

5 First Steps to Starting (or Growing) a Fatherhood Program

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There's an old saying about starting on a path to achieving an objective: just put one foot in front of the other. Sage advice to be sure, but it doesn't tell you much about the direction in which you should head. For all you know, it could lead you to walk off the edge of a cliff. If you want to start or grow a fatherhood program, it's vital that you know what to do first so that you head in the right direction.

1. Conduct a Needs and Assets Assessment of Your Community. You need to understand the “fatherhood landscape” in your community—the rate of father absence, the gaps in services for fathers, the programs for fathers (and the kinds of fathers they serve), etc.—before you can select a group of fathers to serve or who could also benefit from the program you already offer.

2. Identify and Learn About the Kind(s) of Father(s) You Want to Serve or Should Expand to Serve. Programs for specific populations of fathers are often more effective than programs for all fathers. Your organization alone can't possibly address all the needs of all fathers. Educate yourself and your colleagues about the unique needs of specific populations of fathers in your community who can benefit the most from your program.



3. Create or Select a Program that Matches Fathers' Needs and Wants. After you know who you will serve (or expand to serve), create or select a program and provide complementary services and resources that will meet fathers' needs and wants. NFI has evidence-based and research-based and proven curricula, programs, and workshops to reach all kinds of fathers. There is no reason for you to “reinvent the wheel.” To get a current list of curricula

and more detailed information about our resources, visit our website at www.fathersource.org or call our national office.

4. Market and Promote Your Program. Marketing a program or service is the greatest challenge of all. It not only involves recruitment, it involves retention and creating a positive image of your program or service in the community to generate referrals. (To learn how to create an effective marketing effort, contact NFI to bring the “Social Marketing for Fatherhood Programs™” workshop to your organization.)

5. Evaluate Your Program. Just because you follow the first 4 steps doesn't mean that you won't veer off course. An evaluation is like a GPS—it tells you whether you're headed in the right direction as you implement your program and helps you to correct your course if necessary. Moreover, evaluations are critically important for program credibility, accountability, improvement, sharing of best practices, and to prove to funders that their dollars were well spent. You don't need a complicated design to effectively evaluate your program. To help organizations with this step, NFI includes evaluation tools with many of its fatherhood programs.

Don't waste time. Go ahead and put one foot in front of the other—just make sure to know in which direction you should take that first step. For more information on implementing these 5 steps, consider purchasing our how-to guide on starting a fatherhood program called “A Guide to Strengthening Fatherhood In Your Community: Moving From Inspiration to Implementation.” **Download a sample below.**