LGBTQ Supplement to the Diligent Recruitment Navigator

Purpose of this tool

As states and tribes seek to recruit, develop, and support foster, adoptive, and kinship families for children and youth in foster care, it's crucial to build a pool of families that can meet the diverse needs of all children and youth and that welcomes all families who can be good resources for youth in foster care.

Child welfare systems may not currently have a clear picture of how many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and adults they serve, but that shouldn't delay building capacity to engage effectively with LGBTQ youth and prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. In order to provide placement stability and permanency for youth, child welfare systems should ensure that their diligent recruitment program includes approaches for:

- Building capacity to develop and sustain a pool of families—not just LGBTQ parents—who can meet the needs of LGBTQ youth, whether or not those youth have self-identified and come out as LGBTQ.

- Working effectively with LGBTQ youth in foster care.

- Recruiting, welcoming, and working effectively with LGBTQ prospective and current resource parents.

Ways to use this tool

You can use this tool in several ways to support your work, and you may find it helpful to use it in different ways at various points in your planning and implementation stages of your diligent recruitment plan and program. Some ways to make use of this tool include:

- **As a companion to the full Diligent Recruitment Navigator**—As you are using the complete Diligent Recruitment Navigator, add in the information from this publication to supplement and expand on the discussion questions.

- **As a stand-alone resource to begin more focused discussions on LGBTQ youth and adults**—You can use the suggestions and discussion questions in this publication on their own—either using the information all at once or just selecting a few questions to discuss at various times—to assess and plan your specific efforts related to LGBTQ youth and adults.

- As a resource for topics to explore as part of other planning and assessment efforts.

Building your system's LGBTQ competency

We recognize that your diligent recruitment program is just one part of your entire child welfare system and that it may not be where you need to start or continue working to increase your capacity for serving LGBTQ people. Building your child welfare system's capacity and competency for working with LGBTQ youth and adults—like any deeper capacity-building effort—takes times and requires thoughtful sequencing of the work. This publication focuses on topics specifically related to your diligent recruitment plan and program, but we encourage you to identify and consider broader work that your system needs to do before taking on some of these specific steps. We highlight several resources at the end of this resource that can help.

Key considerations for developing your diligent recruitment plans and programs—LGBTQ considerations

- Ensure that you're considering any federal requirements and recommendations on serving LGBTQ youth in foster care, including any requirements for data collection and reporting.

- Include—and truly listen to—the voices and perspectives of youth as you plan for how you'll recruit and sustain families who can meet the needs of LGBTQ youth in care.

- Look for specific strategies and approaches for building a pool of families that will provide safe and affirming homes for all youth, whether they are LGBTQ or not. Because there are almost certainly youth in your foster care system who have not yet self-identified or come out as LGBTQ, your families need to provide safe environments for youth to come out while in their home. Building this pool of families will require looking at both your recruitment strategies and your approaches for developing and supporting families to help them be well prepared to support youth if they come out as LGBTQ.

- Incorporate best practices from the field on building your capacity for working effectively with LGBTQ youth and adults. You can connect with colleagues in other child welfare systems to find out how they have strengthened their system's capacity to serve LGBTQ people

effectively. Look for insights and lessons learned about strategies for addressing key system elements such as staff knowledge and attitudes; policies and procedures; use of data; and leadership roles.

- Tap into existing resources as you develop your diligent recruitment plan and program and as you implement them. There are high-quality materials, trainings, and practice guides available for child welfare systems available to guide your work. You can also learn from your colleagues around the country to benefit from their expertise.

Diligent Recruitment Navigator elements—additional discussion questions

The discussion questions below can be added to the suggested discussion questions in the full Diligent Recruitment Navigator. As you discuss these questions with your team and key stakeholders, it will be helpful to connect the questions about LGBTQ youth and adults to your overall diligent recruitment planning discussions so you are incorporating your focus on building LGBTQ capacity into your comprehensive approach to diligent recruitment.

Procedures for consistently updating the characteristics of children in care utilizing information and analysis of AFCARS data and other data available to the state, region, or county

- What policies or guidelines does our agency have (if any) on how to collect, record, and use data regarding the sexual orientation or gender identity and expression (SOGIE) of youth in foster care? How do we ensure that staff use best practices and ensure only appropriate use of SOGIE data on youth in foster care (e.g., having youth self-report their SOGIE rather than having staff make assumptions)?

