

ELEVATE: Implementation of a healthy marriage and relationship education program by a statewide cooperative extension service



August 2020



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ELEVATE: Implementation of a healthy marriage and relationship education program by a statewide cooperative extension service

August 2020

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OVERVIEW

The Strengthening Relationship Education and Marriage Services (STREAMS) evaluation is a random assignment impact study and in-depth process study of five healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) grantees funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). To maximize its contributions to the evidence base and to inform future program and evaluation design, STREAMS is examining the full range of populations served by HMRE programs, including individual adults, adult couples, and youth in high school. Each STREAMS site functions as a separate study within the larger evaluation and each site addresses a distinct research question.

This process study report presents findings on the implementation of the University of Florida's (UF) ELEVATE program in six counties across the state. UF delivered ELEVATE through its Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) county-based Cooperative Extension Service (Extension). ELEVATE is a popular curriculum for adult couples of all ages who may or may not be married. It was developed as part of the Alabama Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Initiative for delivery through Extension and other organizations. The curriculum has two primary goals: (1) to teach couples practical strategies and tools to maintain a healthy relationship and (2) to develop mindfulness practices that help couples regulate their physiological responses to conflict and stress.

ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) with funding from OFA contracted with Mathematica and its partner Public Strategies to rigorously evaluate a text-messaging intervention designed to boost attendance in ELEVATE. Due to the focus of the impact study on couples' attendance, in this report we emphasize the strategies UF used to recruit couples and encourage their attendance and participation. We also highlight other aspects of implementation, including strategies for delivering a statewide program through Extension and characteristics of the counties in which ELEVATE operated.

This report is based on data from the following four sources, collected to document the implementation of ELEVATE in the first two years of the program (January 2017 to December 2018).

- 1. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations.** We conducted a three-day site visit in September 2018. We interviewed 12 staff, observed two sessions of ELEVATE, and held two focus groups with couples who had attended the workshop.
- 2. nFORM attendance and service data.** nFORM is the client management system that OFA provided to UF and other 2015 grantees. UF staff entered workshop attendance and other data about service delivery in the system. After each ELEVATE workshop session, UF program instructors completed a short assessment about their ability to deliver that day's content and engage participants.
- 3. Applicant characteristic and entrance survey data.** Participants completed an applicant characteristics survey and entrance survey at the first session of ELEVATE. The surveys gathered information on participant demographics and relationship characteristics.
- 4. Staff survey.** Seven program staff who facilitated ELEVATE completed a web-based survey in September 2018. This survey included questions about their work roles and experiences; feelings toward the program; and impressions of the quality of their supervision, of training opportunities, and of the organizational climate.

Key findings from this process study are:

- **Implementing a statewide program through Extension required system building and cultural shifts.** ELEVATE differed from typical Extension programs, which were often one or two days long with no specific enrollment targets or performance monitoring requirements. Overseeing a longer program that involved meeting enrollment targets, entering data into nFORM, and meeting specific performance goals required a different approach to supervision and program management. UF took several steps to support county Extension agents and increase their involvement in program decision making. For example, project leaders convened a monthly meeting with agents and looked for opportunities for agents to publish information and make presentations on UF’s HMRE program. At the time of the site visit, UF also planned to hire a dedicated staff member to provide onsite support to each county on a rotating basis. UF’s data manager provided extensive support to ensure that UF stayed on top of its reporting requirements despite the geographic distance between sites.
- **UF used data and technology to adapt its recruitment and enrollment strategies as needed.** UF carefully monitored data on recruitment and enrollment and used this data to inform its strategies. Project leaders worked with the STREAMS evaluation team to set enrollment targets for each county and the program as a whole. UF then divided these targets among the program instructors and held each instructor accountable for enrolling a certain number of couples in each workshop. The data manager tracked progress toward these targets and shared this information regularly with project leadership and frontline staff, which allowed everyone on the project team to work together to improve enrollment as needed. UF also leveraged technology to boost enrollment. In response to low enrollment in the program’s early months, UF decided to advertise on social media, in addition to other methods like distributing flyers and attending community events. By the end of 2017, UF was meeting its enrollment targets. Over half of the participants reported learning about ELEVATE through an Internet ad, including those placed on social media.
- **ELEVATE engaged couples with highly relevant content and flexible options to make up missed sessions.** Overall, program participants were very satisfied with ELEVATE. Participants reported that the program’s content was highly relevant to their lives. They especially appreciated learning about personal triggers, the ways that stress and anger can interfere with their ability to communicate effectively, and practical skills they could use for resolving conflicts. Recognizing that changing work schedules and other conflicts made it difficult for some couples to attend all five workshop sessions, UF offered two options for couples to make up missed sessions—in-person and online. The make-up options greatly improved program attendance, boosting the percentage of couples who attended all five sessions from 44 to 63 percent.

This study was conducted in conjunction with a rigorous impact study to explore whether text messages improved couples’ initial and ongoing attendance at the ELEVATE program. The STREAMS evaluation team randomly assigned couples either to one of several intervention groups that received text message reminders to attend the program or to a comparison group that did not receive text messages. The impact report is expected to be available in 2021. Findings from this process study report provide context on UF’s ELEVATE program to help interpret the impact evaluation findings.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the passage of welfare reform in 1996, the federal government has promoted programs and policies to strengthen healthy relationships and marriage based on research showing that children fare better when they are raised in stable, two-parent families (Amato and Keith 1991; Biglan et al. 2012). Beginning in the mid-2000s, the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), has provided grants to agencies implementing healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programming for a range of populations, including couples, single adults, and youth.¹

Findings from prior federal evaluations of workshop-based HMRE programs indicate that programs vary in how successful they are recruiting sufficient numbers of couples to participate and getting them to regularly attend voluntary workshop sessions (Dion et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2012; Zaveri and Baumgartner 2016). Finding couples who are eligible for the program and getting both partners to agree to participate can require substantial time and effort by program staff (Pappas-DeLuca et al. 2006). Once couples are enrolled, promoting regular attendance can also pose challenges and require sustained attention (Wood et al. 2012; Miller et al. 2012). Although research on the effects of HMRE participation is limited, a few studies have shown that greater participation is associated with better outcomes (Cobb and Sullivan 2015; Bradford et al. 2017; Arnold and Beelmann 2018). Despite this finding, little research exists about strategies to promote couples' participation in HMRE programs.

To help build the knowledge base on implementation strategies for promoting couples' attendance at group-based workshops, ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) with funding from OFA contracted with Mathematica and its partner Public Strategies, to rigorously evaluate a text-messaging intervention designed to boost attendance in ELEVATE, an HMRE program for couples. ELEVATE (which is an acronym for the curriculum's core modules—see Box I.3) is one of four HMRE programs operated by the University of Florida (UF) in counties across the state. The study is part of the Strengthening Relationship and Marriage Services (STREAMS) evaluation, a five-site random assignment evaluation of HMRE programs and strategies. The STREAMS evaluation team is working with UF to test whether text messages informed by behavioral science can improve couples' attendance at ELEVATE sessions. For more information on the impact study of this text-messaging intervention, see Box I.1.

In this process study report, we document UF's experience implementing of ELEVATE from January 2017 through December 2018. UF delivered ELEVATE throughout Florida through the university's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) county-based

¹ In 2005, Congress passed the Deficit Reduction Act (P.L. 109-171), which first authorized funding for HMRE programs. The funding, administered through OFA, supports grants for programs to offer one or more of eight allowable activities, including relationship education for high school students. The funding was reauthorized in 2010, through the Claims Resolution Act (P.L. 111-291). Following passage of the Deficit Reduction Act, three rounds of HMRE grants have been issued (2006, 2010, and 2015).

Cooperative Extension Service (referred to in this report as Extension). Due to the focus of the impact study on couples’ attendance, in this report we emphasize the strategies UF used to recruit couples and encourage their attendance and participation. We also highlight other aspects of implementation, including strategies for delivering a statewide program through Extension and characteristics of the counties in which ELEVATE operated. The report draws on multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews with program staff, a staff survey, focus groups with participants, observations of program services, and program data on participation (Box I.2).

Box I.1. The STREAMS impact study of text messaging interventions in Florida

The STREAMS impact study of text messaging interventions (which was still underway at the time this report was written) is testing the effectiveness of automated text messages as a strategy to improve couples’ attendance at HMRE group workshop sessions. Findings on program participation from prior evaluations of workshop-based HMRE programs indicate that program providers can face challenges getting couples to regularly attend workshop sessions. To address this challenge, the STREAMS evaluation team is collaborating with UF program staff to test the effectiveness of automated text message reminders as a practical, relatively low-cost strategy for improving couples’ attendance.

To develop the text messages, the STREAMS evaluation team reviewed existing behavioral science literature and consulted with experts and UF program staff to identify behavioral bottlenecks participants might encounter to attending group workshop sessions. For example, couples might forget the date or time of the session, lack child care or reliable transportation, or lose initial motivation. To account for these possible bottlenecks, the STREAMS team developed a research design for the impact study that uses rapid cycle learning methods to allow for iterative testing of multiple distinct text messaging interventions. For example, one intervention offers future-oriented messages with personalized reminders and motivational nudges based on program goals. Another intervention includes present-oriented messages with prompts to plan ahead for child care and transportation, nudges that emphasize progress the couple has made attending the sessions, and prompts to commit to attend future sessions.

In addition, the impact study will provide evidence on the effectiveness of text messages on different aspects of couples’ workshop attendance. From January 2017 to December 2018 (the focus of this report), the STREAMS evaluation team randomly assigned couples to one of several research groups after they attended the first workshop session. The team used this design to test the effectiveness of the text messaging interventions in promoting continued attendance among these couples. In January 2019, the evaluation team changed the design to randomly assign couples and send the text messages before the first program session. The team made this shift because it became clear that the program’s bigger participation challenge was getting enrolled couples to come to the first session. With this design, the impact study will provide evidence on the effectiveness of text messages on couples’ attendance at the first workshop session.

The evaluation team developed three types of text messages. These sample messages show the differences:

Simple message: [Participant name], your first ELEVATE class is tomorrow at [date and time]. See you soon!

Present-oriented message: Hi [Participant name], we are looking forward to seeing you and [Participant partner name] at our ELEVATE class tomorrow! Many couples have told us that the skills they learned in our workshop helped them to become more understanding and supportive partners—and happier together.



Future-oriented message: We are looking forward to seeing you and [Participant partner name] at our ELEVATE class tomorrow! You’ve taken a great step toward strengthening your relationship. We are going to learn and practice relationship skills that will last a lifetime. It’s going to be fun!



