



# Frequently Asked Questions

Find answers below to questions asked during the Introduction to SIRF webinar

## SIRF Overview

All fatherhood programs must work to enroll, engage, and retain fathers to serve them effectively. SIRF is a partnership between researchers and practitioners, who will jointly use learning cycles (also known as rapid learning evaluations) to address challenges that programs face in meeting these goals. The SIRF team will work with fatherhood programs to identify challenges, design and test solutions, assess their effectiveness, and make adaptations to practice. SIRF is Sponsored by the Office of Family Assistance and overseen by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

This FAQ provides answers to questions asked at the Introduction to SIRF webinar on August 12, 2020 at 2pm ET. Learn more at [www.mdrc.org/SIRF](http://www.mdrc.org/SIRF).

## What does it mean to participate in a learning cycle?

Learning cycles vary, but will consist of three repeating phases:

- ▶ LEARN: Identify a problem and consider potential solutions
- ▶ DO: Implement the chosen solution while collecting and analyzing outcome data, and
- ▶ REFLECT: Examine the results to decide on next steps, which may mean beginning another cycle

The specific approach will be developed collaboratively between the SIRF team and your program.

## What are the benefits of participating in SIRF?

The SIRF team will support programs throughout the study period, including on best practices in implementing learning cycles, assessing program outcomes, and using data to monitor program performance. Programs will also be connected with peers through a SIRF learning community, allowing for cross-program growth and collaboration.

The SIRF team will also provide financial support to study partners and will work closely with programs to identify potential costs. Payments will be made in fixed amounts beginning when the MOU is signed in early 2021 and will wind down by late 2022.

## What will be asked of participating programs?

The level of effort may look slightly different for each participating program. Participating programs will be expected to work with the SIRF team to complete the below activities:

- ▶ Fall 2020: A short series of phone calls and a virtual workshop to design a learning approach.
- ▶ Winter 2021: Finalize plans and set up staffing and other necessary resources.
- ▶ Early 2021: Launch learning cycles to test the approaches and attend SIRF learning activities.
- ▶ Late 2022: Wind down activities with the SIRF team and integrate learning from the project.

Each organization will be supported by designated members of the SIRF team throughout the study. The team is here to help!

### What makes a strong candidate for SIRF? How will you decide who will participate?

The SIRF team will prioritize nominated programs and then will conduct outreach to other potential partner programs as Fatherhood FIRE grant awards are made. Any fatherhood programs interested in SIRF will be considered, including Fatherhood FIRE grantees and non-grantees.

As programs express interest, the SIRF team will assess them for two particular characteristics that indicate likelihood of success in taking on the learning cycle approach: (1) organizational maturity, as indicated by a history of delivering fatherhood services and resources in place to do so; and (2) ability to adapt, indicated by willingness to work collaboratively with an external partner to make program adjustments to meet fathers' needs.

The SIRF team will work to ensure that our learning is relevant for the wider fatherhood field, and will identify programs that serve a target population of fathers commonly served in federally funded Responsible Fatherhood programs. The team also seeks diversity in terms of the types of participating programs, program structures (e.g. schedules, lengths, formats); and geography (e.g. rural, urban).

### Does participating in SIRF affect Fatherhood FIRE grant award and requirements?

Though the Fatherhood FIRE grant includes requirements for local evaluation (as described in the Funding Opportunity Announcement), **participation in SIRF is entirely voluntary and will not affect grant award decisions.** Participation in SIRF may replace local evaluation activities if approved.

### How are continuous quality improvement (CQI) and learning cycles different?

The continuous quality improvement (CQI) plan required of all federal grantees will demonstrate programs' organizational approach to monitoring performance towards goals, as well as the sequential steps taken to identify hurdles and create solutions. **Learning cycles complement the CQI process** as an in-depth strategy to test possible solutions and determine whether they lead to progress toward program goals.

In the case of SIRF, learning cycles will focus on challenges related to recruitment, initial program engagement, and retention (ie. ongoing attendance).

### How has COVID affected the research and nomination process?

The SIRF team understands that COVID-19 has drastically changed many programs' service delivery plans. The team will work with participating programs to design learning cycles that are sensitive to programs' local context and needs.

### How do I learn more?

For more information please contact [SIRF@mdrc.org](mailto:SIRF@mdrc.org) or [Katie.Pahigiannis@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:Katie.Pahigiannis@acf.hhs.gov).

