Partnering with Community-Based Organizations to Provide Support Services

Few of the support programs featured in the previous chapter are run exclusively by a public agency — most are operated by nonprofit organizations in partnership with the State, Tribal, or Territorial agency, with the public agency offering expertise, funding, and oversight. For States, Tribes, and Territories interested in providing valuable, sustainable post-placement services to adoptive, foster, and kinship families, partnering with nonprofit organizations can be an effective strategy. In an analysis of social services partnerships, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and James Bell Associates found that collaborating with community-based organizations was one of the key factors in a project's long-term success and its capacity to make a positive difference.[93] Public agency leaders we talked to also emphasized the importance of public/nonprofit partnerships to enable them to most effectively accomplish their goals of supporting families and sustaining programs and services over time.

In most of the programs profiled in Chapter 3 and other support services we examined, the State, Tribe, or Territorial child welfare agency partnered with organizations that were already serving children, youth, and parents. Common partners included parent support groups, foster and adoptive parent associations, adoption exchanges, child-placing agencies, and youth development organizations. These entities, which we'll refer to in this chapter as family support organizations, are some of the most likely nonprofit partners to offer support services for adoptive, foster, and kinship care families, but other community-based organizations (such as mental health providers) may also be a good fit.

In this chapter, we'll explore why partnerships with family support organizations and other community-based organizations may be beneficial. Then we'll explore steps States, Tribes, and Territories can take to build and maintain partnerships to achieve their goals of supporting and sustaining families in adoption, foster care, and kinship care.

Much of the advice presented here was gathered during a January 2014 convening of 40 public agency and nonprofit leaders whose organizations are partnering to provide support services to adoptive, foster, and kinship families or whose agencies are operating diligent recruitment programs for children and youth in foster care. The convening's purpose was to gather information about public/nonprofit partnerships; seek insights about implementing support services (presented in Chapter 5); and share information about how to integrate recruitment and support services to achieve better outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Benefits of Public/Nonprofit Partnerships

Public/nonprofit partnerships are almost the norm in the provision of post-adoption support in this country, and are quite common in foster care and kinship support as well. This didn't happen by accident — there are clear reasons why public/nonprofit partnerships are an excellent way to provide family support services. Focusing on and leveraging the strengths that each partner brings to

an initiative offers public/nonprofit partnerships three primary benefits: they can get started more quickly, be more successful, and increase the likelihood of sustaining programs over time. Below we explore the benefits public agencies may see as a result of partnering with family support organizations and other nonprofit partners.

Partnerships Can Make Implementation Easier

Typically, nonprofits offer increased flexibility in implementation compared to public agencies. As one state child welfare agency leader noted at the January 2014 convening, nonprofits can usually hire staff more quickly than a public agency can. Another representative at the convening noted that nonprofits typically have fewer regulations or protocols than public agencies do when starting or operating a program.

In county-administered systems, having one privately operated initiative or a few regional service providers may be more efficient than having each county offer its own program. At the 2014 convening, a public agency staff member from a county-administered state explained that her state decided to offer post-adoption services through a contract with a nonprofit organization operating statewide rather than funding more than 50 different programs in 50 different counties, each with its own way of doing business. The nonprofit is able to offer services across county lines and host statewide events, such as conferences or webinars available to individuals regardless of where they live in the state.

> **Public/nonprofit partnerships can get started more quickly, be more successful, and increase the likelihood of sustaining programs over time.**

In addition, and as described in more detail below, many nonprofit partners bring established and trusted connections with children, youth, and families. These connections can ensure quick initial implementation of new programs because the organization's established base of clients and strong credibility with parents makes outreach and start-up simpler.

Partnerships Can Make Programs More Successful

States, Tribes, and Territories can often make their family support programs more successful by partnering with nonprofit organizations already serving children, youth, and families. Such partnerships can contribute to success by increasing access to families, ensuring service providers know the population they serve, helping families feel more comfortable asking for help, increasing diversity, and building on each partner's strengths.

Increasing Access to Families

New programs, even those offering an incredibly valuable service, sometimes struggle to reach their desired clientele and often have to invest significant time in outreach to families with whom they may not be connected. Parent or youth support groups and parent associations typically have well-established and ongoing relationships with many parents and youth in the community. They often have mailing lists of families, knowledge of events families attend, and proven strategies to reach the target families in their area. Similarly, child-placing agencies and adoption exchanges have established relationships with the families they have worked with. Having an existing network

of parents, children, and youth ensures a connection with the target population for the support program and offers an excellent source of word-of-mouth outreach, which was noted by several of our featured programs as the most effective way to reach families to tell them about the program's services.