- Has our agency conducted a self-assessment to determine how well positioned we are to begin or expand collecting and using data on the SOGIE of youth in foster care?

- What are ways that our child welfare system currently incorporates data—including estimates, if needed—of the number of LGBTQ youth in foster care as part of our comprehensive data profile of our foster care population? If we don't have a current approach, how can we get started?

Procedures for ongoing analysis of the current pool of available foster and adoptive placement resources

- What policies or guidelines does our agency have (if any) on how to collect, record, and use data regarding the SOGIE of prospective and current foster and adoptive parents? How do we ensure that staff use best practices and ensure only appropriate use of SOGIE data on parents?

- Has our agency conducted a self-assessment to determine how well positioned we are to begin or expand collecting and using data on the SOGIE of prospective foster and adoptive parents?

- How do we assess all of our current foster and adoptive parents' capacities to meet the needs of, and provide a welcoming and affirming environment for, LGBTQ youth in care, including youth who may self-identify for the first time while placed in the family?

Collaboration and public-private partnerships with groups representative of the communities from which children come, to help identify and support potential foster and adoptive families

- How is our agency connected to, and partnering with, organizations that have expertise in serving, supporting, and empowering LGBTQ youth and adults (e.g., local LGBTQ advocacy groups, organizations that connect LGBTQ youth with supportive adults)?

- Do we include requirements for the organizations we partner with to have connections with LGBTQ communities and capacity to work effectively with LGBTQ youth and adults?

- How do we reach out to diverse communities—including LGBTQ communities—to continue learning about how we can strengthen our collaboration and partnership with community groups as a way to strengthen our diligent recruitment efforts?

General, targeted, and child-specific recruitment, including relationship mining[1] for youth, to meet placement needs of children in care

- How well do our recruitment messages and images demonstrate that we welcome all interested prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families, including LGBTQ parents? Are the photos that we use in recruitment materials inclusive of various family structures (e.g., same-sex couples, single parents)?

- What perceptions and knowledge of past policies or practices might LGBTQ adults in our communities have that we need to address and work actively to change about LGBTQ prospective parents being welcome and able to be foster and adoptive parents (e.g., past agency policies and practices that prohibited LGBTQ adults from fostering or adopting)? Do we need to make any focused efforts to build—or rebuild—trust with LGBTQ communities and to make it clear that we now welcome LGBTQ prospective parents?

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1   Relationship mining involves exploring connections a child already has with supportive adults in their life as possible placements for adoption or foster care.

- Do our recruitment materials and messages describe the diverse needs of youth in foster care, including that youth need families that are welcoming and supportive of youth regardless of their SOGIE?

- Do we provide clear guidance to staff—whether with the public agency or in contracted private agencies—about how to appropriately consider and use information about a youth's SOGIE (e.g., guidelines on whether and how to talk about a youth's SOGIE in profiles for Wednesday's Child features or photolistings)?

- What guidance and expectations do we provide to staff—whether with the public agency or in contracted private agencies—who conduct child-specific file mining to ensure that they consider LGBTQ adults as possible resources for youth using the same criteria that they would consider non-LGBTQ adults?

Recruitment and development of homes that can accommodate siblings in care so siblings can be placed together or reunited when they have been separated in care

- How do we ensure that we're recruiting welcoming and affirming foster and adoptive parents that can have several children in a wide span of ages placed with them, so we don't have to choose between placing youth with their siblings and placing them with families who will be supportive of youth regardless of their SOGIE?

Recruitment of foster homes to ensure children and youth may be maintained in their schools when placed in foster care

- How do we ensure that we're recruiting welcoming and affirming foster and adoptive parents in all parts of our jurisdiction, so we don't have to choose between placing youth near their school of origin and placing them with families who will be supportive of youth regardless of their SOGIE?

- How do we develop and support foster and adoptive families to be able to advocate and support LGBTQ youth to have educational stability and success even if they experience bullying at school (e.g., helping families know how to help youth identify safe and supportive adults to go to at school and to find out if there is a gay-straight alliance (GSA) at school)?