Box I.2. Data sources for process study

This process study report, which documents UF's experience implementing ELEVATE through Extension, is based on four sources of data collected from January 2017 through December 2018:

1. **Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations.** We collected qualitative data during a three-day site visit in September 2018 and phone interviews in September and October 2018. We interviewed a total of 12 staff, including: the chair of IFAS' Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences; the program director and project coordinator; the program data manager; 3 county Extension agents; and 5 program instructors who recruited participants and delivered ELEVATE workshops. We observed two sessions of ELEVATE and held two focus groups with 9 couples (18 individuals) who had attended the workshop.
2. **nFORM attendance and service data.** nFORM was the client management system that OFA provided to UF and other 2015 grantees. UF's staff entered workshop attendance and other service contact data (for example, referrals) in the system. After each ELEVATE workshop session, UF's staff completed a short self-assessment about their ability to deliver that day's planned content and engage participants. We analyzed nFORM data on 1,082 couples (2,164 individuals) who enrolled in the STREAMS evaluation between January 2017 and December 2018.
3. **Applicant characteristic and entrance survey data.** Participants completed both an applicant characteristics survey and entrance survey at the first session of ELEVATE. These surveys gathered information on participant demographics and relationship characteristics (for example relationship satisfaction). We analyzed survey responses from 1,082 couples (2,164 individuals) who enrolled in the STREAMS evaluation and completed the surveys between January 2017 and December 2018.
4. **Staff survey.** Seven program staff who facilitated ELEVATE completed a web-based survey in September 2018. This survey included questions about their work roles and experiences; feelings toward the program; and impressions of the quality of their supervision, training opportunities, and organizational climate.

University of Florida's ELEVATE program

UF used their OFA grant funds to offer HMRE programming throughout the state. They offered four different HMRE curricula to different populations, including Relationship Smarts Plus 3.0 to youth and young adults, Before You Tie the Knot to premarital couples and individuals interested in marriage, Smart Steps to couples with stepchildren, and ELEVATE to romantically involved couples regardless of marital status. Initially, the STREAMS evaluation team intended to embed the text-messaging intervention in both Smart Steps and ELEVATE. However, due to low enrollment in Smart Steps, the study team decided to focus only on ELEVATE. UF began delivering ELEVATE in July 2016; enrollment in the STREAMS evaluation began in January 2017.

Between January 2017 and December 2018, UF delivered ELEVATE in six counties across the state of Florida: Alachua, Citrus, Duval, Manatee, Palm Beach, and Santa Rosa. The program operated in four counties (Duval, Manatee, Palm Beach, and Santa Rosa) during this entire period. UF began delivering ELEVATE in Alachua County in March 2017 to help boost program enrollment. It stopped delivering ELEVATE in Citrus County in December 2017 due, in part, to low enrollment.

In five counties, UF delivered the program through county Extension offices. In Alachua County, the exception, it delivered the program directly through the university. Staff at UF's Gainesville campus managed the statewide program. Program instructors employed by UF delivered the workshops in each site. County Extension agents provided direct oversight to the instructors in all counties except for Alachua, where grant staff supervised the instructors.

ELEVATE was developed as part of the Alabama Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Initiative for delivery through Extension programs and other organizations (Futris et al. 2014). It is based on the National Extension Relationship and Education Model, which outlines core concepts shown to be associated with healthy, stable couple relationships. ELEVATE has two primary goals: (1) to teach couples practical strategies and tools to maintain a healthy relationship and (2) to develop mindfulness practices that help couples regulate their physiological responses to conflict and stress. The eight, one-hour modules cover a range of topics including understanding how relationships affect physical and mental health, managing conflict and stress, and intimacy (see Box I.3).

Box I.3. ELEVATE content by module

Module #	Module name	Module objectives
1	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish clear goals and expectations for the program <i>for each partner</i> Understand how relationship emotions, thoughts, and behaviors influence, and are influenced by, the body's physiological response system Identify the core principles and qualities of healthy relationships that an individual can apply to regulate his/her positive emotional, cognitive, and behavioral practices
2	Empower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the reciprocal nature of health and wellness Identify strategies for creating a healthier physical living style, nurturing individual psychological well-being, and promoting sexual health Aspire to engage in behaviors that strengthen relationships by promoting individual physical social/emotional, spiritual, and sexual health
3	Lay the foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that healthy relationships require sustained effort over time Identify choices and strategies that lay a strong foundation for a safe, stable, and satisfying relationship Aspire to engage in behaviors that reinforce dedication and commitment to maintaining a healthy relationship
4	Enlighten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the importance of shared intimate knowledge to create and maintain stable, healthy relationships Identify what individuals and couples need to learn about themselves and each other and what they each bring to the relationship Identify relationship-building activities and resources to help couples develop shared intimate knowledge
5	Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how showing kindness, understanding, respect, and caring can help couples create and maintain stable, healthy relationships Understand the importance of focusing on positive characteristics of partners within a relationship Identify relationship building activities and resources to help individuals and couples demonstrate care in their relationships
6	Attach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the value of developing and maintaining a close friendship as a part of a healthy relationship Develop an ability to provide understanding and create opportunities to foster a shared sense of couple identity Identify strategies to create meaningful couple time that fosters friendship
7	Tame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that differences between partners and conflict are normative aspects of all healthy couple relationships Identify strategies for regulating emotions and managing stress and conflict Aspire to engage in behaviors that promote positive communication and conflict management practices
8	Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the benefits of engaging social support and building community ties on sustaining healthy relationships and marriages Identify sources of personal and community resources (e.g. family, friends, and faith groups) and shared meaning (e.g., rituals, spirituality, and values) that support healthy couple relationships Explore relationship-building activities and resources to become better connected with support systems

Source: Futris et al. 2014.

UF delivered ELEVATE over five weekly sessions at a variety of community-based locations, including Extension offices, community centers, libraries, and on the UF campus. Box I.4 shows the activities and ELEVATE modules delivered in each session. Each session lasted 2.5 hours and included 30 minutes for a shared meal. The first and last session also included time to administer surveys. In the second session, participants completed a customized version of the Online Work Readiness Assessment tool known as the SMART assessment; program staff used participants’ responses on this assessment to identify participants’ needs and provide information about and referrals to other services available in the community.

Box I.4. Content and activities for each ELEVATE session

Week	ELEVATE content delivered	Other activities
1	Introduction to ELEVATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared meal • OFA-required applicant characteristics and entrance surveys
2	Empower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared meal • UF-sponsored survey • SMART assessment • Distribution of gift cards
3	Lay the Foundation and Enlighten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared meal
4	Value and Attach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared meal
5	Tame and Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFA-required exit survey • UF-sponsored survey • Distribution of gift cards

Road map to the report

This process study report presents findings on UF’s implementation of ELEVATE from January 2017 through December 2018. It is informed by and follows the structure of an implementation framework (see Appendix A). In Chapter II, we describe the context for implementation. In Chapter III, we describe the implementation system, including the processes UF used to hire, train, and supervise program staff, and the implementation outputs related to program staff. In Chapter IV, we discuss the systems that UF used to recruit and enroll program participants. In Chapter V, we present implementation outputs related to services and participant responsiveness to services. In Chapter VI, we summarize the main findings about UF’s delivery of ELEVATE during 2017 and 2018.

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II. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT FOR IMPLEMENTING ELEVATE

The location of a program influences whom it serves and how it is implemented. The characteristics of people (for example, their racial and ethnic groups or income levels) living in a program's service area determine the targeted population. Additionally, community characteristics, such as availability of jobs or programs for families, shape the need for and types of services a program offers.

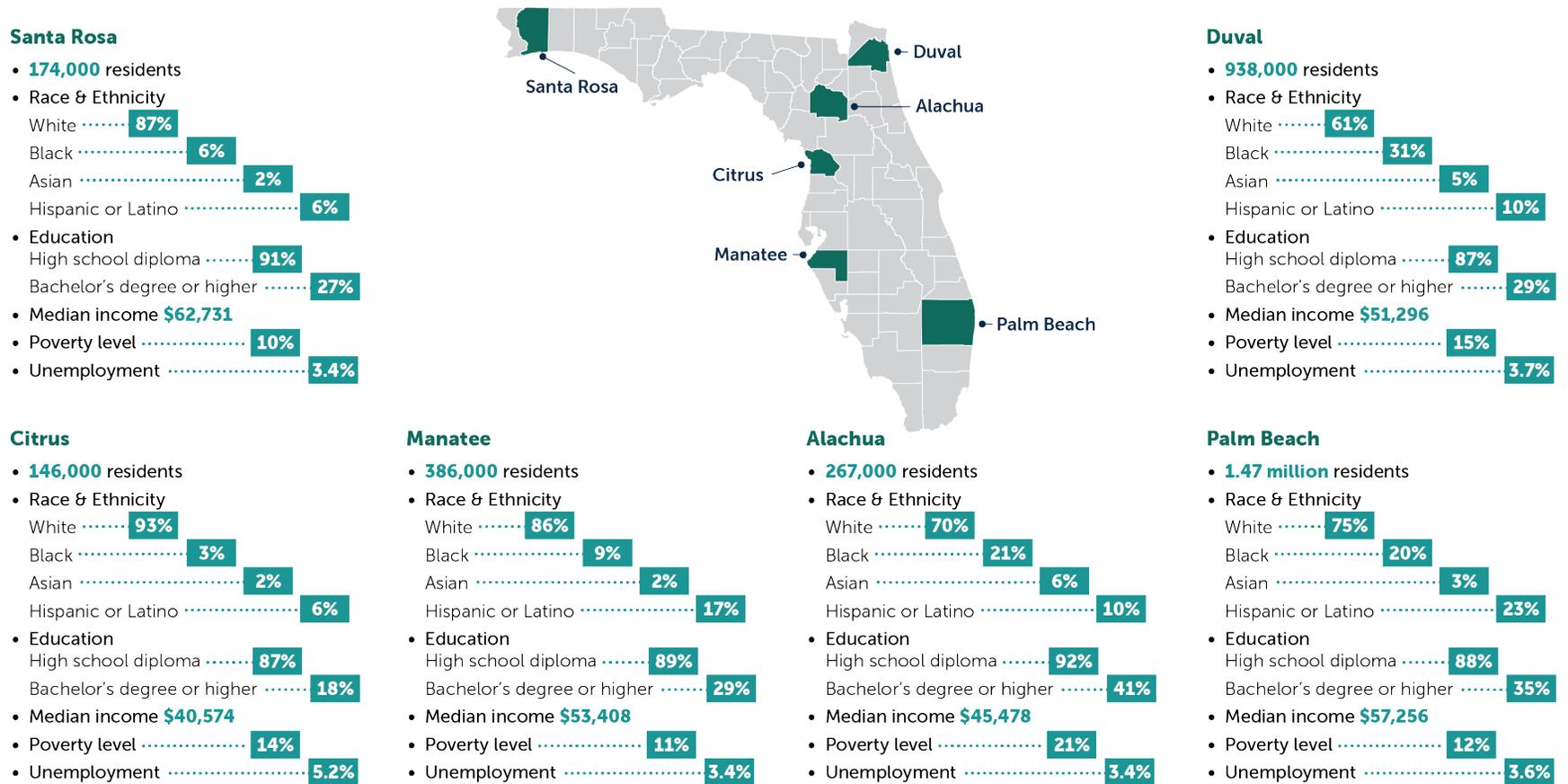
UF operated ELEVATE through Extension in six counties in Florida. The project director chose these counties because they were spread out across the state and represented a mix of rural and urban areas. In this chapter, we describe the community context in each of the six counties that implemented ELEVATE and the characteristics of ELEVATE participants in each county.