At the 2014 convening, public agency and private organization leaders noted that public/private partnerships can also increase support programs' ability to reach families by:

- Opening doors in communities of color and other underserved communities

- Increasing services in rural communities

- Reaching families statewide in county-administered systems without having to offer dozens of different programs

- Reaching families who adopted privately or internationally or who are not otherwise connected to the State, Tribal, or county child welfare agency

- Avoiding — or minimizing the impact of — the stigma that the public agency may have with some populations

While partnering with organizations that are already working with children and families often makes outreach to families easier, it is important to note that the public agency also has a significant role in connecting families with needed services. In several of the programs highlighted in Chapter 3, the public agency provides program information to all adoptive, foster, or kinship care families or shares the names of foster families and families receiving adoption or guardianship assistance with the nonprofit provider to conduct outreach. In all of the public/nonprofit partnerships we highlighted, the public agency also refers families to the program. Reaching out to families to inform them about available services is likely to remain a shared responsibility of public agency and nonprofit partners.

Ensuring Knowledge and Insights About the Needs of Children, Youth, and Families

Organizations with experience serving adoptive, foster, or kinship care families have a baseline of information and expertise when they offer support to these families. These organizations typically have been hearing from youth and parents for years about the community's needs, the services they most value, and effective ways to reach and serve families. The youth and parent leaders of these organizations have a wealth of information that can enhance program design, make implementation easier, and ensure services are more effective.

Many organizations offering support services have noted the tremendous value in learning from the children, youth, and parents they serve, with a particular emphasis on hearing from youth. Partnering with family support organizations can make gathering this input much easier. A state agency staff member at the 2014 convening noted that the insights youth provided have enabled them to change their practices and improve outcomes. Another state agency staff member at the convening noted that hearing from parents can change the culture of a program and even the culture of the state agency — and can result in improvements in services. Partnering with organizations already serving youth and families can make accessing this input much easier for public agencies.

Helping Families Feel More Comfortable Asking for Help

As noted above, partnering with a family support organization can help ensure families are aware of available services. But support programs need to do more than reach families — they must engage them in service provision in an effective and meaningful way. One way experienced support program leaders have found to engage families is to make sure experienced youth and parents are part of the service-provision team. Family support organizations such as support groups, peer networks, and parent associations often have as their core feature that many services are provided by youth and parents. Partnering with community-based organizations may also reduce any reluctance families have to seek services from the public child welfare agency. Below we explore these two ideas further:

- **Having at least some services provided by parents and youth** — In their analysis of barriers to the provision of post-placement services, Ryan et al. noted the following: "Another possible reason for low usage of post-placement services, particularly those that are provided through agencies, is adoptive families' use of and preference for informal rather than formal help (Dhami et al., 2007; Kramer & Houston, 1998). The foregoing review shows that barriers to post-placement services are not only financial, logistical, and informational but also psychological and/or social." They went on to explain: "The use of support groups and mentoring or master adoptive families/parents should be encouraged as a complement to preparation and ongoing training in these normalization efforts. Support groups should also be developed because their largely informal nature and peer-like characteristics may make it easier for adoptive families to share problems and ask for and receive information on available services."[94]

Parents may feel most comfortable receiving services designed and offered by their peers. There is often an increased level of trust with people who have walked a similar path and know the challenges that can occur when parenting children and youth who have experienced abuse, trauma, and neglect. Youth may be most open to engaging with services if providers have experienced foster care, adoption, or kinship care themselves or have colleagues who have been through the system. At the 2014 convening, one director of a statewide support organization said that many parents only want to be served by other parents and feel less comfortable if agency staff are present. Another leader at the convening noted that receiving support from one's peers can normalize the experience of being part of an adoptive, foster, or kinship care family.

> **Support groups' largely informal nature and peer-like characteristics may make it easier for adoptive families to share problems and ask for and receive information on available services.**

Almost all of the programs in Chapter 3 have some services provided by youth and parents who have experienced foster care, kinship care, or adoption. Many have the provision of services by peers as a primary program component. The kinship navigator programs, for example, rely on expert caregivers to help other caregivers access benefits, find community resources, and meet their children's needs. By definition, peer support services rely on support from youth and parents who have shared experiences. But many programs featured in this guide have experienced caregivers or youth providing services other than traditional peer support, such as case management, training, and advocacy.