Procedures or processes to address barriers presented by the agency in order to increase the rate of retention of prospective foster and adoptive parents and to reduce the dropout rates

- What processes do we have in place to track where in the inquiry-to-licensure process prospective foster or adoptive families withdraw from the process? Within that tracking approach, how do we determine whether LGBTQ prospective parents are overrepresented in the families that withdraw at various stages in the process?

- How do we assess our recruitment, licensing, and ongoing support approaches for foster and adoptive parents to determine whether there are barriers that disproportionally affect LGBTQ prospective parents? Do we periodically review our response system, forms, licensing and homestudy protocols, training, and other elements to assess how LGBTQ-competent the elements are (e.g., using inclusive terms such as "parent 1" and "parent 2" rather than "husband" and "wife")?

Procedures for training staff to engage effectively with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities who are reflective of the children and youth in foster care

- What procedures and strategies do we use to continually build and support the competency of our staff to work effectively with the wide range of diversity in the communities we serve, including ensuring understanding of the dynamics of intersectionality (e.g., implications for youth and adults who are members of multiple groups that often experience discrimination such as being LGBTQ and a minority race)? Do we require similar efforts from our contracted partners?

- How do we assess the capacity and skills of our staff in working in effective and affirming ways with LGBTQ youth and adults to help us identify any additional training and coaching needs for staff?

Procedures for providing training to prospective foster and adoptive parents regarding the characteristics, needs, and issues of children who have experienced trauma, as well as adoption clinical issues

- How do we address topics related to SOGIE in our initial and ongoing training for foster and adoptive parents, including helping them understand the importance of providing a welcoming and supportive environment for all youth, regardless of their SOGIE?

- Do we provide any training to prospective foster and adoptive parents on the needs that LGBTQ youth in foster care may have—especially issues that may be more nuanced or complicated for youth to navigate—and how to meet their needs?

- Do we engage youth—not just LGBTQ youth—in designing and providing training for prospective foster and adoptive parents to ensure that youth perspectives are incorporated into the trainings?

- How do we ensure that we frequently update our training information and approaches for prospective foster and adoptive parents so that we are providing up-to-date information, perspectives, and terminology on SOGIE and equipping parents with current information that will help them connect with and support youth?

Utilization of adoption exchanges, including adoptuskids.org and/or regional or local exchanges

- What policies, procedures, and practices do we have in place to provide guidance to staff on how or whether to address the SOGIE of youth in narratives (including those used by adoption exchanges and published on photolistings)?

- How do we ensure that staff are open and responsive to inquiries from all appropriate potential adoptive parents for youth who are photolisted, regardless of the potential parents' SOGIE?

Training strategies for staff and community partners

- How do we address topics related to SOGIE in our initial and ongoing staff training, including helping staff understand how SOGIE of youth and adults relates to various topics within child welfare work?

- How do we include community partners who are involved in working with our child welfare system—whether formally contracted with our agency or not—in our training sessions that build and update cultural competency, working with LGBTQ youth and adults, following our protocols and guidelines related to data on SOGIE, and any other relevant topics related to LGBTQ youth and adults?

- How do we determine which of our community partners may need additional, in-depth training and capacity building assistance in order to be able to work effectively with LGBTQ youth and adults?

Other useful resources

This publication provides a brief overview of some key planning questions to consider to help strengthen your diligent recruitment strategies for serving LGBTQ youth and adults. There are many other useful resources available that provide specific guidance, ideas from the field, and strategies to incorporate into your programs and practices.

- LGBTQ resources from the NRCDR, including practice tips, publications, webinars, and other resources on LGBTQ youth and adults, including:

  - *Strategies for Recruiting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families* (435 KB PDF)
  - Materials from a Diligent Recruitment Grantee on understanding LGBTQ youth needs

- Resources from the Capacity Building Center for States on LGBTQ youth and foster and adoptive families

- Child Welfare Information Gateway resources on LGBTQ youth and adults, including

  - *Supporting Your LGBTQ Youth: A Guide for Foster Parents*, a factsheet published in 2013
  - Working With LGBTQ Families in Adoption, a list of resources

- *LGBTQ in Child Welfare: A Systematic Review of the Literature*, a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation