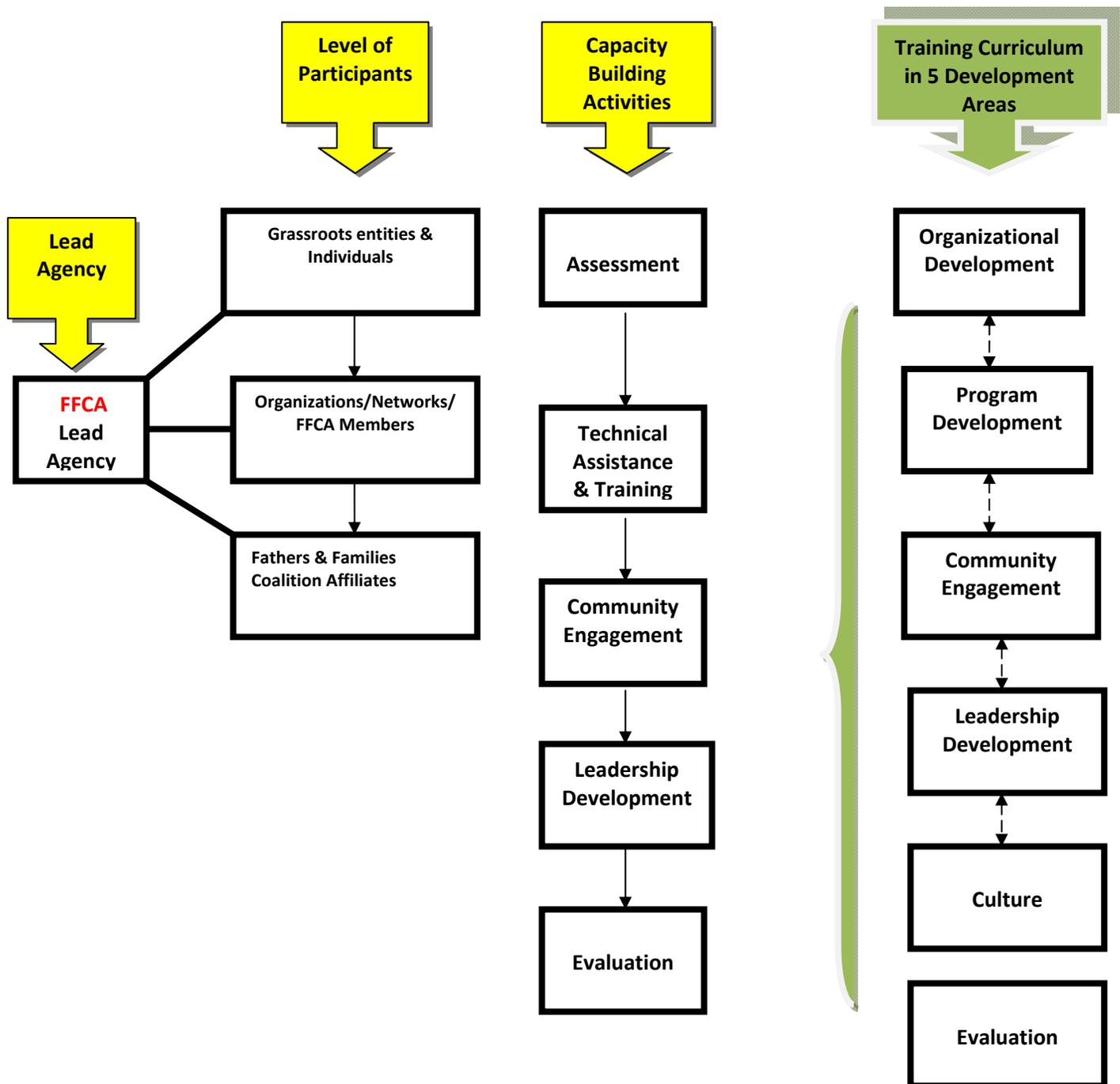
The Model



*Doherty, W.J.; Kouneski, E.F., & Erickson, M.R.
 "Responsible Fathering: An Overview & Conceptual Framework"*

PICTORIAL OVERVIEW OF FFCA CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

GOAL: To Improve Fatherhood, Marriage and Family services Fathers & Families Coalition of America has designed a process that strengthens CBOs, Non-profits and Coalitions through *our Capacity Building Initiatives* to help underserved population groups overcome unemployment and employability factors that impact their financial sustainability and quality of life.



