

Key Considerations in Implementation of Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Support Services

The previous chapter offered thoughts about how you might partner with family support or community-based organizations if you are interested in implementing programs ideas like those presented in Chapter 3. Regardless of whether you act with a partner or alone, though, there is more to consider as you proceed with developing any new support services for adoptive, foster, and kinship care families. This chapter offers advice to help you — and your partners if you have them — plan and prepare for adoption and installation of a new program or service. It will cover:

- Beginning to plan the program
- Thinking about implementation drivers
- Reaching and engaging families
- Evaluating your program
- Addressing barriers to successful implementation
- Funding supporting service

As with Chapter 4, much of the advice in this chapter comes from the leaders of nonprofit and public agencies offering recruitment and support for adoptive, foster, and kinship care families we convened in January 2014. Additional insights are presented from the sample programs profiled in Chapter 3 and from literature on program implementation.

Beginning to Plan Your Program

Implementing a new program or idea sounds simple enough, but recent research has shown that *how* you choose to incorporate new work into your agency can be as important as the new program idea itself. Implementing new programs successfully and fully takes from two to four years and requires careful planning and preparation. As explained in the introduction to this guide, the stages of implementation are:¹⁰⁰

- Exploration and adoption
- Program installation
- Initial implementation
- Full operation
- Innovation
- Sustainability

In this section, we'll cover several steps to help you start your exploration phase.

Identify an Implementation Team That Includes Stakeholders

An important early step in program planning is identifying a team to take the lead in creating your program and preparing for implementation. For your effort to succeed, you'll need team members who are passionate about helping children and youth and their families and are committed to the belief that adoptive, foster, and kinship care families who need it deserve ongoing support. Implementing new programs can be challenging and stressful, and having a team of individuals who believe you will succeed and understand the importance of your effort is critical. The programs in Chapter 3 show that implementing successful support programs is possible, and we encourage you to use this guide to build team members' confidence and knowledge.

You likely already know of staff members who would be a natural fit to be on this planning team, but even if you aren't using a formal external partnership, we recommend including stakeholders

and community partners as well. Multiple program leaders at the 2014 convening noted that having youth and parents involved in assessing needs and program planning led to better information. One leader shared, "We trained youth on how to interview or do focus groups with other youth. We got rich input because the youth were speaking to other youth." One nonprofit agency director expressed the opinion that it simply isn't ethical to design and

provide these support services without the involvement of people who have had similar experiences.

Many of the programs featured in Chapter 3 involved caregivers and youth in program planning and design, including on advisory boards and on program design teams. Both public and private leaders at the 2014 convening emphasized the importance of having an engaged advisory team with people from diverse areas — including parents, state administrators, youth who had been in care, community-based agencies, and residential centers — to provide insights and to change the way staff think about permanency and family support. The team is critical in the early planning process we're discussing here, but can also serve an ongoing purpose over time as part of program refinement or adaptation.

Consider How Identified Needs Can Be Addressed by Services

As part of the exploration phase of implementation, your team can use the results of any assessment you conducted (see Chapter 2) to determine the primary needs adoptive, foster, and kinship care families have identified and which services they have most sought or valued. From there, you can develop a theory of change — that is, how will particular interventions address your community's needs and make the difference you seek for adoption, foster, and kinship care families? The descriptions of programs in Chapter 3 can help you think about which types of services might be best designed to meet your local support needs and goals. An engaged group of experienced youth and parents can also be helpful here — to be part of analyzing the results of the needs assessment and translating needs into services that are most likely to help.

“ For your effort to succeed, you'll need team members who are committed to the belief that adoptive, foster, and kinship care families deserve ongoing support.

As part of the planning process, you may want to develop a logic model, which enables program planners to link goals with specific activities and decide how to evaluate whether those activities are resulting in the stated goals and objectives. Developing a logic model helps clarify goals, identify the resources needed to accomplish those goals, and ensure any services provided are likely to achieve the desired objectives. Child Welfare Information Gateway has developed a logic model builder for post-adoption support programsⁱ that can also be used for support services for foster and kinship care families.

The exploration phase is an important time to consider multiple services and program models to determine which will best align with your community's needs and with your goals. In *Tips for Implementation of Evidence-Based Practice*, Child Welfare Information Gateway recommends gathering copies of guidelines and curricula, discussing the program with those who are currently operating it, and making a site visit to meet with staff, families served, and other stakeholders.¹⁰¹ If there is a program that particularly interests you, you may want to contact program staff to discuss specifics about the program, including which components of the program they consider core to accomplishing their outcomes and which staff and leadership elements are necessary to have in place to ensure effectiveness.

Consider Necessary Changes and the Scale of Your Program

You can use the sample programs to generate ideas for your community and think about how they can be incorporated into what you're already doing. You can also choose to start small, perhaps with a pilot or local program or with a smaller group of the most essential services.

During the exploration and learning phase, however, it's also important to think about how much you can change a program model that you wish to replicate and still accomplish similar outcomes. First, you'll need to consider if you want to *adopt* a particular program model, implementing it in much the same manner, or *adapt* it by making changes based on your resources and your community's needs.