UF delivered ELEVATE in diverse community contexts throughout Florida

The counties implementing ELEVATE varied in population size and demographics (Figure II.1). Palm Beach County and Duval County (where Jacksonville is located) are primarily urban with populations near one million residents; Citrus and Santa Rosa counties are more rural, both with populations under 200,000 residents. In all counties, the majority of residents were White. Alachua, Duval, and Palm Beach counties also had substantial Black populations (31, 21, and 20 percent, respectively). Palm Beach and Manatee counties also had substantial Hispanic or Latino populations (23 percent and 17 percent, respectively). Counties varied in their income and poverty levels. The median income for counties ranged from \$40,474 in Citrus to \$62,731 in Santa Rosa.² Alachua and Citrus counties had the highest poverty rates at 21 and 15 percent, respectively, which were higher than the statewide rate (13.6 percent). Santa Rosa County had the lowest poverty rate at 10 percent. All of the counties had unemployment rates at or near the statewide rate of 3.4 percent, except for Citrus where the unemployment rate was over 5 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2019).

² As context, the state median income was \$50,883 (U.S. Census Bureau 2019).

Figure II.1 Description of counties implementing ELEVATE



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2019.

Note: Florida's unemployment rate is 3.4 percent and its median income is \$50,883. The federal poverty rate is 12.3 percent.

Most couples enrolled in ELEVATE were White and under age 45, but participant characteristics varied by county

Most participants enrolled in ELEVATE were White (56 percent) and under the age of 45 (73 percent); however, these characteristics varied somewhat across counties (see Table II.1). For example, half of the participants in Duval County were Black. In Citrus County, 90 percent were White. Manatee and Palm Beach counties served the largest proportion of Hispanic participants (24 and 23 percent, respectively). Alachua County, where program staff reported that most participants were UF students, served the largest group of participants under the age of 25 (21 percent). In contrast, in Citrus County nearly a third of the participants were ages 55 and older (32 percent).

Most participants had at least some college education (86 percent) and were employed (81 percent). Most participants reported earning over \$1,000 per month (74 percent). Approximately one-third of participants in all counties except Citrus made over \$3,000 per month, equivalent to almost \$40,000 per year, which is well above the federal poverty level for a two-adult household of \$16,815 per year (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Just over half the participants (53 percent) had no children at enrollment.

Table II.1. Characteristics of participants enrolled in ELEVATE, by county

	Alachua	Citrus	Duval	Manatee	Palm Beach	Santa Rosa	Total
Age (%)							
Younger than 25	21	6	6	6	7	8	13
25–34	37	19	37	31	33	38	35
34–44	22	19	27	30	25	26	25
45–54	12	23	14	14	19	19	14
55 and older	7	32	16	19	15	9	13
Race/Ethnicity (%)							
White, non-Hispanic	61	90	40	64	44	85	56
Black, non-Hispanic	14	3	50	9	23	8	22
Hispanic/Latino	18	2	8	24	23	5	16
Other	9	5	6	5	10	3	8
Highest Education level (%)							
Less than high school	1	2	3	6	3	6	3
High school degree/GED	6	26	15	15	13	15	11
Some college or currently enrolled in college	48	42	52	44	44	53	48
Bachelor’s degree or higher	45	31	30	35	39	26	38
Currently employed (%)	84	64	78	78	84	81	81
Earnings per month (%)							
Less than \$500	19	19	14	15	10	14	16
\$500-\$1,000	10	21	10	9	9	11	10
\$1,001-\$2,000	19	25	18	23	22	17	20
\$2,001-\$3,000	18	17	21	19	22	28	20
More than \$3,000	33	17	36	34	38	30	34

	Alachua	Citrus	Duval	Manatee	Palm Beach	Santa Rosa	Total
Number of Children (%)							
0	62	44	47	45	52	32	53
1	15	20	22	16	15	32	18
2	16	22	18	22	21	24	18
3 or more	7	14	13	17	12	13	11
N	922	62	480	248	346	106	2,164

Source: Applicant characteristics and entrance surveys.

Note: Table includes all participants enrolled between January 2017 and December 2018. Not all percentages add to 100 percent due to multiple items being endorsed or missing responses.

GED = General Educational Development.

Just over half the couples (57 percent) were married at the time of enrollment (Table II.2). Manatee County had the highest portion of married couples (67 percent) and Santa Rosa had the lowest (47 percent). A small percentage of ELEVATE couples were in same-sex relationships (3 percent).

Table II.2. Relationship status of couples enrolled in ELEVATE, by county

	Alachua	Citrus	Duval	Manatee	Palm Beach	Santa Rosa	Total
Relationship status (%)							
Married	56	52	62	67	51	47	57
Unmarried, but live together all of the time	28	32	27	24	32	41	29
Unmarried, but does not live together all of the time	16	16	10	8	17	11	14
Same-sex couples (%)	2	3	4	5	2	2	3
N	461	31	240	124	173	53	1,082

Source: Applicant characteristics survey.

Note: Table includes all participants enrolled between January 2017 and December 2018. Not all percentages add to 100 percent due to multiple items being endorsed or missing responses.

III. SUPPORTING ELEVATE IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH EXTENSION

In its 2015 HMRE funding announcement, OFA emphasized the importance of choosing a curriculum with evidence of effectiveness and then implementing that curriculum with fidelity. To implement a curriculum as intended by the developers, grantees must have strong systems in place to support implementation. These include systems for hiring, training, and supervising staff (Fixsen et al. 2005). Delivering a program with fidelity also increases the likelihood that participants receive its intended benefits.

In this chapter, we cover the organizational structure of ELEVATE and the processes UF used to support high fidelity implementation of this evidence-informed program. We also describe the steps UF took to hire and train staff and support program implementation in multiple counties across the state. Finally, we discuss staff qualifications and staff satisfaction with the ELEVATE program.

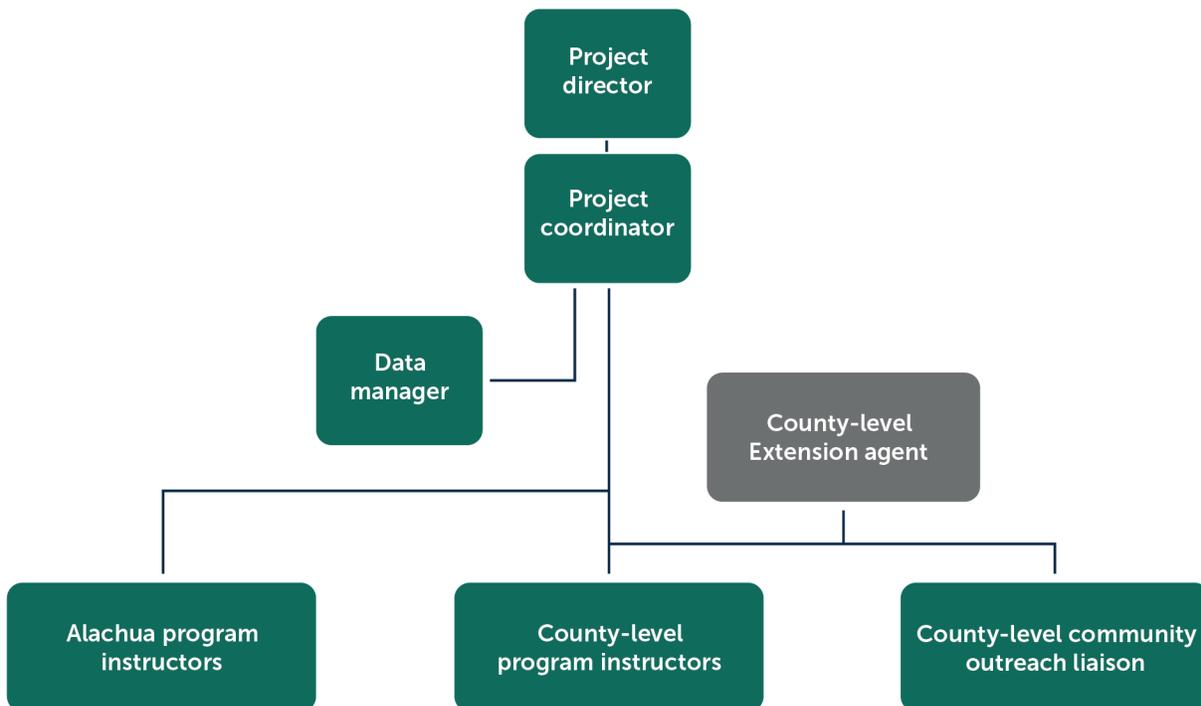
Extension offers educational opportunities throughout Florida

The national Extension service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture aims to bring together land-grant universities and federal, state, and county governments to provide educational opportunities and scientific expertise to the public. It offers community classes and learning opportunities in several program areas, including agriculture, nutrition, youth development, and family and consumer sciences. Due to the mix of agencies involved, the national Extension service is funded by a combination of sources, including federal, state, and county agencies. The exact combination of funding sources varies by location.

In Florida, Extension has offices in each of the state's 67 counties. UF's IFAS department operates both the Extension service and UF's HMRE program, which helped to facilitate the integration of HMRE programming into Extension. County Extension offices are staffed by a mix of faculty members, scientists, educators, administrative staff, and volunteers. Each program area (such as agriculture or nutrition) is led by one or more Extension agents who coordinate programming and manage staff within that area. As faculty of UF/IFAS, Extension agents are also expected to teach, conduct research, and disseminate knowledge in their program areas through scholarly publications and conference presentations. HMRE programming falls within Extension's family and consumer sciences area.

UF used staff funded by the OFA grant, STREAMS, and Extension to deliver ELEVATE

UF relied on a mix of staff funded by the OFA grant, STREAMS, and Extension to deliver ELEVATE (Figure III.1). UF staff on the Gainesville campus managed the ELEVATE program, and the project director was a professor in IFAS. His background included experience in HMRE program delivery, particularly through Extension, and teaching instruction and facilitation techniques. The project director's primary responsibilities regarding ELEVATE implementation included grant management and program-wide decision making. As lead trainer for the program, he also provided the ELEVATE training to program staff. In addition, he facilitated the ELEVATE sessions in Alachua County (where Gainesville is located) for nearly one year, prior to hiring additional program instructors.

Figure III.1. Organizational chart for staff involved in ELEVATE

The project director used OFA grant funds to hire a project coordinator and a data manager. These two staff worked closely with the project director to manage the program and supervise staff in the county Extension offices. The project coordinator oversaw most of the day-to-day operations. She took the lead on supervising staff by setting up regular meetings and check-ins to make sure staff fulfilled their responsibilities in recruitment and program delivery. The project coordinator also managed all of the contracts related to the grant, including liaising with STREAMS evaluators, the curriculum distributor, and vendors for staff trainings. She also developed marketing materials for the program, including advertisements on social media, and oversaw purchasing.

The data manager oversaw the grant's substantial data and reporting requirements. The grant required UF to administer two surveys to program participants when entering the program and one when exiting. It also required frontline staff to enter data on attendance and adherence to the program model into nFORM, the client management system that OFA provided to all 2015 grantees. In addition, UF administered a separate survey for its own evaluation and asked program participants to complete an assessment indicating their desire for referrals to other services in the community. The data manager ensured that staff in each county entered data into nFORM in a timely and accurate manner. He also helped troubleshoot technological issues remotely by making himself available during all scheduled workshop sessions. For example, if staff experienced problems with the tablets that participants used to complete surveys, they could call the data manager to troubleshoot the issue during the session. The data manager also regularly compiled reports to monitor program performance (for example, program enrollment and attendance reports) and shared them with the rest of the project team.