- **Reducing reluctance to rely on the public agency** — By working with a family support or community-based organization, State, Tribal, and Territorial child welfare agencies can make it easier for families to request help. For example, some parents who care for children adopted from the child welfare system may be reluctant to engage the public agency in their lives again, but may not have similar hesitations about working with organizations run by their peers or other community members. Those who have been approved and trained to adopt, foster, or provide kinship care may feel like failures or worry that they will be judged if they have to reach out to the public agency for help. Kinship caregivers may have some negative feelings about the public agency if their family members have had children removed from the home or if they fear the children they are caring for might end up in foster care. Even if the public agency offers a support program directly, a partner community-based organization can help connect families to services and encourage families to trust the agency and its service providers.

Increasing Diversity

One of the many benefits of collaboration is that it can enable an initiative to be more diverse — and more effective at serving diverse groups — than it might be with just one agency working alone. Partnerships with community-based organizations are a good way to ensure that service providers are more diverse and better represent the clients to be served. A public agency can partner with multiple organizations to ensure it reaches all of the communities that need support services, with specialized services offered by partners who have connections with and expertise serving different populations.

For example, if a community has a large Native American population, a partnership with a tribal nonprofit may enable the agency to more easily provide culturally responsive and appropriate services. To ensure culturally competent services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender youth in care, agencies might partner with local nonprofits already serving this population. In other cases, a nonprofit organization may already be serving diverse community members and have diverse staff, enabling the agency to partner with just one entity and accomplish its goals of serving a diverse clientele.

Tips on Partnering with Organizations to Achieve Diversity

A public child welfare agency staff member at the 2014 convening emphasized that it is important to be respectful and thoughtful when reaching out to establish potential partnerships in communities of color. She explained that you have to be clear that you want a collaboration, not just a way to reach families you haven't served before. She also noted that identifying a community's true leaders may not always be easy, and the best contacts may not be the most visible members of the community.

Tribal staff members at the National Indian Child Welfare Association conference in spring 2014 also noted the importance of establishing trusting relationships with tribal elders. They noted that program developers need to get to know a community well before they learn which partners might be the best for their effort.

Building on the Strengths of Each Partner

Although each agency's or organization's strengths will differ, according to *A Model for Public and Private Child Welfare Partnerships*, private partners may be more likely than public partners to be able to:

- Initiate action quickly
- Specialize services
- Tailor policies and practices

The publication notes that public partners can:

- Respond better to large problems
- Maintain consistent and stable funding
- Divert or obtain other sources of funding when needed[95]

Public/private partnerships can bring these strengths together to provide a well-funded, stable, nimble, and specialized program.

Several public agency staff at the 2014 convening noted that the basis for partnering is to draw on the varied strengths of different entities. For example, one state child welfare administrator explained, "When different voices come to the table, you develop better ideas than working alone." A nonprofit leader at the meeting added that each partner brings different expertise to the table — one might bring customer service experience, for example, while another brings financial resources. She noted that coming together in collaboration enables all of the partners to enhance services while also building their individual organization's capacity.

Partnerships Can Increase Sustainability of Programs

Another major benefit of public/nonprofit partnerships is that they may make it more likely that a new program is able to continue over time. Sustaining services is important because families' needs continue over time and because it takes time to develop a program, build trust and relationships with clients, and fully implement a program. If a program isn't sustainable, it may never reach its full potential to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. If your support services aren't sustained and relatively consistent over time, it will also be challenging for families to develop trust that they will be able to access the services they need down the road.

Community-based organizations can play a key role in the efforts of States, Tribes, and Territories to sustain effective support services. In *Implementation Resource Guide for Social Service Programs: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Programming*, the authors note, "Project partners and community goodwill appear to play a critical role in the ability of a project to sustain itself." The report continues, "It appears that, beyond participant referrals, one of the most important roles a partner organization can play is in project sustainability. Creating a network of agencies that are invested in the success and continuation of your project is key to successful sustainability."[96]

Below we explore several ways support organizations and other community-based groups can help sustain support services over time.

Enabling the Public Agency to Maintain Its Priorities and Adjust to Shifting Priorities

At the 2014 convening, one state child welfare administrator noted that a state agency may face shifting priorities based on political changes or crises. Working through a public/private partnership, she explained, enables the nonprofit partner to keep offering support services to adoptive, foster, and kinship care families even if public agency staff have to focus elsewhere. Another state administrator at the meeting shared that it's also helpful for public agency staff to have a trusted partner to whom they can refer families when workloads don't permit them to provide all of the necessary support. Another convening participant said that having a nonprofit-run support program can also save public agency staff time by reducing the calls that staff members have to handle themselves.

Improving Access to Other Financial Resources

Public agencies often don't have the ability to try a small project as a pilot or to access corporate, foundation, or individual donations. As one nonprofit director at the 2014 convening explained, nonprofits can typically find funding for a small innovative program. Then once they have proven its success, the group can go to the public agency or other funders and partner on a larger, more sustainable effort.

Another leader of a public/private support program explained at the meeting that nonprofits can access United Way and foundation funding that would not be options for a public agency working alone. She added that increasing the funding pool means increasing their partnership's ability to serve more families. Nonprofit partners can also accept in-kind donations from businesses for food, clothing, school supplies, and similar items, which can help keep program costs lower and make it easier to keep the program going with limited funds. Nonprofits are typically better able to attract volunteers, which can keep program costs lower than if all services are provided by paid staff.

Building Community Engagement in Child Welfare and Increasing the Community's Capacity to Respond

Partnerships can also help public agencies build public acceptance of and support for their goals. In "Community Partnerships Offer a Means for Changing Frontline Child Welfare Practice," the authors state, "Community partnerships can help child welfare systems cope with the magnitude of child maltreatment cases and provide a better way of protecting children and supporting the families they serve by sharing the mission of child protection more broadly."[97] Although the article focuses on child protection, the notion of expanding responsibility for caring for vulnerable children, youth, and families certainly extends to those in adoption, foster care, and kinship care.

At the 2014 convening, several participants echoed this sentiment. One nonprofit staff member explained that partnerships help raise community awareness about the needs of vulnerable children and youth and their families. Another agreed that neither public nor private agencies should take on child welfare issues on their own. She explained that partnerships help improve the whole community's capacity to serve families, which is better for everyone in the long run.

Another nonprofit leader at the 2014 convening shared that by engaging community organizations, public partners can demonstrate the value of supporting families involved in the child welfare system.

Through such partnerships, community members see firsthand the challenges facing children and youth in foster care and how they can succeed if they have families who receive the support they need. She noted that once a community can see the value of services, it is more likely to support and sustain those services in the future.

Steps to Building Relationships with Family Support Organizations and Other Community Partners

We know partnerships have benefits, but they also take careful thought and consideration to succeed. Partnerships may struggle or even fail due to lack of trust, lack of shared vision, insufficient resources, and unstated power imbalances. Once you have decided to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families through a partnership, some of the key steps for building a successful collaboration are:

1 Deciding on the type of partnership

2 Identifying partners

3 Establishing trust, shared vision, and values

4 Clarifying roles and expectations

5 Nurturing the partnership

Please note that steps one and two may be reversed, depending on the situation. Sometimes an agency will determine how it's going to offer services and then search for the right community-based partner. In others, the public agency and potential partners will come together to plan a program and then decide under what structure they'll work together. Below, we describe these key steps to create and sustain effective partnerships to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families.

1. Determining the Type of Partnership

The programs in Chapter 3 represent a variety of models of partnership — from public agency-run programs that partner with nonprofits in order to access additional services to nonprofit-run programs that accept referrals from the public child welfare agency. Below we explore the diverse program structures and highlight a few key facts about each. It's useful to think about the many options as you begin to explore creating a partnership to offer support services to adoptive, foster, or kinship care families. Please note that the programs listed as examples are only some of programs of each type and may not meet all of the characteristics.

Type	Characteristics	Examples (see profiles in Chapter 3 for details)
Public program with public funds	• The public child welfare agency both funds and operates the program. • Funding can be local, State/Territorial/Tribal, federal, or a combination of these sources. • The agency may refer to community-based organizations or other types of public agencies for additional services needed by families.	Seminole Tribe
Public program with public and private funds	• The public child welfare agency operates the program and is a significant funder. • Some funding is raised from foundations, corporations, or individuals. • Private funders may also offer technical assistance, evaluation, and other program support.	Yakama Nation Kinship Support Program
Public program with mostly private funds	• The public child welfare agency operates the program, with most funding from a private source such as a foundation. • The public agency and private organization are close partners in program development and evaluation.	The Child Wellbeing Project

Type	Characteristics	Examples (see profiles in Chapter 3 for details)
Publicly funded program with multiple provider agencies	• The public agency designs program, often with input from provider agencies or the community, and issues a request for proposals. • The public agency contracts with numerous nonprofits to offer services. The different contracts may be regional or may be for different types of services (one nonprofit offers peer support, while another provides therapeutic services). • Even if providing the same types of services, nonprofit providers may have regional or other variations in services offered. • The public agency may do overall program evaluation or analysis.	Washington state kinship support services Illinois Adoption/ Guardianship Preservation Program Bridges to Health
Single privately operated program with one public agency as primary or sole funder	• The public agency often outlines overall program goals and issues a request for proposals for funding. Funding may also be negotiated as a sole-source contract. • The nonprofit organization has some flexibility to design a program responsive to the request for proposals. • The nonprofit organization may do additional fund-raising to enhance services.	Alabama Pre/ Post Adoption Connections Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association
Purchase of service or per diem	• Public agencies contract with nonprofit providers to manage the cases of particular children in care. Funding is typically determined per child or youth or for specific services. In county-administered systems, different counties may contract with the same provider for the same services. • The nonprofit provider designs and offers services to meet the public agency's goal. • The nonprofit may raise private funds to provide enhanced services.	A Second Chance, Inc. Anu Family Services

Type	Characteristics	Examples (see profiles in Chapter 3 for details)
Public/private partnership	• The public agency and nonprofit provider jointly plan and offer services, often with each partner providing particular services. • The public agency is typically the primary funder, but the nonprofit partner may do additional fundraising to add or enhance services.	Placer County Permanency Support Services
Private program with multiple public funders	• A nonprofit organization designs services, often in partnership with at least one public child welfare agency partner. • Other public child welfare agency partners provide funding to the nonprofit to offer the same or similar services in their community. • This type of partnership is more likely in county-administered systems.	Edgewood Center for Children and Families Seneca Adoption/ Permanency Wraparound
Private program with multiple funders, including significant support from the public agency	• A nonprofit organization or university designs a series of supportive services and raises funds from various entities to cover the services. • At least one public child welfare agency is a major funder. The public child welfare agency may be actively involved in program design. • The public agency may pay for particular elements of the service array and refers families to the program.	Adoption Network Cleveland Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition UCLA TIES for Families
Private program with limited public agency funding	• A nonprofit designs a program and services and is responsible for funding the program primarily through foundation, corporate, and individual donations and other sources. • The nonprofit is typically solely responsible for evaluating the program. • Public agencies often refer families to the program. • For children still in care, the public child welfare agency may provide financial support for services.	Camp to Belong Bethany ADOPTS

2. Identifying Partners

One of the most important parts of a successful partnership is finding the right partner or partners. There are many nonprofit organizations that might be a good fit for a partnership to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families. For example, the partners in the programs profiled in Chapter 3 varied greatly and included the following types of organizations:

- Parent support groups (such as Adoption Network Cleveland)

- Foster and adoptive parent associations (such as the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association)

- Community-based agencies that grew from parent support organizations (such as A Second Chance and Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association)

- Youth-service or advocacy organizations (such as Treehouse and the Native American Youth and Family Center)

- Agencies that place children for adoption, foster care, or kinship care (such as Sierra Forever Families, Bethany Christian Services, and The Children's Home)

- Multiservice agencies that offer a wide variety of social or human services in their communities (such as Kennedy Krieger Institute and Anu Family Services)

- Universities (such as the University of California Los Angeles and Western Michigan University's Children's Trauma Assessment Center)

As a public agency administrator at the 2014 convening said, public agencies need to find partners that share their interests and are already committed to children, youth, and families. She explained that partnering with organizations that share a common mission with the public agency makes implementation much easier. Others at the meeting noted that choosing a partner who is already doing similar work helps ensure easier start-up. When organizations have similar missions, it is also easier to establish trust.

Another public agency staff member at the convening highlighted the importance of having a partner with an established presence in the community, so the organization can start right away and won't need to build credibility. This can be particularly important for agencies seeking to reach families in communities of color or other underserved populations. Partnering with an agency that has a proven track record in the community can lower the barriers to project outreach and increase chances for success.

During the 2014 convening, another public agency leader noted that it's important to research the potential partner's commitment and mission by checking with others in the community about the organization's effectiveness and its past success. It's important to ensure that any partner organizations have the capacity to meet your goals, and the best way to know this is to learn what they are currently doing. If the group is already providing some support services to adoptive, foster, and kinship care families, they are more likely to be able to help you meet your objectives. If they have proven success in this arena or in similar programs, your agency may also have a more solid foundation for the partnership.

Others at the convening noted that partnering with organizations that have strong parent and youth involvement and leadership — such as parent support groups, advocacy networks for

adoptees or former foster youth, and foster/adoptive parent associations — is the most likely way to ensure success.

3. Establishing Shared Vision, Mutual Trust, and Common Values

Once you have identified a potential partner and determined how you will work together, the next step is to discuss your goals and values to be sure your partnership has a shared vision. Through these discussions and the investment of time to get to know one another, the organizations can also develop a trusting relationship.

Identify Program Goals

As a representative of the public child welfare agency, it's important for you to clearly explain to any partner why you want to establish the partnership — in this case, to enhance support to adoptive, foster, or kinship care families and improve outcomes for children and youth — and what your specific goals are for the proposed collaboration. Your potential partner also will want to know why you think partnership — both in general and this partnership in particular — is the right way to proceed.

Then it's good to learn more from your potential partners about their mission and goals, and see if they have common ground with your agency that will enable the partnership to proceed. At the 2014 convening, one state/nonprofit team noted that they started quickly and had success but then realized they were operating without a shared foundation for the work. The participants explained that they found it beneficial to pause and jointly clarify the purpose of their collaborative work. Investing more time upfront to clarify each partner's specific understanding of goals — and roles and expectations, which are discussed further below — can save time in the long run and prevent potential challenges. Without a shared foundation, partners may struggle to agree how to proceed or face conflicts over priorities. Again, during these early discussions it's useful to be specific. Everyone may share a goal of ensuring children and youth are in supported families who can meet their needs, but digging deeper will allow all potential partners to be sure they are on the same page about what objectives you seek to accomplish to meet that ultimate goal.

Invest Time in Relationship Building

Early, frequent, and in-depth conversations between partners can be helpful to build a solid relationship and establish trust in one another. Partnerships typically benefit when leaders from each organization take the time to get to know one another and discuss common ground as well as how they will address conflict. It's also good to discuss potential concerns and any past conflicts or disagreements. Taking the time for these early conversations helps establish a baseline of good will that can help leaders overcome challenges or conflicts that may develop in the future. During these discussions, partners can also show that they can have difficult conversations while continuing to move forward in a positive way. Through this process, leaders are also modeling how future conflicts may be addressed.

During the relationship-building phase, one good way to establish trust is to remind each other of your shared goal of improving outcomes for adoptive, foster, and kinship care families, and how each of your organizations has accomplished this goal in the past.

Discuss Values, Including Where Values Diverge

Even with a shared mission and goals, each organization will bring its own values to a partnership. During early discussions, partners can highlight their organization's values so common ground is established and any differences can be addressed. For example, both organizations may place a strong value on strength-based and client-driven services. They may also share a fundamental commitment to listening to the voices of youth who have experienced foster care, kinship care, or adoption. But their values may diverge in other areas. The public agency may place a very strong value on accountability, for example, while a community-based organization may see flexibility as more important.

> " **Partnerships typically benefit when leaders from each organization take the time to get to know one another and discuss common ground and how they will address conflict.**

At the 2014 convening, several participants noted another potential area of value conflict. They said that one of a family support organization's core values may be advocating for families, which can mean taking a different position than the public child welfare agency in certain cases. Both public and non-profit staff at the convening said that balancing values and priorities in situations like this is definitely possible, but takes many conversations and strong relationships between partners to identify the common values and determine how to address differences. Convening participants explained that it's important to remind one another how often the public child welfare agency and the nonprofit are on the same side of an issue and use this common ground to strengthen the partnership and emphasize the organizations' shared values.

Through conversation, the partners can develop a set of values that define how this particular partnership will work together and in which situations they will agree to respectfully disagree. As explained below, they will also want to be clear about what the nonprofit partner can continue to do on its own (outside the partnership).

4. Clarifying Roles and Expectations

In many of the partnerships described in Chapter 3, the public agency is a primary funder, but the partnerships go deeper than simply a relationship between a funder and a recipient of funds. The public agencies often remain involved in program design, evaluation, and implementation. Because each partnership is unique, being clear from the beginning about specific roles can help prevent confusion or conflict down the road. Below we address some key topics to think about and discuss as you develop a partnership.

Intensity of the Public Agency's Involvement

When the public agency funds a nonprofit organization to offer support services, the agency's level of engagement in program development and delivery can vary. At the 2014 convening, several participants recommended a deeper level of involvement between the partners. One state child welfare leader reminded participants why deeper public agency engagement matters. He explained that his state used to simply fund a post-adoption services contract and had no ongoing engagement in the

work. Over time, the partners began to take each other for granted, and eventually the state terminated the contract. Now, the state has redeveloped a partnership where public agency staff meet with the nonprofit partner regularly and collaborate more deeply on program goals and implementation.

Other participants at the convening emphasized how important it is to bring partners together during the planning process so the program is developed jointly. These collaborative conversations can result in more ideas, better program design, and an improved ongoing relationship.

Partners' Roles and Workplan

One of the most important things to clarify is the role of each partner in the collaboration. Will the public agency simply be funding the program and reviewing quarterly reports? Or will the agency be involved in hiring decisions, event planning, and program evaluation? What does the funded nonprofit have to send to the public agency for approval? Which services are covered under the contracts and which aren't? Partnerships are likely to do best when all of these questions have been clearly answered before service delivery begins.

One participant at the 2014 convening noted how important it is to go carefully through a program plan to identify activities and then clarify which person or entity is responsible for each one. This planning process can help ensure that all partners have sufficient staff assigned to accomplish the partnership's goals, calculating the additional time it can take to prepare for and nurture a lasting collaboration.

Once these discussions about roles and responsibilities have happened, a written contract, memorandum of understanding (MOU), or partnership agreement can ensure all parties are on the same page and have a point of reference during staff transitions or program changes.

It can also be valuable during these negotiations to discuss what isn't part of the partnership or agreement. At the 2014 convening, one state staff member used the advocacy example mentioned above to highlight the importance of detailing what a state contract funds and what it does not. For example, a contract might permit the nonprofit organization to help individual families access needed public benefits and services, while specifically prohibiting lobbying for increased overall benefits from the state legislature. The nonprofit partner would remain free to take on such advocacy, but not through the state-funded project.

Power Dynamics

With funding and oversight responsibility can come a power imbalance that has the potential to affect a partnership's success if it is not acknowledged. If one partner is contributing significant resources, it may help if that partner acknowledges the power — both real and perceived — that comes with funding while also clearly enabling and empowering the other partner to make decisions and sharing accountability for success. Discussing these real and perceived power differentials — and talking about where a nonprofit partner can take the lead and where staff must consult with the public agency — can prevent resentment or any misunderstandings that might damage the partners' relationship.

Measures of Success

At the 2014 convening, one nonprofit leader emphasized the importance of being clear about how the public agency will measure success. An administrator in another state agreed and suggested that outcome measures be developed jointly by both the public agency and the nonprofit partner. Without specific agreement on the desired outcomes, partners can have very different views of whether the investment of the State, Tribe, or Territory is paying off for children and families. (See Chapter 5 for more information on evaluating outcomes.)

5. Nurturing the Partnership

Creating a true partnership is not a one-time task. The relationship needs ongoing investment of time and resources to keep it strong and healthy. A public agency leader at the 2014 convening noted that his agency saw a partnership die from lack of attention. He stressed the importance of tending to partnerships over time before problems get too deep or intractable. Frequent, honest, and open conversations and planned information sharing can ensure partners remain on the same page, continue to strengthen relationships, and maintain or enhance the partnership over time. Below are a few specific tips to nurturing ongoing relationships.

Invest Time

A participant at the 2014 convening noted that the partnership her group is involved with succeeds because of the time both organizations invest in building trusting relationships with one another. She emphasized that it's just like working well with families — it takes time, commitment, flexibility, and trust to keep a successful partnership going. In *Implementation Resource Guide for Social Service Programs: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Programming,* the authors found that ongoing communication was critical to keeping partners invested in an initiative over the long term.[98]

Take Care During Transitions

At the 2014 convening, participants particularly emphasized the importance of keeping in touch during staff, leadership, or funding transitions. If a staff member from one organization leaves, the partners need to meet and do a careful transition with new staff members to ensure the new staff understand the partnership, its goals, roles, and the important parts of its history.

Review the Relationship

No matter how much work you put in at the beginning, partners' roles may need to change over time. Any successful partnership relies on periodic reviews to make sure everything is working the way it should. One public/private partnership team at the 2014 convening shared that they didn't do enough planning up front, and had to stop and regroup once their project was underway. Another team learned that their assigned roles weren't working the way they wanted, so they decided to revisit how the partnership would operate.

Even without substantial changes in roles, regular check-ins about the partnership can be valuable. During meetings, leaders can ask if there are any problems or concerns and be open to discussions about how the collaboration is progressing.

Tribal Partnership Example

The Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California and Alpine County (California) Department of Health and Human Services recently developed a unique partnership to offer enhanced child welfare services to members of the tribe living in Alpine County. Although it is a public/public partnership between two government agencies, the entities went through a careful planning and development process that can inform others who are establishing public/private child welfare partnerships.

About half of the children in Alpine County elementary schools are Native American, most of whom are affiliated with the Washoe Tribe. Children were being served by the tribal child welfare system, but the county had funds it felt could benefit the tribe's children and youth. The county was looking to share its resources, and the tribe needed funds to better serve children and families. Representatives of the tribe and the Department of Health and Human Services began by having conversations about how the county could help Washoe's leaders meet their child welfare goals.

At first the partners talked with one another from a more legal point of view — focusing on rules and regulations — but leaders soon realized they needed to approach the partnership from a social services point of view, with a focus on their mission and their relationship. Both partners were committed to improving outcomes for children, youth, and families, and they worked through how they could make delivery of services most effective and efficient. Representatives from both the tribe and the county invested energy into relationship building, taking the time to become comfortable with one another. The county invited the tribe to be part of program improvement plans and gave the tribe a grant from the county's share of Promoting Safe and Stable Families funds. Staff from both organizations met with each other and attended training on Indian child welfare so all parties were informed about the issues. The tribal child welfare leader spent a lot of time with tribal council members to explain the goal of the partnership and get their buy-in.

When it came time to develop a specific agreement, Washoe Tribe and Alpine County hired an experienced Indian Child Welfare Act attorney who served as an informed mediator. She helped them negotiate and draft a unique county/tribal memorandum of understanding. The agreement ensures that families can choose between county or tribal services and that both parties share supervision of the placement. Cases will continue to be heard in the Washoe Tribal Court, but Alpine County attorneys will be admitted into the court so they can participate.

Both parties agree that the keys to successful partnership are communication and relationship building, leadership from the tribe and the county, staff commitment, and clarity about how the partnership would work.

Source: Suzanne Garcia, Washoe Tribe, and Nichole Williamson, Alpine County Department of Health and Human Services, interview, March 31, 2014.

Building the Capacity of Family Support Organization Partners

As we've highlighted above, there are excellent reasons to partner with organizations already serving children and families in foster care, adoption, or kinship care as you seek to provide support services to families. It can make implementation easier, ensure services are more effective, and help sustain the program over time. But in some cases family support organizations may need additional help to enable them to be a full partner in program implementation and provision.

Below, we highlight just a few strategies your State, Tribal, and Territorial child welfare agency can take to ensure local family support organizations have the capacity to partner with you to better serve children, youth, and families.

Providing Leadership Training for Parents and Youth

At the 2014 convening, a director of a statewide adoption support program shared that her agency offers a regular youth leadership training where young people who were in foster care or who have been adopted learn more about child welfare and develop advocacy skills. She explained that the training empowers young people to be service providers and to take on the work of helping other children and families in the future.

A state child welfare administrator at the meeting noted that providing parents and youth with advocacy skills can help build community support for child welfare services. She explained that youth and parents who have been served by a program are often able make an excellent case for why the program matters, and can help educate community leaders about the importance of providing ongoing support services. Another representative at the meeting shared that trained parent and youth champions can also help explain the value of a program when new agency leaders come on board.

Developing a Network of Groups

A State, Tribal, or Territorial child welfare agency is in a unique position to bring together smaller organizations or groups already serving adoptive, foster, and kinship care families. The public child welfare agency may be able to convene these organizations and provide funding to help them develop a coordinated network of groups, which would then be better prepared and positioned to offer services to families.

At the 2014 convening, a number of service providers emphasized the importance of offering services tailored to the needs of different communities within a state. One noted that rural communities may have different needs than urban ones, while one region might have access to better mental health services than another. Networks of local support groups or organizations may be best positioned to offer the regionally tailored services families need. In many states, the public child welfare agency supports a statewide foster or adoptive parent association, which brings together the expertise of local chapters around the state. Such partnerships expand the capacity of the association and increase foster, adoptive, and kinship care families' access to needed services.

As we have also seen many times across the country, parent and youth groups can grow into full service agencies that recruit and support families for children in care. Over time many support groups

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