



## North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street

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Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Pheon E. Beal, Director  
(919) 733-3055

August 29, 2003

### **Re: Family Formation and Healthy Marriage Initiatives**

**Dear County Director of Social Services:**

**Attention: Work First Supervisors and Program Administrators**

Many research studies have suggested that family structure has a direct relationship on child well-being. Data has shown that all things being equal, children who grow up in married two-parent families do better on a number of outcomes than those who do not. Some lawmakers and social policy advocates have stressed that many social problems affecting children, families, and communities could be prevented if more children grew up in healthy, intact families. The Bush Administration has acknowledged that many one-parent families are also a source of comfort and reassurance, but a family comprised of a mom and a dad who are committed to marriage and devote themselves to their children helps provide a sound foundation for success. To this end, the administration believes that government can support families by promoting policies that help strengthen the institution of marriage and help parents rear their children in positive and healthy environments.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), has established a healthy marriage initiative that aims to help couples who choose marriage for themselves to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain healthy marriages. The initiative involves developing demonstrations, emphasizing marriage in federal programs, conducting research, and providing training about healthy marriage issues. ACF has been quick to point out that the initiative is not about trapping anyone in an abusive or violent relationship, forcing anyone to get married or stay married, running a dating service, or withdrawing supports from or diminishing the important work of single parents.

At the present time there are proposed sources of funding to support healthy marriage initiatives. The U.S. House of Representatives' welfare reform reauthorization bill (HR 4), as presently written, would provide \$100 million annually for five (5) years that could be used to award competitive grants to states, territories, and tribal organizations. These grants would fund not more than 50 percent of the cost of developing and implementing innovative programs to promote and support healthy, married, two-parent families. Allowable activities for grant funding include:

- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health;
- Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting;
- Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs, that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement, for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers;
- Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or individuals interested in marriage;
- Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples;
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills;
- Marriage mentoring programs which use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities; and,
- Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs, if offered in conjunction with any activity described above.

In addition, \$102 million annually for five (5) years would be available for competitive grants to public or private entities. These funds, which require no match, would be available to support research, technical assistance, and demonstration projects primarily on the activities described above.

A Work Group comprised of members from the Division, the Employment Programs Committee of the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services (NCACDSS), and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Services has been formed to explore family formation and healthy marriage initiatives. The first step in the process is to identify existing initiatives in North Carolina that might be eligible for funding under the healthy marriage promotion grants, as well as to gauge your level of interest in the promotion of family formation and healthy marriage initiatives. The attached survey will help us to determine whether acceptable activities might be currently operating in your county and to ascertain your interest in expanding existing initiatives or pursuing grant funding for healthy marriage promotion or funding for research, demonstrations, and technical assistance. Please complete and return the enclosed survey form not later than September 30, 2003.

Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated. The results of the survey will be shared with the Employment Programs Committee and the Work Group so an appropriate decision might be made regarding North Carolina's interest in pursuing grant funding. All questions and concerns can be directed to my attention by calling (919) 733-3055.

Sincerely,



Wilbert Morris, Associate Director  
Performance Management/Economic Svcs.

Enclosure

PM-02-2003

# Family Formation/Healthy Marriage Initiatives Survey

County Department of Social Services

**Allowable Health Marriage Activities:** Public advertising campaigns; Marriage education in high schools; Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs for non-married expectant fathers and pregnant women; Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged or couples interested in marriage; Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training for married couples; Divorce reduction programs; Marriage mentoring programs; and, Reduction of disincentives to marriage in means tested programs.

1. Are you aware of any family formation/marriage education programs or activities that are currently operated by public agencies in your county?

YES                       NO

If YES, indicate the allowable activity (see list above) and the responsible public agency:

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2. If funding became available to support a Family Formation/Healthy Marriage program in North Carolina, indicate your level of interest:

Very Interested  
 Somewhat Interested  
 Little Interest  
 Not At All Interested

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. If interested, indicate your level of interest in your county being part of a pilot or a partnering agency in a Family Formation/Healthy Marriage initiative:

Very Interested  
 Somewhat Interested  
 Little Interest  
 Not At All Interested

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Indicate which Family Formation/Healthy Marriage activities your county might be interested in participating:

- Public Advertising Campaigns
- Marriage Education in High Schools
- Marriage Education and Skills, and Relationship Skills
- Pre-marital Education and Marriage Skills Training
- Marriage Enhancement and Marriage Skills Training
- Divorce Reduction Programs
- Marriage Mentoring Programs
- Reduction of Disincentives to Marriage in Means Tested Programs

5. Would you be interested in learning more about Family Formation/Healthy Marriage initiatives?

- YES                       NO

If yes, indicate agency contact:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Questions, concerns or issues my county have regarding Family Formation/Healthy Marriage initiatives:

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Survey Completed By:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_