In each county, one or two program instructors provided direct services to couples in the program. At the time of the September 2018 site visit, the program had seven instructors who worked 30 hours per week. Three of these instructors were funded by UF's OFA grant and four were funded by STREAMS. Although employees of the university, most program instructors worked out of the county Extension offices (with the exception of Alachua County, where they worked at the university). Instructors split their time between delivering the program and conducting marketing and recruitment activities. In addition, program instructors reviewed the results of needs assessments and followed up with participants to provide referrals to outside services.

UF also used its OFA grant funds to employ a community outreach liaison in each county for 20 hours per week. Liaisons devoted about half of their time to marketing and recruitment, including meeting with staff from potential partner organizations in the county. They spent the rest of their time helping with workshop logistics, including survey administration.

In all counties except Alachua, an Extension agent supervised the program instructors and community outreach liaisons. UF/IFAS Extension and/or the county, rather than the OFA grant, funded these agents' salaries. Agents were responsible for supervising Extension programs in their counties; they also taught courses, published materials, and presented original research. Their supervisory duties for the ELEVATE program included observing program instructors deliver the curriculum in order to monitor fidelity and ensure effective program delivery. Agents also ensured that instructors and community outreach liaisons followed through on recruitment activities, such as marketing the program at community events, posting flyers, and emailing community partners. Some agents also delivered ELEVATE workshops themselves. Some also helped with recruitment by advertising the program among their large networks of community partners and at their local Extension offices.

UF project leaders created systems to hire, train, and manage ELEVATE staff across the state

Project leaders took several steps to integrate ELEVATE into the Extension system and manage the statewide program remotely. These steps included developing a centralized process to hire and train program instructors, instituting regular check-ins with staff, working closely with Extension agents to support them as program supervisors, and managing the grant's substantial data collection and reporting requirements.

The project director and project coordinator oversaw all hiring and initial training for the ELEVATE program. To fill vacant positions for program instructor and community outreach liaison in each county, the project coordinator worked with UF's human resources department to post the positions on the university's job listings website. Applications were submitted through this website, where they were reviewed by the project coordinator, project director, and sometimes the Extension agent in the relevant county. The project coordinator and director then conducted a phone interview with promising applicants. Before hiring, applicants for program instructor positions also had to deliver a practice lesson, which the project coordinator and director attended via video conference or in person.

Prior to delivering their first ELEVATE workshop, program instructors completed an online training on the curriculum and carefully reviewed the curriculum manual. When possible, they also observed at least one full workshop series and participated in teach-backs to practice delivering the curriculum themselves. At the beginning of the grant period, the Extension agents supervised most of this initial training, but over time, the project director and coordinator decided to play a larger role to help mitigate differences in training across counties. For instance, rather than having the Extension agents lead the teach-backs with new instructors, they decided to have new instructors come to Gainesville for a two-day training focused on learning effective teaching techniques and observing the ELEVATE program in Alachua County. In addition to ensuring consistent training, this onboarding experience allowed new staff to meet and connect with project leaders in person, which the project director and coordinator felt enhanced buy-in for the program.

Project leaders used regular conference calls, assessments, and in-person meetings to manage program staff remotely. Because the six counties involved in the grant were spread out across the state, project leaders used several methods to supervise and stay connected to project staff. Early in project, they established weekly, hour-long conference calls with the full project team, including the Extension agents, program instructors, and community outreach liaisons in each county, as well as the project director, project coordinator, and data manager. The calls provided an opportunity for staff to update the team on their marketing and recruitment activities, enrollment numbers, data collection and reporting activities, and issues that arose when delivering the workshops, administering surveys, and entering data. They also provided a venue for the project leaders to address solutions to these issues with the full team.

To monitor staff performance, project leaders also asked program instructors to complete regular reports and self-assessments. Each week, instructors submitted a report about their successes and challenges in marketing and recruitment in the prior week and their plans for recruitment in the upcoming week. Program instructors also filled out weekly self-assessments about their overall performance. The project coordinator and project director reviewed these reports and assessments and used them to inform feedback and teaching tips that they presented during weekly conference calls.

In addition to these regular check-ins, all program staff met in person in Gainesville once per year. This meeting provided an opportunity for staff from across the state to connect with one another and share their challenges and accomplishments from the prior year as well as their goals for the upcoming year. The in-person meeting also served as a venue for staff training, such as booster training on the curriculum, training on domestic violence and cultural diversity, and training on the data collection and reporting systems. The project director and project coordinator also visited county sites to stay connected with staff, observe the program, and improve their understanding of program implementation in each site.

Implementing ELEVATE through Extension required a culture shift. ELEVATE differed from typical Extension programs in several respects. Most Extension programs were shorter, one- or two-day programs with no specific enrollment targets. To recruit participants for these programs, Extension offices usually advertised through newsletters, websites, and other channels but did not actively recruit individual participants. Overseeing a longer program that involved active recruiting, regular data entry into nFORM, providing referrals, and meeting

specific performance goals required a different approach to supervision and program management. Early on, agents expressed concern about the amount of time required to supervise program staff, as well as how to balance their ELEVATE duties with other tasks, such as teaching and publishing. Agents also felt their ability to address performance issues was limited because program instructors and community outreach liaisons were employees of UF, rather than the Extension office.

The project director took several steps to support the Extension agents, increase their involvement in program planning, and address their concerns. He began convening monthly conference calls with the agents to provide support; discuss challenges; and collaborate on solutions in the areas of staffing, recruitment, program delivery, and data collection and reporting. During the site visit interview, the program director credited these monthly meetings with improving agents' buy-in for the program because they provided a forum for addressing agents' concerns and for agents to provide input on the future direction of the program. In addition, the project director allocated funds from outside the grant to support agents' attendance at research conferences and looked for opportunities to coauthor publications with agents about HMRE programming. These activities helped agents meet their other job requirements and improved their chances of becoming tenured. At the time of the site visit, the project director was also planning to hire a staff member to help the agents provide training and supervise staff. This person would visit each Extension office monthly to observe ELEVATE workshops and help troubleshoot issues. The project director thought that hiring a dedicated staff member to support program implementation at the county level would help relieve some of the burden on the Extension agents and ensure ELEVATE was delivered with fidelity.

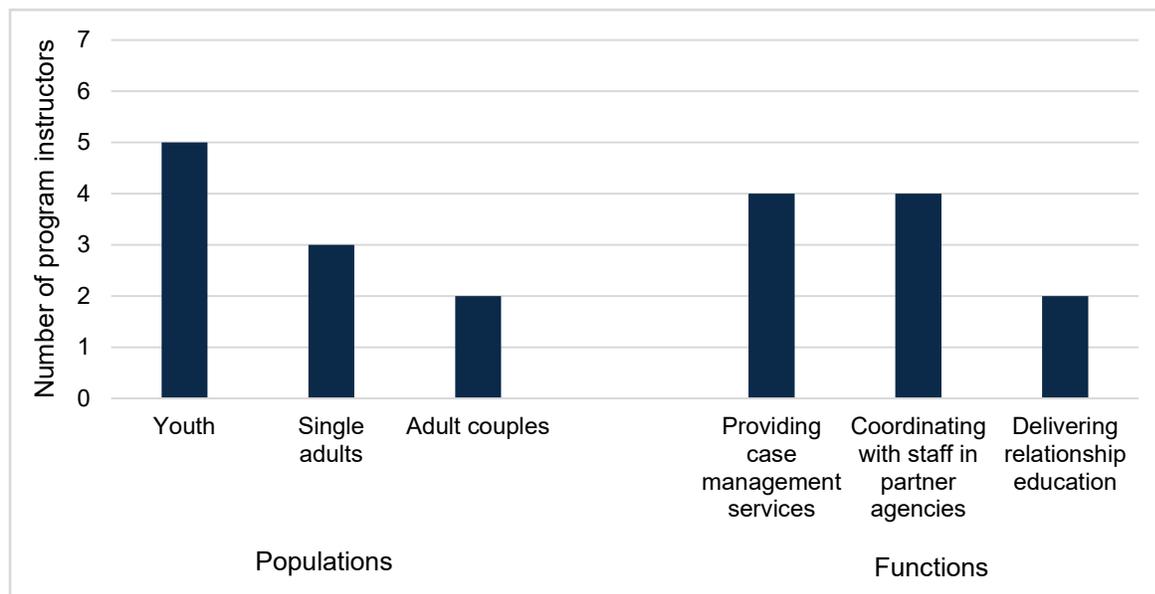
The data manager provided extensive support to ensure that UF stayed on top of its data collection and reporting requirements despite the geographic distance between sites. As explained, instructors were required to enter data collected on behalf of the OFA grant into nFORM. Many instructors initially found this system challenging to use and needed assistance from the project's data manager, who took steps to support them remotely. Early in the grant period, the data manager held weekly video conferences with each county's instructors to discuss issues with data entry. As noted earlier, the data manager also made himself available when assessments were administered in the sites to troubleshoot issues that might arise.

In addition, the data manager monitored each sites' data entry closely to support program implementation. For example, the morning after each session, he checked whether instructors had entered attendance and adherence data in nFORM, and if they had not, he sent an email reminding them to do so. The data manager helped manage referrals to outside services by reviewing participants' completed SMART assessments and creating a file listing each participant's requested services. He sent this file to instructors so they could refer clients accordingly, and he followed up with instructors after the final workshop session to ensure they had contacted all of the necessary referral agencies on participants' behalf. The data manager also supported recruitment by creating a report listing individuals who registered for ELEVATE but never showed up to the workshop. Instructors used this report to contact these individuals about attending a subsequent workshop.

Program staff were highly qualified for their positions

The project director had over 20 years of experience working with teachers and studying the implementation and outcomes of HMRE programs. The project coordinator had a master’s degree in business administration and 17 years of work experience in various nonprofit settings, such as child welfare, legal aid, and academia. The data manager had a background in computer-aided design as well as a graduate degree in family, youth, and community science. All program instructors had at least a four-year college degree, and four of the seven had a graduate or professional degree. The instructors had backgrounds in such fields as social work, counseling, psychology, and teaching. According to a survey, five of the seven had worked with youth before joining the ELEVATE program, three had worked with single adults, and two had worked with adult couples (Figure III.2). Over half had experience providing case management services or coordinating services with staff in partner agencies, and two program instructors had experience providing relationship education.

Figure III.2. Prior work experience of program instructors



Source: STREAMS staff survey.

Note: Based on the responses of the seven instructors who were delivering the ELEVATE curriculum at the time the study team administered the staff survey in September 2018.

Staff satisfaction with the ELEVATE program was high

Program instructors were passionate about the content of the ELEVATE curriculum and felt that the program offered numerous benefits to participants. During the site visit, they reported that the program taught couples valuable skills for managing stress and being more mindful of their emotions, which in turn served as a foundation for improving couples' communication and conflict management skills. The program also provided couples with uninterrupted time to focus on their relationship and personal needs.

Program instructors also reported that efforts by program leaders and Extension agents to monitor and support fidelity to the curriculum were successful. According to the staff survey, all instructors agreed or strongly agreed that they were adequately trained to use ELEVATE, there were systems in place to track how well ELEVATE was used at the organization, and training and technical assistance were readily available to staff delivering ELEVATE. The majority of instructors (86 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that program leaders minimized obstacles and barriers to using ELEVATE and that they had the resources they needed to use ELEVATE as designed. In an interview, one instructor noted that the weekly meetings with the full project team were particularly helpful for enhancing program delivery, providing the opportunity to "hear from each other and learn from each other and give feedback." The instructor went on to explain, "there's a little bit of a mini-lesson in each meeting."

