



Building a Diverse Home Visiting Workforce: Recruitment Strategies



Home visiting is recognized as a promising strategy for addressing the disparities in health, economic, and educational outcomes experienced by many Black, brown, and indigenous families.^{1,2} Reaching these families, and supporting them in achieving success for themselves and their children, requires a diverse, experienced, and well-supported home visiting workforce.

Research shows that when patients see themselves in service providers, they are more likely to trust them, communicate their problems, understand and follow recommendations, and express satisfaction with their care—all critical factors that lead to better outcomes.^{3,4} MIECHV awardees and local implementing agencies (LIAs) also benefit from workforce diversity; these benefits include a larger applicant pool; broader range of perspectives, ideas, and experiences; increased understanding of program participants; and a richer workplace culture. Most importantly, a diverse workforce can help home

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program supports voluntary, evidence-based home visiting services for at-risk pregnant women and parents with young children up to kindergarten entry. Home visiting helps prevent child abuse and neglect, supports positive parenting, improves maternal and child health, and promotes child development and school readiness.

- 1 Lewy, D. (2021). [*Addressing racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and child health through home visiting programs*](#). Center for Health Care Strategies.
- 2 Park, M., & Katsiaficas, C. (2019). [*Leveraging the potential of home visiting programs to service immigrant and dual language learner families*](#). Migration Policy Institute.
- 3 Provo College. (2022). [*The importance of diversity in healthcare & how to promote it*](#).
- 4 Kathawa, C. A., Arora, K. S., Zielinski, R., & Low, L. K. (2022). Perspectives of doulas of color on their role in alleviating racial disparities in birth outcomes: A qualitative study. *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*, 67: 31–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmwh.13305>

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visiting programs expand their reach to communities and families that often go unserved.

Despite its impact, workforce diversity remains a challenge for many MIECHV awardees and LIAs. About two-thirds of MIECHV home visitors are non-Hispanic White, 13 percent are non-Hispanic Black, 16 percent are Hispanic, and two percent are Asian. Only 17 percent of home visitors and 10 percent of supervisors report having sufficient Spanish language fluency to offer home visits in Spanish. Less than half (41 percent) of home visiting staff report that they share similar traits (race, ethnicity, and culture) with most clients, and 20 percent report sharing these traits with few or no clients.⁵ Staff recruitment and retention, and development of culturally responsive systems, were among the top priorities identified by MIECHV awardees in their 2022–23 technical assistance scans.

Success in attracting and retaining a diverse workforce requires more than just hiring people from different races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. It also requires an understanding of, and commitment to, equity, inclusion, and belonging (see box). Together, diversity and all its dimensions contribute to a strong, stable, and committed workforce, and ultimately help MIECHV awardees and LIAs achieve the best outcomes for the families they serve.

This is one of two checklists intended to support MIECHV awardees and the home visiting programs they fund in attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. It explores and addresses commonly identified barriers and practices that limit diversity in staff recruitment and hiring, and presents strategies for overcoming these challenges based on the best practices of awardees and LIAs (see box), and on the work of the home



⁵ Sandstrom, H., Benatar, B., Peters, R., Devon Genua, D., Coffey, A., Lou, C., Adelstein, S., & Greenberg, E. (2020). [Home visiting career trajectories: Final report. OPRE report #2020-11](#). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

visiting equity and staff recruitment and retention CoIINs. A companion checklist, *Building a Diverse Home Visiting Workforce: Nurturing and Supporting Staff*, examines what it takes to reduce attrition and support a diverse home visiting staff.

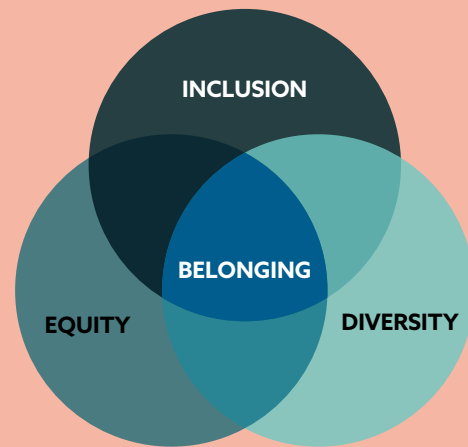
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Diversity: Variations of characteristics in a group of people. Includes everything that makes us unique (e.g., cognitive skills, personality traits) and shapes our identity (e.g., race, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, cultural background).

