

Evaluating a Community-Based Program: Lessons Learned from the Strong Start | Healthy Start Program

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PURPOSE

This poster provides an overview of lessons learned while evaluating a community-based program that provides services to a marginalized population in Ingham County. The program is working to become evidence-based and is currently participating in a national evaluation. As evaluators, we:

- Balance local program needs with national requirements
- Utilize an array of tools to effectively capture and convey program data
- Communicate regularly with program staff and facilitate problem-solving

INTRODUCTION

Strong Start | Healthy Start is a federally-funded program dedicated to reducing maternal and infant health disparities among low-income African American women and families in Ingham County. The program provides case management, parent-coaching and education, family support, and referrals for health and social services.

The Strong Start | Healthy Start program has developed unique community programs and initiatives to improve health and wellness in the Lansing area, including the Black Breastfeeding Sisterhood, a Fatherhood Initiative called Dads Matter, health education workshops and the Infant Mortality Coalition.

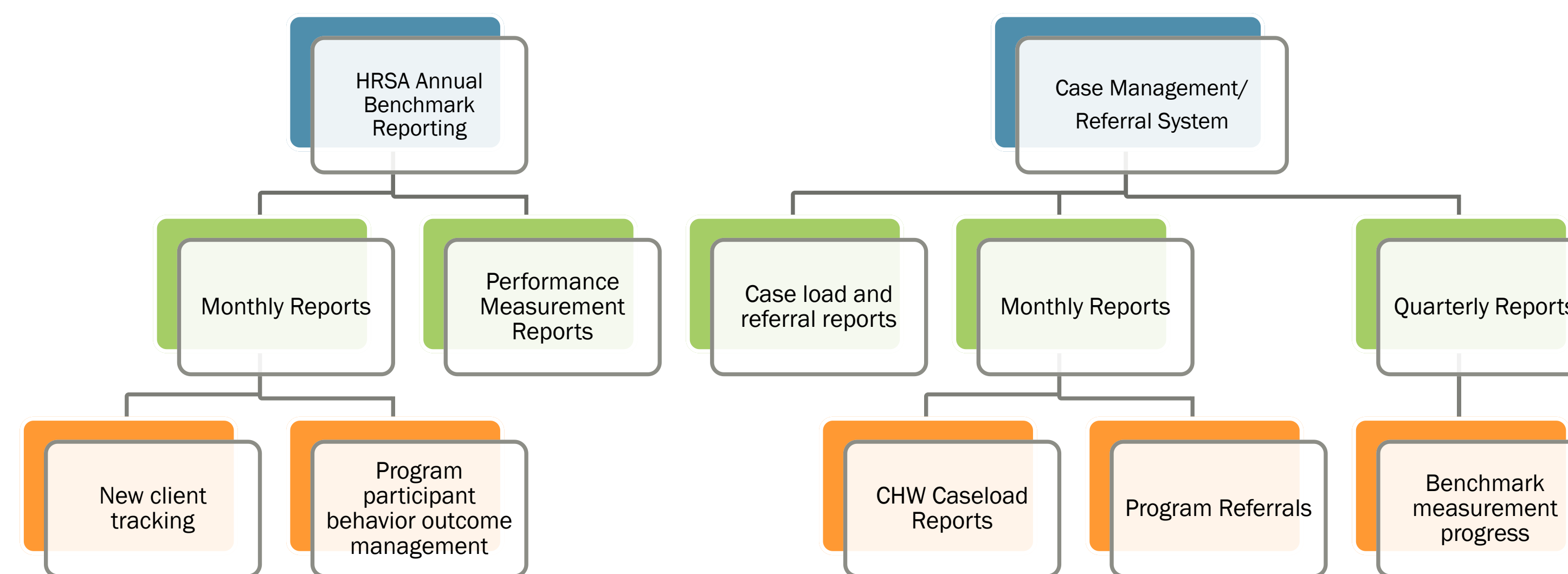
The program is currently participating in a national evaluation coordinated by the Human Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The goal of the evaluation is to create a gold-standard model for reducing maternal and child health disparities in minority and/or underserved populations.