"[Couples] are more attentive to each other I see some couples that will come in, and they're kind of disgruntled, or they're not as connected. But then, throughout the series, you'll see them start to joke more or make eye contact more, or reach out and touch each other... I honestly think it has a lot to do with the quality time and what they're learning in the program."

—Duval County program instructor

Program instructors noted a few areas of improvement related to the overall organizational climate, including autonomy over decision making and support from program leaders to overcome challenges in service delivery. For example, one instructor mentioned that although she preferred to send a personal welcome email to participants prior to the first session, she was unable to do so because program leaders wanted every participant to receive a standard email welcoming them to the program.

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IV. RECRUITING AND ENROLLING PARTICIPANTS

HMRE programs need to recruit enough eligible and interested participants to fill planned workshop series. In addition, because most HMRE curricula, including ELEVATE, emphasize group discussions and activities, having an adequate number of participants is important to ensure the workshops function as intended. In the context of an impact evaluation, recruitment takes on the added importance of generating an adequate research sample that provides the statistical power to test the key research questions being examined.

HMRE program providers often experience challenges recruiting couples into voluntary programs (Dion et al. 2008; Miller et al. 2012; Zaveri and Baumgartner 2016). To overcome these challenges, programs must develop effective outreach strategies for reaching their target population. In this chapter, we describe the strategies that UF used to recruit couples into ELEVATE and the enrollment trends over time. We focus on couples who enrolled in the ELEVATE program and agreed to participate in the STREAMS text-messaging study.³ Between January 2017 and December 2018, more than 90 percent of couples who enrolled in ELEVATE agreed to receive the STREAMS text message reminders. To streamline our terminology, we refer to these couples as enrolling in ELEVATE.

UF carefully tracked program enrollment and used program data to adapt recruitment strategies when needed

UF used data to closely monitor enrollment and guide its recruitment strategy. To generate an adequate sample size for the texting intervention study, UF staff worked closely with the STREAMS evaluation team to establish annual target enrollment numbers for each county and the ELEVATE program as a whole. They monitored progress toward that goal with each new workshop series. UF also asked program instructors to set a goal for how many couples they could enroll over the course of the year and tracked their progress toward that goal. To facilitate tracking, instructors completed weekly reports on their activities and progress towards their enrollment goals. The instructors also met regularly (generally biweekly) with the STREAMS evaluation team to create and review their recruitment plans and goals. The STREAMS evaluation team also worked closely with project leadership to guide their overall approach to recruitment and monitoring the program instructors. This careful monitoring allowed UF to quickly identify problems with enrollment and respond accordingly.

UF used Eventbrite, a technology platform for event management, to register participants in the program, which also facilitated tracking and monitoring. Individuals who learned about the program were directed to the ELEVATE Eventbrite page to sign up. Through Eventbrite, UF staff could track how many people were registered for each upcoming workshop series in real time. They also used Eventbrite to track how many people who registered for a workshop series showed up for the first session, and whether this “show rate” varied by county and venue. This

³ Couples were given the option to participate in ELEVATE even if they did not consent to participate in the texting study. These couples are excluded from the data on ELEVATE enrollment and attendance presented in this report. As noted elsewhere in the report, beginning in January 2019, after the period covered by this report, the STREAMS evaluation team changed the texting intervention to focus on boosting attendance at the first session among all couples who enrolled in ELEVATE.

information helped UF engage their community partners more purposefully by focusing on venues that appealed to participants. For instance, in Duval County, Eventbrite data indicated that attendance was often higher when the program was delivered at a local church as opposed to the Extension office, which led UF to deliver more workshop series at the church and to identify barriers to attendance at the Extension office.

Initially, UF relied heavily on community outreach to advertise the ELEVATE program and recruit potential couples. Outreach activities included distributing flyers at local organizations and businesses, attending community events such as health fairs, establishing formal or informal referral partnerships with local organizations, and sending flyers via email for community partners to distribute to their contact lists. Program instructors and community outreach liaisons also looked for alternative venues at which to deliver ELEVATE, such as libraries and community centers, to ensure that the program was accessible to couples who might not be able to come to the local Extension office for programming. As an added benefit, the community agencies hosting the workshop series often helped with recruitment.

Recruitment was initially slow, leading to new strategies to boost enrollment. During the first few months, enrollment was slower than expected. To increase enrollment, UF worked internally and with the STREAMS evaluation team to adjust its recruitment strategies. For example, as described in Chapter I, UF initially offered two couples programs as part of STREAMS: (1) ELEVATE, which was available to all couples; and (2) Smart Steps, a program available to couples with stepchildren. Initially, staff spent a considerable amount of time trying to recruit couples for the Smart Steps program, but found many couples eligible for Smart Steps preferred to enroll in ELEVATE. In light of this experience, UF received permission from OFA to focus their STREAMS recruitment efforts exclusively on ELEVATE.

To increase enrollment, UF also began offering ELEVATE in Alachua County, where UF-Gainesville is located, in March of 2017, about nine months after the program started and three months into the STREAMS evaluation. Alachua differed from the other counties in that ELEVATE was delivered through the main UF campus, rather than through the county Extension office. This allowed the program director and administrative staff to have more control over program operations and serve as a model for the other counties. Initially, the program coordinator oversaw recruitment, and the program director facilitated the ELEVATE sessions. In fall 2017, based on a pattern of strong enrollment, UF decided to hire a dedicated program instructor in Alachua County to assist with these activities. At the end of 2017, UF decided to stop operating in Citrus County due to low performance (including consistent difficulty meeting enrollment targets) and to hire a second program instructor in Alachua.

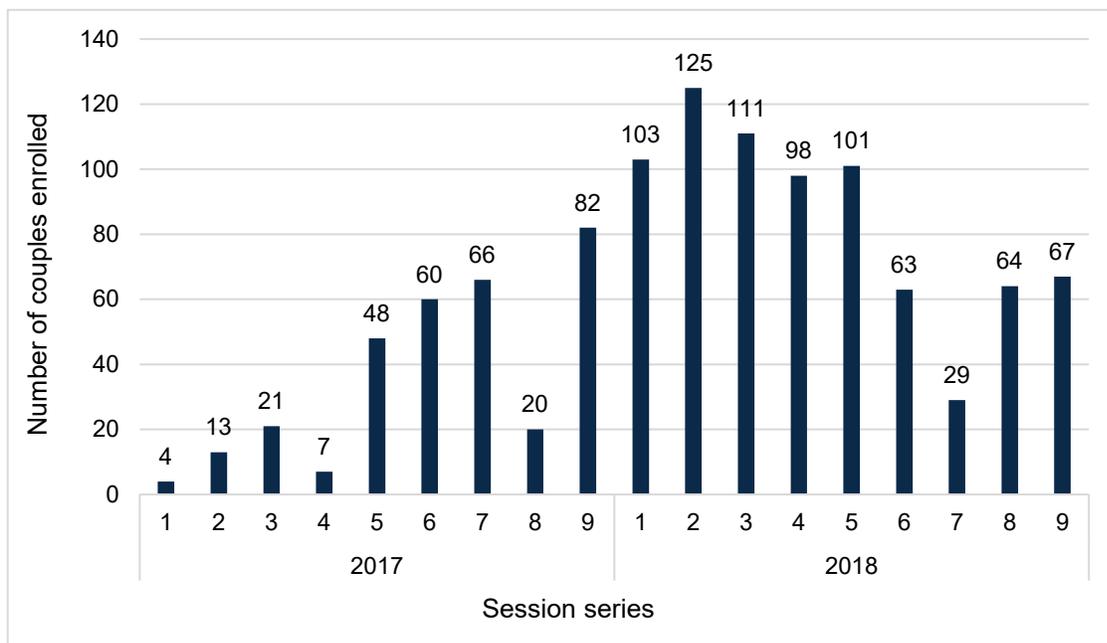
UF also leveraged social media to boost enrollment. Initially, the program ran ads in local newspapers, magazines, and on the radio, but leaders found these ads did not yield the number of participants needed to reach enrollment targets. Beginning in the summer of 2017, UF began advertising on social media. The project coordinator worked with a social media specialist to create the ads, which targeted individuals who lived in counties where the program was offered and indicated on their social media profile that they were in a relationship, married, or had an unspecified relationship status. The ads were not tailored to specific groups, but designed to be relevant to a wide range of ages, races, ethnicities, and income categories, in order to attract a diverse group of couples. The social media ads were less expensive and ran for a longer period

than the ads in local newspapers. Almost immediately after they started to advertise on social media, UF began to see program enrollment increase and decided to limit the running of newspaper ads.

UF’s enrollment numbers reflect improvements in their recruitment strategy

Between January 2017 and December 2018, UF enrolled 1,082 couples in ELEVATE, an average of 45 couples per month (Figure IV.1). During this period, UF offered 18 workshop series of ELEVATE. The statewide enrollment target across all counties during the initial months of enrollment was 50 couples per series. However, the first four series fell substantially below this target, with an average of 11 couples per series across all counties. Enrollment increased steadily shortly after Alachua County began offering the program and UF began advertising on social media. By the summer of 2017, enrollment averaged about 60 couples per workshop series, and in the first half of 2018, average enrollment exceeded 100 couples per workshop series. Enrollment decreased somewhat in the second half of 2018, but still exceeded 60 couples in most series.

Figure IV.1. Enrollment in ELEVATE by session series

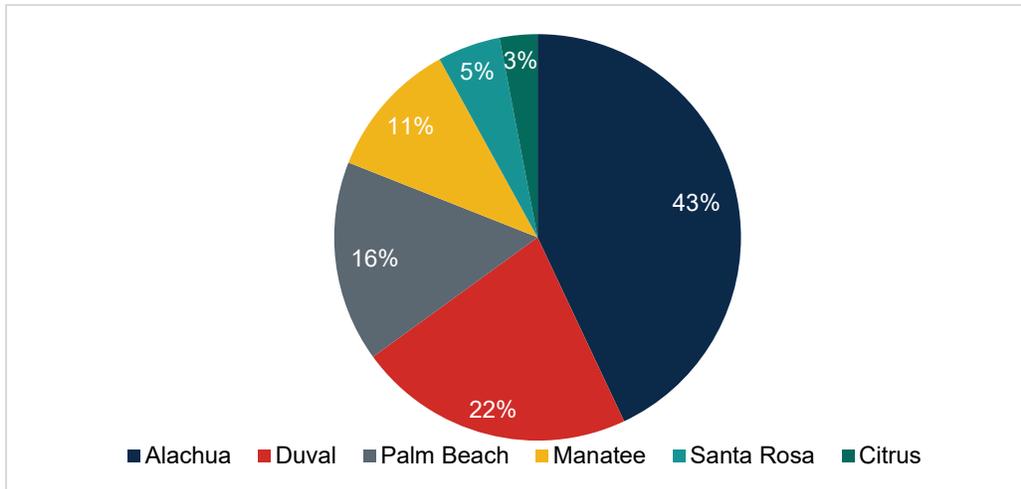


Source: nFORM.

Enrollment in ELEVATE varied across counties (Figure IV.2). Of the 1,082 couples enrolled in 2017 and 2018, 43 percent were in Alachua County, with 22 percent in Duval, 16 percent in Palm Beach, 11 percent in Manatee, 5 percent in Santa Rosa, and 3 percent in Citrus. Some of this variation can be explained by differences in population size, as Citrus and Santa Rosa counties have the smallest populations and Duval and Palm Beach counties have the largest. Moreover, as noted, UF closed its program site in Citrus County halfway through this period. Staff turnover also made it difficult for some counties to meet enrollment targets. For instance, the Extension agent in Palm Beach County retired in October 2017, and her replacement did not start until February 2018. Finally, the large population of university students

and staff in Alachua County may have helped boost enrollment at this site. UF advertised the program on campus and held the majority of the ELEVATE workshops there.

Figure IV.2. Share of total ELEVATE enrollments by county



Source: nFORM.

Note. Figure covers enrollment from January 2017 through December 2018.

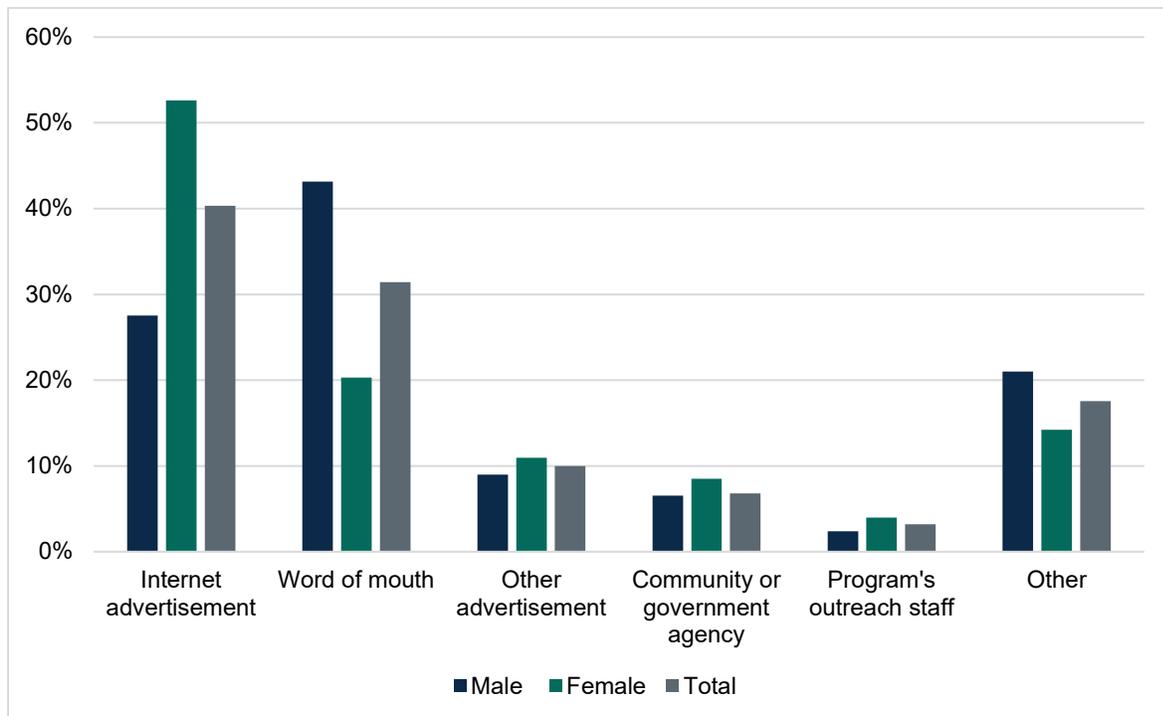
More program participants reported learning about the program through Internet advertisements than any other referral source

The largest referral source for the ELEVATE program was Internet advertisements, including ads on social media (Figure IV.3). About 4 in 10 individuals who enrolled in the program reported learning about the program through such an ad. About 3 in 10 reported learning about the program through word of mouth, including their partner or other friends or family. Another 10 percent of individuals reported learning about the program through other types of advertisements, such as flyers, newspaper ads, or radio or TV ads. Only 7 percent of individuals reported learning about the program through other community or government agencies, and only 3 percent of individuals reported learning about the program directly from the program’s outreach staff, such as at community events. Looking at these percentages separately for men and women reveals that Internet advertisements were the largest referral source for women, whereas word of mouth was the largest referral source for men. This suggests that in many couples, women may have heard about the program through an Internet advertisement and told their male partners. Overall, 57 percent of couples had at least one partner report that they heard about the program through an Internet advertisement (not shown).

The proportion of participants recruited through Internet advertisements grew over time. At the beginning of the STREAMS study in January 2017, Internet advertisements accounted for less than 10 percent of the referrals to ELEVATE (not shown). In contrast, other types of advertisements accounted for 40 percent of referrals. However, by late 2017 and early 2018, over half of the individuals in ELEVATE said that they learned about the program through an Internet advertisement, with less than 5 percent saying they learned about the program through another type of advertisement.

This increase in Internet advertisements as a referral source aligns with a large increase in program enrollment, suggesting that UF’s decision to advertise on social media was successful at drawing more people to the ELEVATE program. Although other community and government agencies and direct outreach from program staff were not large sources of referrals, UF continued recruiting through these avenues to bolster its presence in the communities it serves and to build relationships with other organizations that offer related services (for example, social service providers) or that work with similar populations.

Figure IV.3. Recruitment referral sources for ELEVATE



Source: Applicant characteristics and entrance surveys.

Note: N = 2,164. This includes all participants who enrolled between January 2017 and December 2018. Categories sum to more than 100 percent because respondents could indicate more than one referral source.

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V. PARTICIPATING AND ENGAGING IN ELEVATE

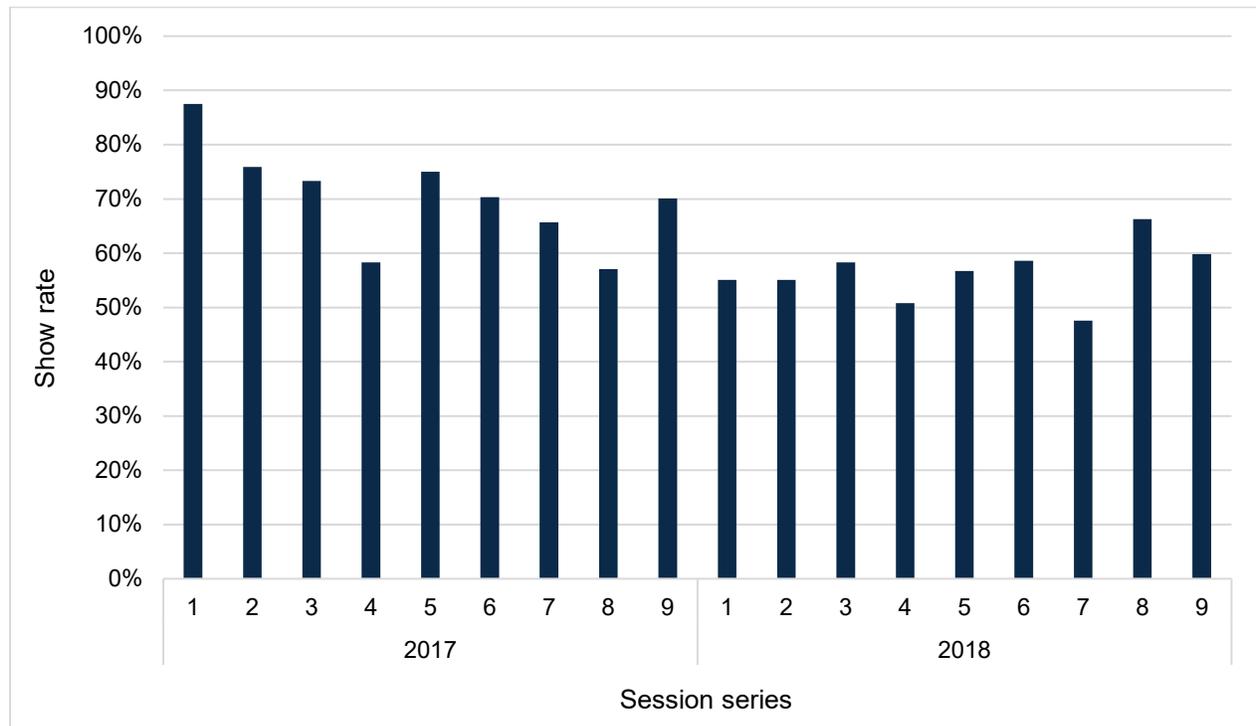
Prior federal evaluations of HMRE programs indicate that program providers can face challenges sustaining couples' participation in voluntary workshop sessions (Dion et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2012; Zaveri and Baumgartner 2016). For couples to achieve the intended benefits of the program, they must receive the program content. Because of the challenges and importance of maintaining regular attendance, the impact study for UF is examining the effectiveness of using text message reminders as a strategy for improving couples' attendance at ELEVATE sessions. In this chapter, we provide important context for the impact study by describing couples' attendance at workshop sessions. We also present data on the amount and content of programming offered and referrals to outside services. Finally, we discuss couples' engagement and satisfaction with the program, based on participant focus group discussions and interviews with program instructors.

Nearly two-thirds of participants who registered for ELEVATE attended the first session

To participate in ELEVATE, both members of a couple first had to register for an upcoming workshop series in Eventbrite. Couples who learned about the program through an advertisement or directly from program staff were directed to Eventbrite to sign up. UF then transferred the Eventbrite data into nFORM and used it to track the percentage of couples who showed up for the first session (i.e., the show rate). Between January 2017 and December 2018, the average show rate across all six counties was 63 percent (Figure V.1). Rates ranged from a low of 59 percent in Duval County to a high of 68 percent in Alachua County (not shown).

Program staff took a number of steps to encourage people who registered for the workshop to attend the first session. A few days prior to the start of the workshop series, program instructors sent each potential participant a welcome email that included the time and location of the class and directions to the building. Instructors also called each participant to confirm their plans to attend and to answer any questions they had. In most counties, UF started new ELEVATE series regularly, typically the week after the prior series ended, to minimize the time that interested couples had to wait between registering for and starting the workshop.

Figure V.1. ELEVATE show rate by session series



Source: Data from the grantee’s Eventbrite system for registering participants.

Note: Show rate was calculated for each session series from January 2017 through December 2018 by dividing number of participants who attended the first session by the number of participants registered for the workshop. Each series is five weeks. Each year, the first series began in January and the last series began in late October or early November.

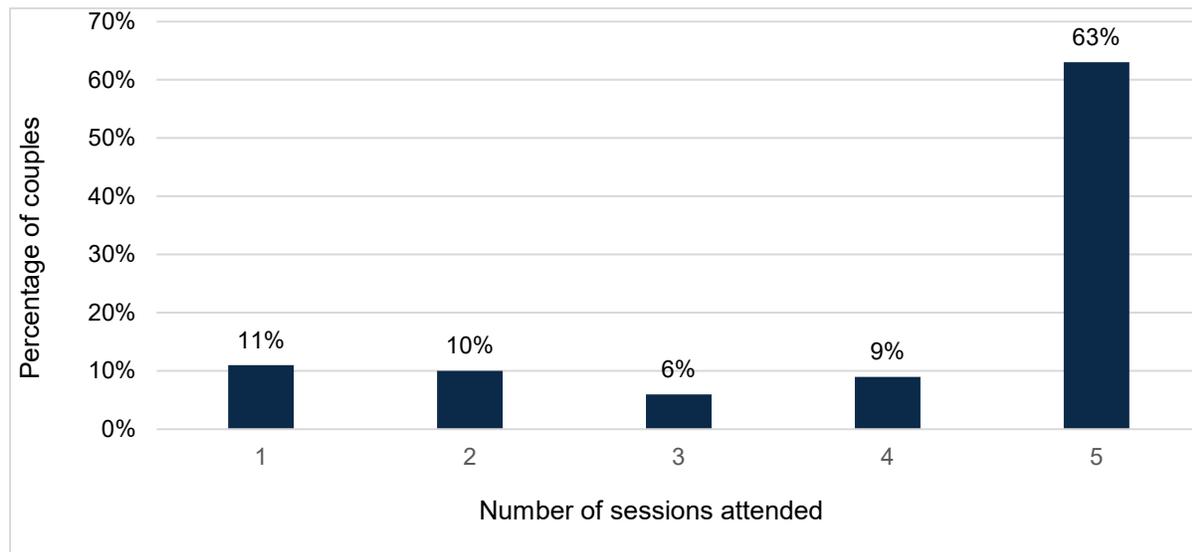
Among couples who attended the first session, attendance at the remaining sessions was high

Each ELEVATE workshop series included five, 2.5 hour sessions, for a total of 12.5 hours over five weeks. Among couples who attended the first session, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) attended all five sessions (Figure V.2). Twenty-one percent of couples attended one or two sessions, and 15 percent of couples attended three or four sessions. On average, participants received 10.3 hours of workshop content. These figures include couples who made-up missed sessions by watching an online video of the content they missed or by dropping into a session offered on a different night of the week. We provide additional detail about these make-up options in the next subsection.

The texting intervention being tested as part of STREAMS originally focused on boosting continued attendance among couples who attended the first ELEVATE session. In this initial phase of the study, only couples who attended the first session and agreed to participate in the texting study received the text messages. Because attendance rates were so high among couples who attended the first session, the ability of these text messages to boost attendance was limited. For this reason, in January 2019 the STREAMS evaluation team changed the texting intervention to focus on the initial show rate. Couples enrolled in the study at the time they registered for

ELEVATE and were randomly assigned either to an experimental group that received various types of text messages or a control group that did not receive text messages. Data from this phase of the study will allow the study team to examine the effectiveness of text reminders for increasing the number of couples who show up to the first session.

Figure V.2. Couples’ attendance at workshop sessions, among couples who attended the first session



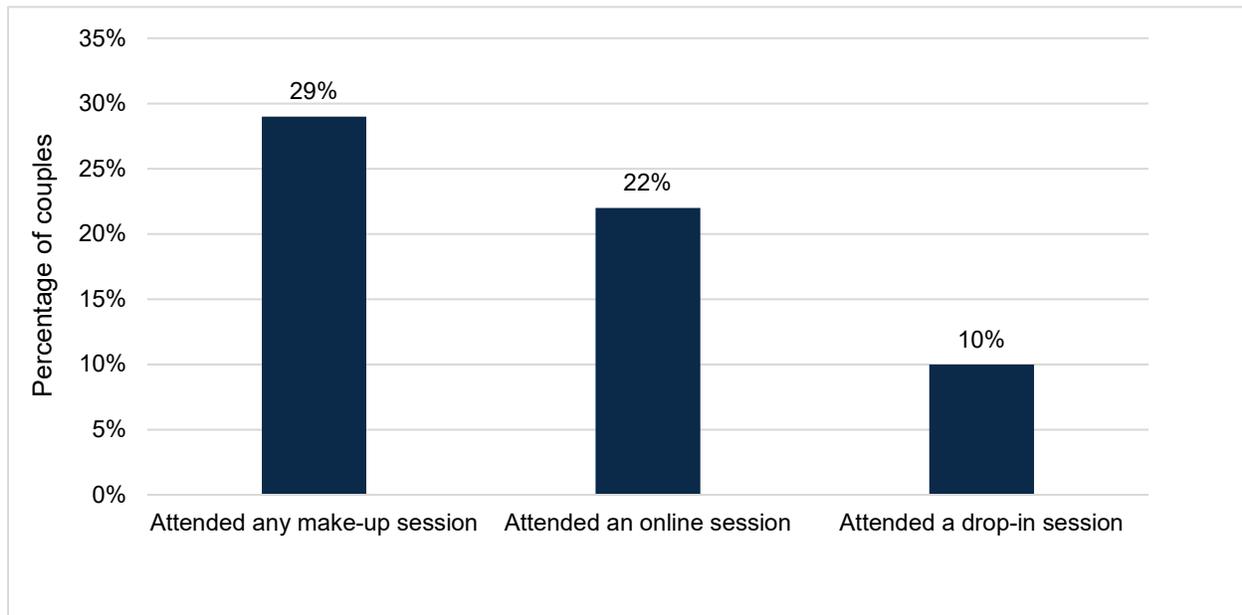
Source: nFORM.

Note: N = 1,082. This includes all couples who enrolled between January 2017 and December 2018 and who had at least four months to participate in services. Figures include couples who attended their scheduled workshop session or made up missed sessions. Figures may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

UF offered flexible make-up options to help couples complete the workshop

To complete the workshop, couples had to attend all five sessions or make up missed sessions. UF offered two options to make up missed sessions. First, the project director recorded video versions of the ELEVATE sessions. Couples who missed a session could obtain a link to these videos to make up one missed session. Second, because most counties offered multiple concurrent ELEVATE workshops on different days of the week, couples could drop in to a workshop offered on a different day to make up a missed session. For example, a county might offer the program weekly on both Monday and Wednesday nights. If participants could not make their scheduled workshop on Monday, they could drop in to the Wednesday workshop and attend the session they missed. UF allowed them to do this as many times as needed during the five-week series. If participants missed a session, program instructors sent them an email letting them know about these make-up options.

Attendance data reveals the importance of these make-up options for boosting attendance. The percentage of couples who attended all five sessions drops 19 percent when make-ups are excluded, from 63 to 44 percent of couples. Twenty-nine percent of couples in the sample used at least one make-up option: 22 percent completed at least one online make-up session and 10 percent attended at least one drop-in session (Figure V.3).

Figure V.3. Percentage of couples who attended make-up sessions

Source: nFORM.

Note: N = 1,082. This includes all couples who enrolled between January 2017 and December 2018 and who had at least four months to participate in services.

Focus group interviews further support the importance of having multiple make-up options for helping couples complete the workshop. Several couples reported that it was not always feasible to attend their scheduled workshop due to changes in their work schedule, disruptions in child care, or other last-minute conflicts. Many took advantage of a drop-in session on a different night of the week. One couple reported that the program instructor even met with them individually outside of class to review the material from a session they missed. They praised the instructor's level of personal attention to their progress in the program and felt it kept them engaged in the class. In focus groups, the online make-up option appeared to be more popular among younger couples—particularly those who were still enrolled in college—than among older couples. Several younger couples reported that they appreciated the opportunity to cover the workshop material on their own schedule in the privacy of their home. In contrast, older couples expressed that the online modules lacked the interactive components of the class, including group conversations and the ability to learn from others.

The content and format of ELEVATE workshops and other program supports encouraged attendance

In focus groups, couples reported that they found the content of the ELEVATE workshops to be engaging and beneficial, which kept them coming back each week. They especially enjoyed learning techniques to improve their communication and conflict resolution skills. Couples also appreciated learning how to recognize their personal triggers and how stress influenced their ability to communicate effectively with their partner. Since finishing the class, one participant said, “I feel like I now stop and think more before I react.” Several other participants echoed how the workshop made them more aware of how they communicate with their partner and enhanced their ability to work through disagreements.

Focus group participants also spoke highly of the format of the workshop. They reported that having sessions once per week gave them time to practice the techniques learned in the previous session and discuss how the techniques worked when class resumed the following week. Couples also appreciated how the weekly sessions forced them to carve out time for each other, often sparking conversations that continued after the session. The group format of the workshop helped reduce participants' anxiety about addressing problems in their relationship by allowing them to see that most other couples were dealing with the same problems they were.

"We used [the ELEVATE workshop] as our date night. So I actually kind of wish the class was a little longer, because it's nice being with the other couples and stuff, and it's nice to see that you're not the only one struggling with some of these issues."

—Focus group participant

UF offered additional supports to encourage couples' participation in the program. In addition to a shared meal at every session, each member of the couple received a \$10 gift card for attending the first two sessions and completing the initial surveys, and a \$25 gift card for attending all five sessions and completing all surveys. Individuals who missed a session had to complete a make-up session in order to receive these incentives. Program instructors reported that couples were often unaware of these financial incentives when they signed up for the program but that the incentives helped motivate couples to return each week. For couples in need of child care, the program coordinator compiled a list of child care providers located near each workshop for instructors to distribute to participants upon request. Occasionally, couples brought their children with them to the workshop when their regular child care fell through.

Program instructors also took steps to make the workshops welcoming and fun. During the shared meal, couples had a chance to get to know each other and the program instructor in a relaxed environment. Instructors also played music and took song requests while couples completed their surveys during the first session in order to make the process of filling out the surveys less tedious. During interviews, instructors reported that couples disliked the amount of time spent on surveys—a point that was echoed among several focus group participants. At the time of the site visit, the project's data manager was looking into ways to reduce the amount of time couples spent filling out surveys in response to this feedback.

Program instructors adhered closely to the curriculum and reported few disruptions during workshop sessions

Program instructors completed short surveys in nFORM after each workshop addressing their adherence to the curriculum and an overall assessment of session implementation (for example, disruptions or challenges). They reported which of the planned curriculum topics were covered and noted the degree to which they followed the instructor's manual. Instructors' responses indicated that they used all or most of the planned content and followed all or almost all of the instructor's manual more than 94 percent of the time.

According to nFORM data, instructors modified or adapted ELEVATE content in 15 percent of sessions. The most common reason for modifications was that they ran out of time to cover

the planned content or extended time to cover a topic when participants were very engaged. For example, in interviews, program instructors reported that couples often wanted to spend extra time in the last session on practicing strategies for managing conflict and staying calm during arguments. This sometimes led instructors to reduce the amount of time devoted to summarizing and wrapping up the five-week workshop.