Equity: Ensuring that everyone receives what they need to succeed. While *equality* emphasizes sameness, fairness, and justice by giving everyone the same resources, *equity* highlights the importance of providing people with access to the same opportunities.

Inclusion: The active practice of inviting diverse perspectives and voices by intentionally creating space, acknowledging unequal power in relationships, and making appropriate accommodations for people to meaningfully participate.

Belonging: When people of diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and identities feel accepted and celebrated for who they are and feel comfortable expressing their authentic selves.



Sources: "[Glossary of Health Equity Terms](#)," *Health Equity in Home Visiting: The HV Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network (CoIIN) Health Equity Toolkit*; [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Definitions](#), David and Lucile Packard Foundation; Graphic adapted from [Progressive AE](#).

Building Organizational Capacity and Commitment

Successfully attracting and hiring a diverse home visiting workforce requires capacity-building and commitment at all levels of an organization, for both awardees and LIAs. Key components of organizational capacity include leadership and resources, training, hiring policies and procedures, engagement of current workforce, and accountability. Each is described below.

Leadership and Resources

- **Review your organization's mission, vision, and value statements.** Do these documents acknowledge the need for, and state a commitment to, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB)? Does your agency's strategic plan outline specific steps for achieving workforce diversity? If not, explore ways to make this commitment more explicit.
- **Establish a committee or work group charged with developing a plan to increase staff diversity.** Set recruitment and hiring goals. Assess current barriers in the recruitment and hiring processes, and brainstorm strategies to overcome them. Allocate time and resources to support the committee and its work. Make sure human resources partners are part of the conversation.
- **Identify a DEIB champion.** This should be someone within your program or organization who is willing to advocate for DEIB principles in all policies, processes, and activities. Budget time, resources, and support for staff to fulfill this role.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** Rely on existing structures, such as your state/territory home visiting steering committee or community advisory board, to reinforce



your DEIB goals. Use these meetings to share common challenges and best practices.

Training

- **Make cultural competency and responsiveness key components of new staff orientation and onboarding.** This will provide new staff with an important foundation for understanding and appreciating differences in backgrounds, behaviors, beliefs, and cultures. It will also contribute to increased self-awareness among employees of unconscious biases and stereotypes, and strategies for mitigating these biases.
- **Infuse DEIB conversations and training into ongoing continuing professional development for staff at all levels of the organization.** Achieving workplace equity and inclusion requires ongoing learning with reinforcement and continued skill-building. Providing staff with opportunities to share experiences and challenges in working with peers, as well as with families from diverse backgrounds, is important to building a workplace culture that supports diversity.
- **Require training on implicit bias for staff involved in the hiring process.** Make sure these trainings move beyond awareness and include [actionable steps to overcome unconscious bias](#) in the hiring process.
- **Ensure that DEIB and cultural competency is included on the agenda** of state/territory and local home visiting conferences and other collaborative early childhood training efforts. For example, consider having a panel speak about their successes and challenges recruiting and hiring a diverse workforce.



Hiring Policies and Procedures

- **Examine current organizational hiring and personnel policies and practices through an equity lens.** Identify opportunities where policies or practices

might hinder efforts to attract and hire a diverse workforce. Identify steps *you can take now* to improve recruitment and hiring practices while working on larger systemic changes.

- **Align employee classifications with salaries, roles, and responsibilities.** Low salaries are consistently cited as a barrier to attracting a diverse home visiting workforce at both the state/territory and local levels. A common problem identified by providers is that position classifications for home visitors do not accurately reflect the breadth and range of staff responsibilities.
- **Ensure that LIA agreements include clear expectations related to workforce diversity, staff recruitment, and hiring.** Support these expectations with written policies and practices. Also provide technical assistance to LIAs around developing similar policies and practices to support their recruitment and hiring efforts.
- **Work with home visiting models to address staff qualifications and other requirements that can create hiring barriers.** For example, are there ways home visitors can work to meet educational requirements by pursuing degrees while on the job? Are educational stipends or scholarships available to support home visitors interested in advancing their education or attaining professional licensures?

Engagement of Current Workforce

- **Solicit feedback from current program staff on their experiences with the hiring process.** What factors contribute to or hinder diversity in applicants? What changes could be made to encourage more applicants from diverse backgrounds to apply for positions? How could requirements be broadened to include both educational and lived experiences? What did they like/dislike about the interview process? Did the information provided during the hiring process accurately reflect the responsibilities of the job?