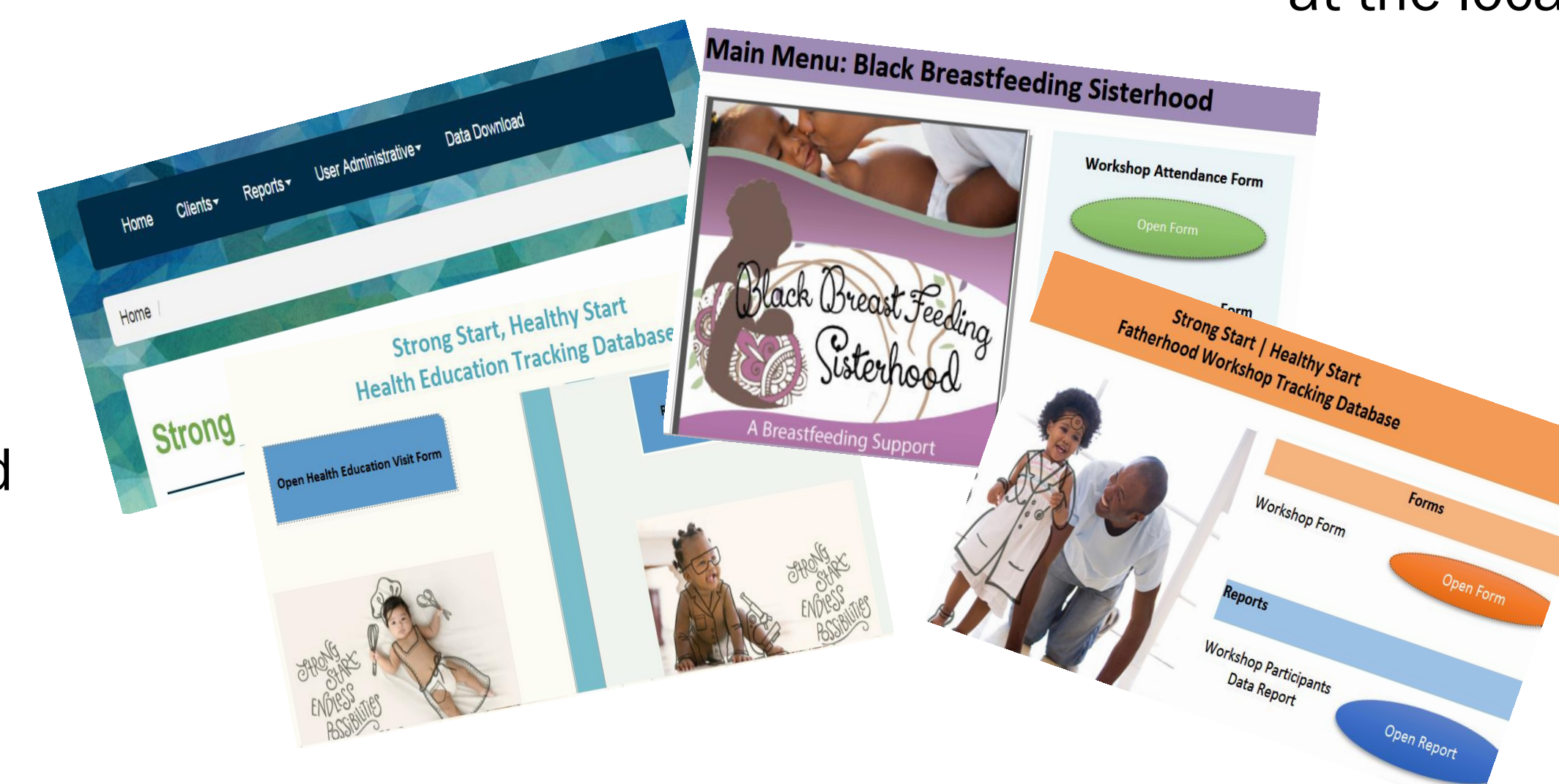
LESSONS LEARNED

Data Management and Analysis Plans

- **Detailed process maps and data crosswalks** foster mutual understanding between program and evaluation staff, and help to outline roles and responsibilities
 - For example, aligning program data collection tools and databases with nationally required evaluation benchmarks



- **Customized Electronic and Access databases** were tailored to capture data for and evaluate the program's unique community initiatives
 - Incorporates program data collection tools (e.g., client screening tools), collects required benchmark data, and includes program-specific case management forms and assessments



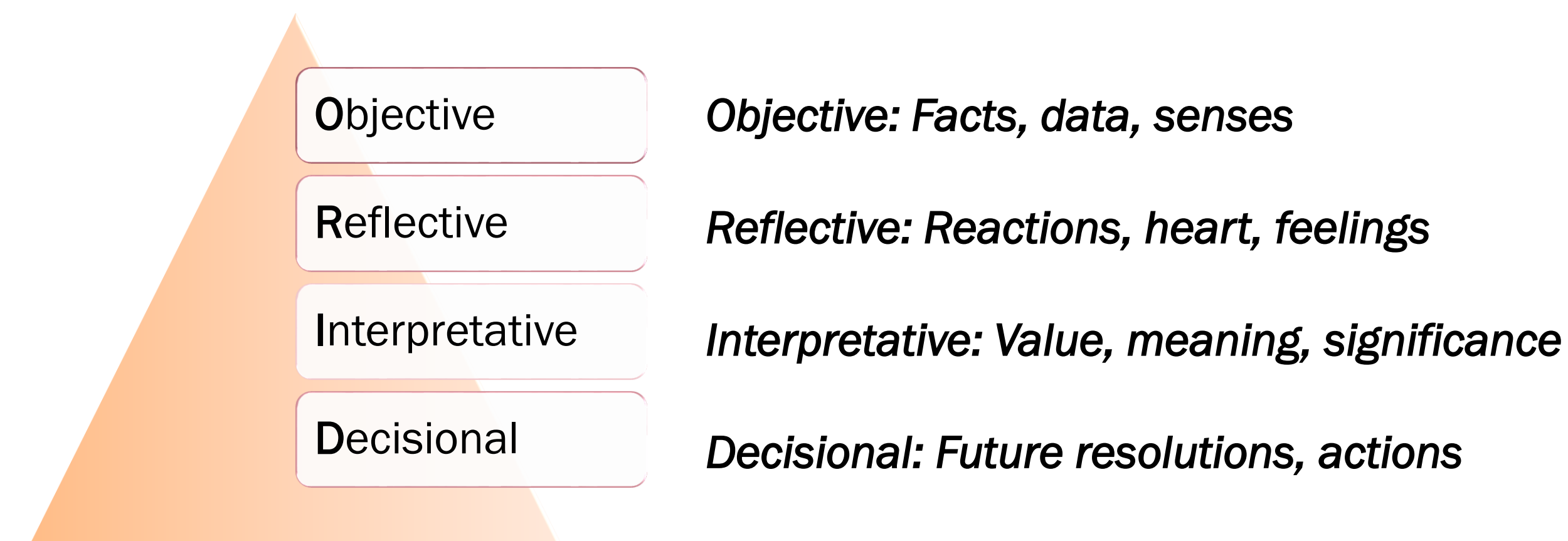
Data Visualization and Representation

An infographic used to highlight program achievements to the community was a well-received and successful tool. It presents statistical data in an easily-digestible format and conveys client demographics and program benchmarks in a visually interesting way.

Facilitation in Evaluation and the O.R.I.D Method

Applying facilitation skills and techniques during client meetings helps to navigate client conversations and get at the heart of program needs and expectations.

The O.R.I.D method, which utilizes focused conversations, encourages clients to think through and share their challenges, and with evaluators, make key decisions and determine feasible and realistic solutions¹.



CONCLUSION

We've learned that evaluation in the real world is not always clean and "by the book". Working with an ever-changing and growing community program has required that we are adaptive and flexible. Anticipating change and maintaining this flexibility has proven to be particularly important when conducting an effective and useful evaluation.



Data crosswalks, process maps, custom databases, and data visualization tools have each aided in the development of the evaluation. Data crosswalks align screening tools with their data measurements. Process maps create a system of how information is collected in the field and how it is reported. Working with MPHI, the program was able to establish a customized electronic database that incorporated both program information and HRSA information, but also served as a referrals portal for all Maternal and Child Divisions at the local health department.

This opened the door for all of the community-based programs to work together and create an information system serving the Lansing community. Data visualization tools, such as the annual report and quarterly infographic, allow the data to be presented in ways that the community can understand.

Throughout our evaluation, we have consistently kept our end goal in mind: providing the Strong Start | Healthy Start program with quality data that they can use to strengthen their program and improve the lives of those they serve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- We would like to thank the Ingham County Health Department Strong Start|Healthy Start staff and administration for allowing us to use their program information
- For more information, please visit: www.strongstarthealthystart.org

REFERENCES

- Hogan, Christine. (2003). Practical Facilitation: A Toolkit of Techniques. Sterling, VA: Kogan Page Limited.