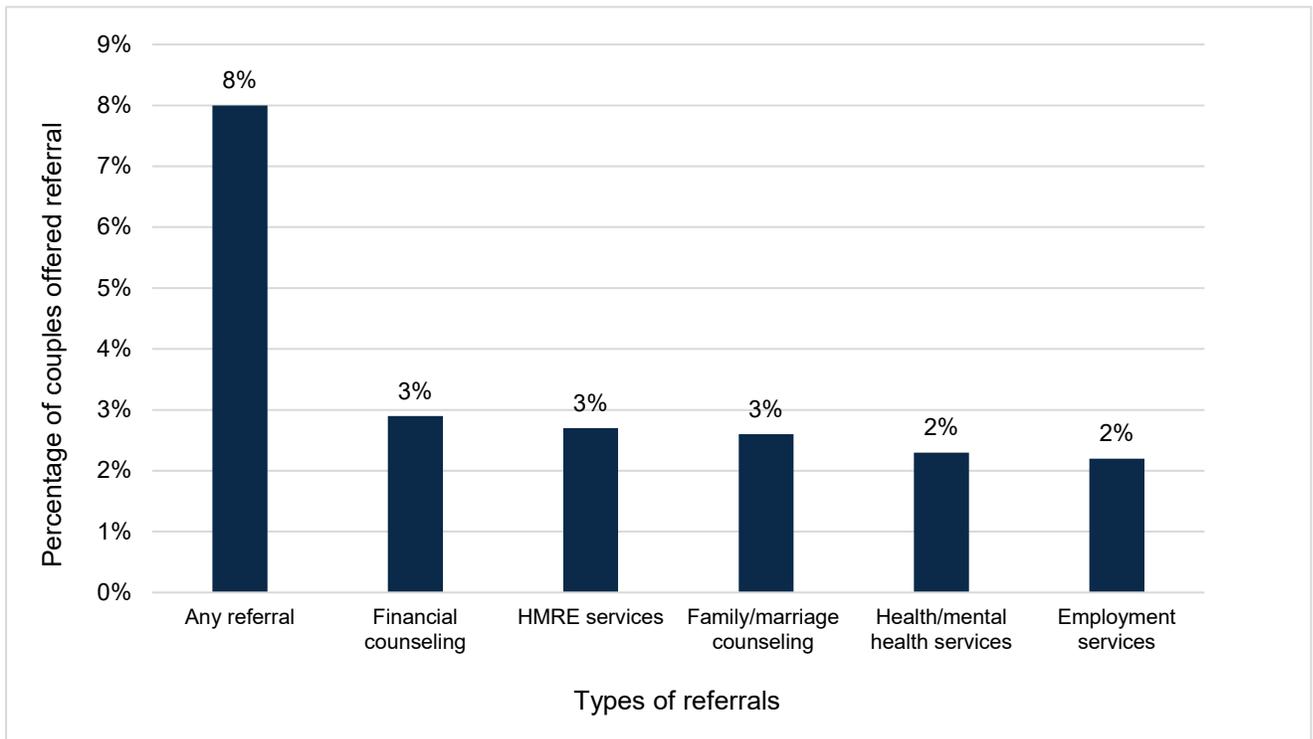
In nFORM, program instructors reported that disruptions were rare—occurring in less than 5 percent of sessions. The primary reasons for disruptions were participants arriving late or leaving the session early. Instructors also reported that participants occasionally engaged in off-topic conversations. This usually happened during small-group breakout activities, when couples would begin talking about topics unrelated to the curriculum. Technical difficulties also caused occasional disruptions. For instance, instructors sometimes had trouble playing the video clips embedded in the workshop slides, or they struggled with getting participants logged into tablets to complete required surveys.

Few couples received referrals to other services in the community

During the second week of the ELEVATE workshop, participants completed a customized version of ACF's Online Work Readiness Assessment tool to indicate their interest in receiving referrals to a range of other services in the community. The data manager created a report for each participant listing the services they requested, which program instructors distributed to participants in week three. Participants reviewed their report and indicated whether they would like more information about services available in the community, or if they preferred the program instructor to make a referral on their behalf. Instructors then reached out to service providers to make the requested referrals, and they followed up with participants by phone to make sure participants were able to access all of the services they wanted.

According to nFORM data, only 8 percent of couples in ELEVATE received a referral (Figure V.4). The most common types of referrals were for financial counseling, additional HMRE services (including referrals to UF's other programs), family or marriage counseling, health or mental health services, and employment services. During interviews, program instructors noted that while couples often expressed an interest in learning about other services available in the community, few felt ready to make immediate use of a referral to those services. In these cases, instructors gave couples information about outside services but did not make a referral on couples' behalf.

Figure V.4. Most common types of referrals received by couples



Source: nFORM.

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VI. CONCLUSIONS

UF's ELEVATE program aimed to teach adult couples practical strategies to improve their relationship skills and experiences. To reach multiple communities across the state, UF worked with Florida's Extension service to deliver the program in six counties. UF also worked with the STREAMS evaluation team to implement a text messaging intervention to improve couples' attendance at ELEVATE sessions.

This process study report sought to document UF's experience delivering ELEVATE from January 2017 through December 2018, including the strategies they used to operate the program through Extension, recruit and enroll couples, and engage couples in program activities. In this chapter, we summarize three key findings about how UF supported high quality implementation.

Implementing a statewide program through Extension required system building and cultural shifts

Extension agents needed support to learn the requirements of the OFA grant and supervise staff with performance goals in mind. ELEVATE differed from typical Extension programs, which were often one- or two-day programs with no specific enrollment targets. To recruit participants, Extension offices usually advertised through newsletters, websites, and other channels but did not actively recruit individual participants. Overseeing a longer program that involved meeting enrollment targets, entering data into nFORM, providing referrals, and meeting specific performance goals required a different approach to supervision and program management. UF took several steps to support the agents and increase their involvement in program decision making, including convening a monthly meeting with agents and finding opportunities for agents to publish and present on UF's HMRE program and making plans to hire a dedicated staff member to provide onsite support to each county on a monthly basis.

UF put systems in place to oversee county operations and stay connected to remote staff. To monitor county-level marketing and recruitment activities and troubleshoot other issues, project leaders asked program instructors to submit weekly reports about their recruitment activities and their overall performance. Project leadership also implemented weekly conference calls for all staff—including program instructors, community outreach liaisons, Extension agents, and project leaders—to come together and discuss issues that arose in the prior week and brainstorm solutions as a team. Not only did these calls provide a way for project leaders to stay abreast of the activities of the program, they also provided a venue for program staff from across the state to connect with each other and with project leaders, which helped enhance the cohesion of the whole team.

UF's data manager provided extensive support to ensure that UF stayed on top of its reporting requirements despite the geographic distance between sites. Though located in Gainesville, the data manager was extremely accessible and efficient at troubleshooting technological issues remotely; those issues included difficulty accessing surveys or problems with tablets or laptops. He also closely monitored each site's data entry and immediately reached out if he noticed problems, such as instructors forgetting to enter attendance from the previous

night's workshop. This support helped frontline staff successfully complete the data collection and entry tasks required for the OFA grant.

UF used data and technology to adapt its recruitment and enrollment strategies as needed

UF carefully monitored data on enrollment and used this to inform its recruitment strategies. Project leaders worked with the STREAMS evaluation team to set enrollment targets for each county and the program as a whole. UF then divided these targets among the program instructors and held each instructor accountable for enrolling a certain number of couples in each workshop. The data manager tracked progress towards these targets at a granular level, looking at the data by instructor, county, workshop series, and venue.

The data manager shared this information regularly not only with project leadership, but also with Extension agents and frontline staff. As a result, everyone involved in the program could assess their progress toward recruitment goals and use the data to guide their decisions. If a particular instructor or county was not meeting enrollment targets, the project team acted quickly to identify the issues and brainstorm solutions to increase these numbers. By continuing to monitor the data, the project team also kept tabs on how the proposed solutions were working. At the county level, some agents used the data to assess which venues had the strongest enrollment and attendance.

UF also leveraged technology to boost low enrollment by using targeted social media ads to recruit couples. In response to low enrollment in the program's early months, UF decided to advertise on social media, in addition to distributing flyers, attending community events, and running ads in local media outlets. Advertising on social media was a relatively low-cost method for attracting a wide range of couples to the program across a large geographic area. By the end of 2017, UF was meeting their enrollment targets, with over half of participants reporting that they learned about ELEVATE through an Internet ad, including those placed on social media. In the first two years of the STREAMS evaluation, UF enrolled more than 1,000 couples who attended at least the first session together.

ELEVATE engaged couples with highly relevant content and flexible options to make up missed sessions

Program participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with ELEVATE and reported that the content of the program was highly relevant to their lives. They appreciated learning about personal triggers and how stress and anger can interfere with their ability to communicate effectively. They also enjoyed lessons on communication and practical skills for resolving conflicts. According to these couples, the workshop format helped solidify the lessons by providing ample opportunities for participants to practice skills with their partner both in class and at home between weekly sessions. In interviews, program instructors indicated that workshop engagement was generally high and that they saw noticeable improvements in how couples communicated with each other over the course of the workshop.

Recognizing that changing work schedules and other conflicts made it difficult for some couples to attend all five workshop sessions, UF offered two options for couples to make up missed sessions. The make-up options greatly improved program attendance, boosting the

percentage of couples who attended all five sessions from 44 to 63 percent. In focus groups, couples reported that they appreciated the flexibility of the make-ups and that having two different options contributed to reducing barriers to attendance. Some couples preferred the in-person option (attending another session on the same topic as the one missed) because they were more interactive and allowed them to learn from other couples. In contrast, other couples appreciated the opportunity to cover the curriculum material by accessing a recorded video of the missed session online because this approach allowed them to complete the make-up on their own schedule and in the privacy of their home.

Next steps

This study of the implementation of ELEVATE in Florida was conducted in conjunction with a rigorous impact study to assess the effectiveness of automated text messages to promote program attendance. Between January 2017 and December 2018, the STREAMS evaluation team randomly assigned couples who attended the first workshop session to either one of several intervention groups that received text message reminders, or to a comparison group that did not receive text messages. Due in part to preliminary data showing that continued attendance was high among couples who attended the first session, in latter rounds of the impact study beginning in January 2019, the evaluation team shifted the test of the texting intervention to use text message reminders to promote attendance at the first workshop session. The various rounds of the impact study will explore whether text messages improved couples' initial and ongoing attendance at the ELEVATE program. The impact report is expected to be available in 2021. Findings from this process study report provide context on UF's ELEVATE program to help interpret the impact evaluation findings.

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APPENDIX A: IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

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Inputs to implementation		Implementation outputs	Outcomes
Program design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target population: Couples in six counties in Florida • Curriculum: ELEVATE • Core workshop meets weekly for 2.5 hours for five weeks • Needs assessments and referrals to other services in the community • Participation supports including meals and participation incentives 	Implementation system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select facilitators who have prior facilitation experience or educational fit with program • Train all staff on ELEVATE curriculum and facilitation • Monitor curriculum delivery through live observations, checklists, and coaching • Supervise staff through regular staff meetings and observations • Recruit participants through social media, other advertisements, and other programs operating within each county • Use data systems to track recruitment, enrollment, program participation, service contacts, and referrals 	Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and skills to deliver the curriculum • Satisfaction with and commitment to the program model 	Changes in knowledge and attitudes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge of characteristics of healthy relationships • More positive attitudes about healthy relationships • Healthier attitudes about intimate partner violence • Increased understanding of the effects of relationship choices on child well-being
		Services (content, dosage, fidelity) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sessions provided at intended dosage • Sessions covered required content and activities • Participants' needs assessed and addressed • Participation supports and incentives provided 	Short-term outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved relationship skills • Improved communication and conflict management skills • Reduced exposure to intimate partner violence • Improved satisfaction with relationships • Fewer relationship transitions • Better co-parenting • Increased father involvement
Grantee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources: OFA grant, partnership with UF-operated county-based Extension service • Program leaders at University of Florida (UF) 		Participants' responsiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enroll at expected pace • Attend group sessions regularly and complete program • Access other community services as needed • Satisfaction with program services 	Long-term outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved relationship and family stability • Improved personal well-being • Improved child well-being • Improved economic self-sufficiency
Context: Community (socioeconomic conditions and family structures), relevant policies (tax incentives to marry and public assistance rules), availability and accessibility of other services			

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