

# Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation

## EVALUATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BRIEF

### Technical Assistance Provision for MIECHV Grantees

May 2012

#### Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of the federal expectations concerning research and evaluation conducted using MIECHV funds. The brief provides a broad framework that should be used to direct the planning, design and execution of research and evaluation activities by grantees. Please note, however, that each specific research or evaluation activity needs consideration of how it applies to the specific context through conversations within the grantee, with the regional project officer, and/or with the DOHVE<sup>1</sup> team.

The legislation under MIECHV emphasizes the importance of using research and evaluation funds to support well-designed, rigorous research that contributes to the field of home visiting. Specifically, the legislation calls for “a continuous program of research and evaluation activities in order to increase knowledge about the implementation and effectiveness of home visiting programs, using random assignment designs to the maximum extent feasible.”

Research and evaluation funds under MIECHV should be used to contribute to the scientific knowledge base about home visiting, rather than to support what may be seen as programmatic activities that all grantees should incorporate, such as data systems and continuous quality improvement efforts. These efforts are intended to support the strengthening of the evidence base for home visiting models and enhancements. Therefore, states are encouraged to address questions of impact using a research design that meets HomVEE evaluation standards.<sup>2</sup> However, not all projects are at the point where impact questions can be answered. For these projects, implementation studies that target the adoption, implementation, and sustaining of the proposed project are appropriate; nevertheless, the emphasis on well-designed and rigorous evaluation remains.

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<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the Design Options for Home Visiting Evaluation (DOHVE) project is to provide research and evaluation support for the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program. The project is funded by the Administration for Children and Families and the Health Resources and Services Administration.

<sup>2</sup> The Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE) project, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, conducts thorough and transparent reviews of the home visiting research literature and provides an assessment of the evidence of effectiveness for home visiting programs models that target families with pregnant women and children from birth to age 5. More information about the standards and results of these reviews can be found at <http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/>.

## Methodological Rigor

Methodological rigor is important for both impact and implementation studies. Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods designs should have:

- **Credibility** – Ensuring what is intended to be evaluated is actually being evaluated and that the proposed research data collection and analysis appropriately answer the research questions of interest. For example, this means that if the question focuses on efficacy, an appropriate comparison group must be utilized.
- **Applicability** – Ensuring results can be generalized beyond this project and that the reader can believe the results accurately represent a population or context. For example, ensuring communities included in the research would be appropriately representative of those communities that qualify for MIECHV funds.
- **Consistency** – Ensuring that the process and method are articulated in advance and closely followed. This supports the rationale for requesting that the evaluation plan include specific measures, data collection procedures, etc. Consistency includes both consistency in data collection to reduce error and pre-specifying plans (i.e., analysis plans) to reduce bias.
- **Neutrality** – Producing results that are as objective as possible while acknowledging the bias that may be brought to data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results. To this end, the evaluation team must have the necessary independence from the project to assure objectivity, regardless of the research question.

## Conclusion

To this end, HHS and DOHVE have provided feedback and guidance to sites implementing promising approaches and those awarded competitive grants with evaluations to:

- Clearly articulate research questions of interest, focusing on those questions that are most salient to the project proposed and most feasible to answer well within the research and evaluation plan;
- Clearly articulate the study design, including specifying measures, data collection plans, construction of appropriate comparison groups, and appropriate analysis; and,
- Appropriately allocate funds to support the proposed evaluation plan.

Specifically, as stated in the Supplemental Information Request (SIR), which provided the guidance to states as to how to apply for MIECHV funds, the evaluation plan should:

- Discuss how the evaluation will be conducted;
- Articulate the proposed evaluation methods, measurement, data collection, sample and sampling (if appropriate), timeline for activities, plan for securing IRB review, and analysis;

- Identify the evaluator, cost of the evaluation, and the source of funds;
- Use an appropriate comparison condition, if the research is measuring the impact of the promising or new home visiting model on participant outcomes; and
- Include a logic model or conceptual framework that shows the linkages between the proposed planning and implementation activities and the outcomes that these are designed to achieve.

The research and evaluation activities under MIECHV have the potential to advance the field of home visiting and to share knowledge that will strengthen the research-to-practice and practice-to-research feedback loop.

For more information about MIECHV evaluation, please speak with your Regional Project Officer and contact:

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