FFCA, surveyed thousands of practitioners existing needs to improve services to fathers and families. Consistently, providers request support with program assessment, technical assistance and training, community engagement, leadership development and evaluation. The training curriculum for these capacity building activities includes five modules: 1) Organizational Development; 2) Program Development; 3) Community Engagement; 4) Leadership Development; and 5) Evaluation.

The joining of the Fatherhood and Marriage/Relationships Initiatives can offer an invigorating “head-start” to fathers in building strong relationships with their children and parents building healthy relationships for the benefit of their children—whether or not it results in marriage.



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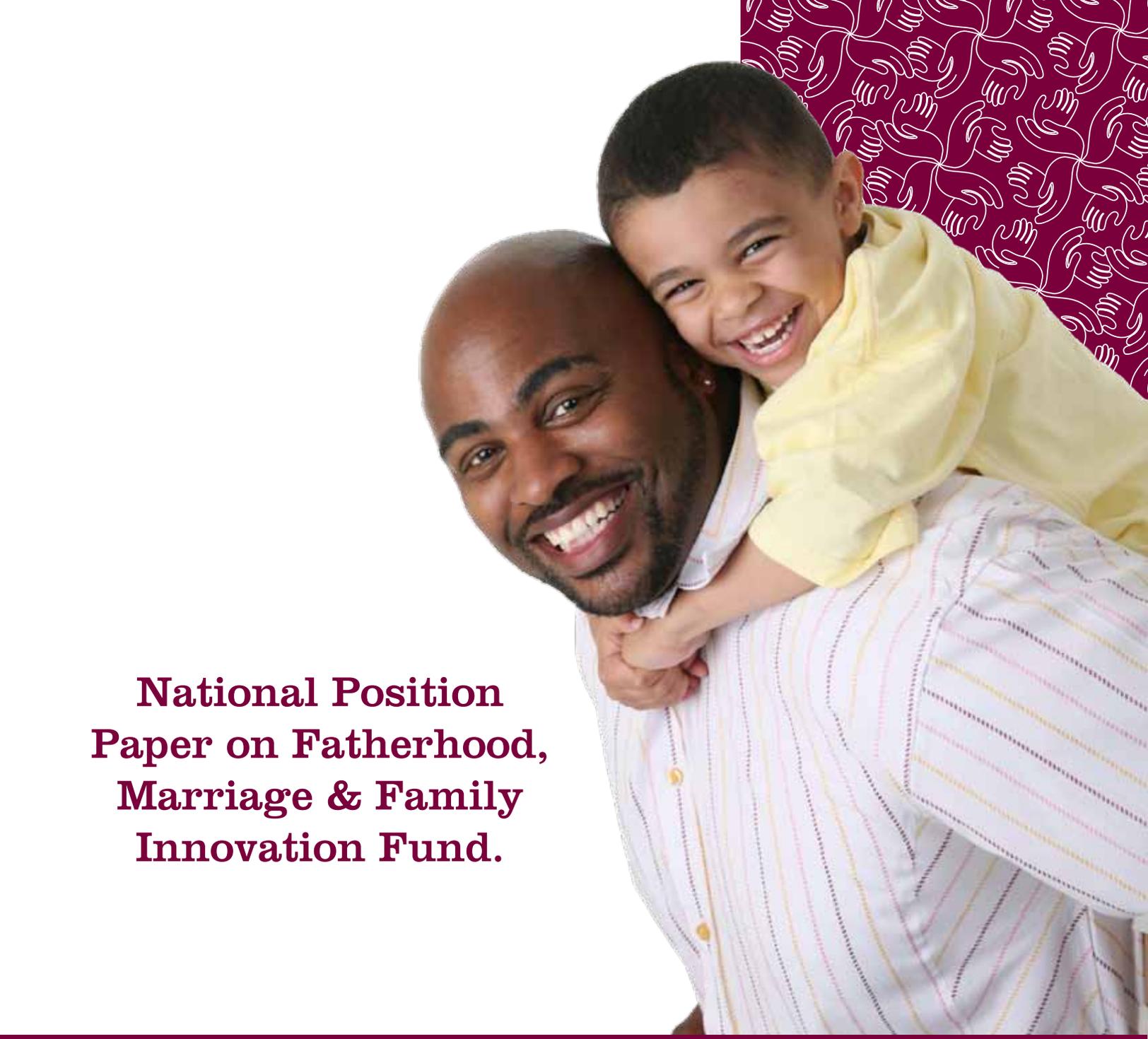
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