For example:



When a survey of home visiting programs in Baltimore revealed that some programs weren't paying staff a living wage, the MIECHV-funded [B'More for Healthy Babies](#) increased beginning salaries across agencies. The study was part of a larger, equity-focused effort to improve outcomes by ensuring that home visiting staff were well-paid and well-prepared, and had clear career trajectories.

An Idaho LIA addressed this challenge by developing a "lead home visitor" position with a higher salary to better align pay grade and work requirements.

- **Ask current staff to review and critique their position descriptions using an equity lens**, and offer suggestions for improvement. For example: Does it adhere to [plain language guidelines](#)? Does it acknowledge the value of lived experience? Is it available in multiple languages? Does it use gender-inclusive language and pronouns?
- **Encourage staff to set personal goals related to DEIB as part of their annual evaluations.** This will increase staff awareness and commitment, and help them identify specific, actionable steps they can take on a personal level to support a diverse and inclusive workplace.
- **Create opportunities for staff from diverse backgrounds and experiences to work together.** Similarly, create opportunities for leadership to connect with staff who may be traditionally overlooked for promotion and advancement.
- **Engage current staff in referring qualified candidates, including program participants, for job openings.** Home visiting staff are in the best position to identify and recruit potential candidates from the community and the families they serve. They can help develop a pipeline for applicants who have the requisite skills and lived experience but might not automatically apply for open positions.
- **Use CQI to support LIAs in recruiting and hiring a diverse workforce.** HV ColIN 3.0 Staff Recruitment and Retention has a [playbook](#) with lots of ideas! Strategies for addressing diversity and equity in the recruitment process are also outlined in [Health Equity in Home Visiting: The HV ColIN Health Equity Toolkit](#).

Accountability

- **Gather baseline information** on the demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes) of your organization's current staff by



position. Use this information to set recruitment goals and develop strategies for diversifying the workforce.

- **Assess past efforts** by looking at the demographics and other attributes of the candidate pool for past vacancies. Are there any specific groups that are consistently underrepresented? Share this information with the work group/committee developing your organization's recruitment and hiring plan.

Recruiting and Hiring for Diversity

Consider the strategies below for strengthening position descriptions, advertising job vacancies, using networks and community outreach to recruit candidates, and developing an equitable and inclusive interview and selection process—all common barriers identified by awardees and LIAs in recruiting and hiring a diverse workforce.

Job Descriptions and Qualifications

- **List only the essential requirements for the position, and focus instead on the skills required to do the job.** Research shows that women and minorities are more likely to think they must meet all job requirements before applying for a job, compared to men who are more willing to apply if they meet only some or most of the listed qualifications. Having a long list of specific qualifications and requirements can dissuade women and minorities from applying for positions and can limit the applicant pool.
- **Describe outputs—that is, what the job entails.** This will help a broader group of candidates to identify with the role. List desirable abilities whenever possible. For example, the ability to learn, communicate, empathize, organize, and/or connect. This will allow applicants with limited work experience to demonstrate their abilities.

For example:



In Ohio, home visitors in one community agency created policies and procedures to guide how they worked together as a team. They shared these with potential candidates during interviews, providing a basis for applicants and interviewers to discuss expectations.

- **Use plain and gender-neutral language, and avoid jargon.** For example, words like ambition, driven, lead, persist, principle, decision, superior, assertive, strong, and active reflect a masculine bias, while words like thoughtful, creative, adaptable, collaborate, curious, and intuitive reflect a feminine bias. The use of acronyms (MIECHV) and programmatic terminology (evidence-based) can confuse and deter competitive applicants with experience and skills from fields other than home visiting.
- **Highlight factors that make the job attractive.** For example, include the job's contribution to improving the health and well-being of families, flexible or part-time working hours, work-from-home options, a supportive and diverse worksite, opportunities for advancement, and/or continued professional development.
- **Specify educational requirements, but offer parameters for substituting experience** (e.g., lived experience). Invite applicants to describe specific skills they have acquired through work in fields other than home visiting, as well as volunteer work.
- **Include value criteria** such as "ability to work with a diverse team" or "ability to work effectively with diverse families."
- **Focus on long-term potential and opportunities for personal and professional growth.** Be explicit about your commitment to supporting staff in developing new skills and attaining educational goals. Include your agency's mission statement, and underscore its commitment to diversity.



Getting the Word Out: Advertising Job Vacancies

- **Actively market open positions** via communication outlets and networks (e.g., websites, job boards, professional associations, job fairs, social media, and

specific LinkedIn groups) that focus on systemically excluded groups.

- **Reach out to community colleges and minority-serving institutions**, including historically Black colleges and universities, and tribal colleges and universities, for help in sharing employment opportunities with alumni and recent graduates.
- **Recruit from within!** Make sure staff are aware of opportunities for advancement, and encourage them to apply.

Targeted Recruitment: Networking and Community Outreach

- **Leverage contacts** within your agency, as well as in sister agencies, to distribute information about job openings to diverse applicants. Share information on employment opportunities with partner organizations at the state/territory and local levels.
- **Distribute recruitment flyers** through LIAs and community groups, and to current and former participants. Seek their help in identifying potential candidates. Provide guidance, if needed, to complete the application process.



- **Spread the word!** Research shows word of mouth is one of the most effective and powerful recruitment tools, especially for reaching a diverse pool of applicants. Broadly share position openings with your professional and community networks.

Interview and Selection Process

- **Establish a screening/interview panel**, including current employees, managers, and program participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences to screen, interview, and rank candidates.
- **Use a [standardized rating form](#) to select applicants for interviews.** This will help to ensure that each interview is conducted in a consistent way and every candidate is evaluated based on the same criteria.
- **Develop a structured set of interview questions to avoid bias and ensure all candidates are asked the same questions.** Include [interview questions](#) that are open-ended, and explicitly ask about the candidates' experiences and values related to equity, inclusion, and cultural competency.

For example:



The Healthy Start Coalition of Pinellas County, a Florida LIA implementing the Parents as Teachers model, added these four questions to both its program-specific and agencywide interview processes as a result of its work with the Health Equity in HV CollN:

1. Please describe a situation in which you worked on a project with people who were from backgrounds other than your own. What was challenging for you in this work? What did you do to make your work together successful?
2. How has your culture influenced your career goals?
3. What opportunities have you participated in to increase your knowledge of racial equity, inclusion, or diversity? What did you learn, and how did you apply the learning?
4. Tell us about a situation in which you were required to provide services to a diverse group of people.

LIAs in Alabama added home visitors to the interview team and offered applicants a chance to shadow staff. This provided additional voices in the interview, as well as an opportunity for the interviewee to experience the position firsthand before deciding to accept the job.

- **Make time during the interview to have a current staff member share information about the position and their experience doing the job.** Encourage applicants to ask questions about what it's like to do the work and be part of the organization.
- **Create a rubric to use in ranking the candidates based on their responses.** The interview team should discuss and reach consensus on the criteria for each score. This will help to mitigate bias and will contribute to objectivity and reliability in scoring each candidate.
- **After the selection process is completed, be sure to contact all interviewed candidates.** While some organizations have strict prohibitions about providing any feedback to unsuccessful applicants, most candidates—particularly those who are less experienced—welcome this information. If you have the flexibility to provide [feedback](#), do so—and make sure it is honest, positive, and constructive.

Tracking and Monitoring

Accountability is key to achieving DEIB goals. In addition to collecting baseline data, ongoing monitoring of evolving recruitment and hiring strategies provides valuable information for continuous quality improvement. Some monitoring strategies include the following:

- **Create a [DEIB scorecard](#)** to assess and track your organization's or program's effectiveness in addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of people of color.
- **Look at the numbers.** See who is applying for positions, who is selected for interviews, and who is hired, and share this information with your DEIB planning committee/work group. Adjust recruitment and hiring processes as needed.

For example:



Ohio MIECHV is restructuring its state data system to better collect information on staff recruitment and retention, increasing its ability to monitor home visitor tenure and vacancy rates.

- **Require LIAs to collect and report demographic information on their staff**, as well as how they are ensuring that their workforce reflects the communities and families they serve, as part of their contractual requirements. Track the impacts of their efforts on family engagement and retention.
- **Solicit feedback from staff involved in the hiring and recruitment process**, as well as from applicants and new hires, on their experiences and suggestions for improvement.

A Final Word

MIECHV awardees and LIAs reap demonstrable benefits from a diverse home visiting workforce. Attracting and hiring people of color, and other traditionally underrepresented groups, requires planning and implementation of an intentional process, and a commitment to DEIB principles at all levels of the organization, agency, and program. It also requires an acknowledgement of existing barriers to staff recruitment, and hiring policies and practices that have systematically disadvantaged certain groups in employment opportunities. Finding ways—large and small—to overcome these barriers is the first step to diversifying the home visiting workforce and attaining the best outcomes for participating families.



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