If you want to adopt a model, implementation science experts caution against making too many changes upfront, particularly with models that are truly evidence-based. Research on implementation suggest that while changes might make it easier to go forward with implementing a new program, the same changes might make your new program less effective than the original model that you choose to replicate. It can be difficult to know which components of the program, or the even the relationship between program components, generate the results you're hoping to emulate. So if you're planning to make changes to a model, it can be helpful to explore these issues with the agencies or organizations operating the model you are interested in adapting. For true replication, experts recommend making changes only after you know what is truly a core element of the program and, ideally, waiting to make any changes until after you've implemented the full model.¹⁰²

i The logic model builder is available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/postplacement/evaluation-of-postadoption-services-programs/logic-model-builder-for-postadoption-services-programs/>

Thinking About Implementation Components or Drivers

Once you've narrowed down your goals and possible services you'll provide, you need to focus on how to bring a program to reality. In this section, we share information from research about implementation science and describe the key issues that are likely to affect the successful creation of a new initiative. The National Implementation Research Network has identified several key elements that drive whether one can successfully implement a program:

- **Competency drivers** — As defined in implementation science, competency drivers are “mechanisms that help to develop, improve, and sustain one’s ability to implement an intervention with fidelity and benefits to consumers.”
- **Organizational drivers** — Organizational drivers are defined as “mechanisms to *create and sustain hospitable organizational and systems environments.*”
- **Leadership drivers** — Implementation science describes leadership drivers as “*methods to manage technical problems* where there are high levels of agreement about problems and high levels of certainty about solutions and to *constructively deal with adaptive challenges* where problems are not clear and solutions are elusive.”¹⁰³

The Network also explains that while the drivers should be integrated to ensure maximum effect, they also compensate for one another, so that a strength in one component may offset a weakness in another.¹⁰⁴

Below we present insights and suggestions related to these implementation drivers, gathered from our interviews with the leaders of the organizations featured in Chapter 3 and through discussions with state and nonprofit leaders held at the 2014 convening. An additional resource to help you think about implementation is [Implementation Drivers: Assessing Best Practices](#), developed by the National Implementation Research Network, which identifies ideal practices for each driver and enables leaders to evaluate how well their organization is implementing a new program or service.

Competency Drivers

Recruitment and Selection of Staff

Without the right frontline staff and supervisors, new programs are likely to falter. Part of planning for implementation includes determining your staff needs, including the qualities — such as knowledge, skills, and abilities — of individuals who will deliver key services. At the 2014 convening, leaders of both public and private agencies noted the following as key characteristics of staff providing support to adoptive, foster, and kinship care families:

- **Experienced with foster care, kinship care, and adoption** — Children, youth, and parents benefit when service providers have in-depth understanding of the key issues the family is facing. For many organizations we interviewed, this meant service providers included adoptive or foster parents, kinship caregivers, or youth with experience in care or with adoption. The support organizations took various approaches to accomplishing this. One nonprofit at the January 2014 convening hired staff only after they had been licensed foster parents for at least five years, while other organizations made sure that the service team included some adoptive or foster

parents or kinship caregivers and individuals who were adopted or had spent time in foster care or kinship care. Other leaders didn't require personal experience in child welfare for a given position or team, but did see it as a bonus to have staff members who were personally involved in adoption, foster care, or kinship care. A program leader at the 2014 convening explained that having a youth navigator on the staff helped shape how all staff thought about youth and how to work with them. In most programs we reviewed, clients received at least some services from their peers, most often through support groups, navigator programs, or mentoring.

- **Have excellent interpersonal skills** — The ability to engage families — establishing effective connections with children, youth, and parents as clients — is key to successful implementation of support programs, and the leaders at our convening reiterated the importance of this characteristic. Several managers of the programs profiled in Chapter 3 also noted this as a primary staff requirement. *Implementation Resource Guide for Social Service Programs: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Programming* notes the best frontline staff are genuine and caring, able to connect personally with participants, seen as credible by participants, respectful of participants, and passionate about the program. This research suggests these interpersonal skills are often more important than educational background, shared life experience or racial or culture background with clients, or previous experience with the core issues involved.¹⁰⁵ (See page 270 for additional information about how organizations can assess and improve their ability to engage client families.)
- **Committed** — A post-adoption program manager emphasized that staff need to be compassionate and committed and believe the services provided are necessary and valuable. This commitment can help staff keep doing what is sometimes difficult work.
- **Responsive to clients** — “Customer service-oriented” is one of the ways many attendees at the 2014 convening described their staff members. They agreed that staff need to be client-focused and able to see the strengths of the children, youth, and parents being served. Providing responsive, effective customer service helps ensure successful family outreach and engagement in services. Effective customer or client service means that the families served feel respected, heard, valued, cared for, and supported as much as possible. Among other things, customer service means putting relationships first, treating families as partners in service provision, and empowering families. To ensure good customer service, agency leaders should create an organizational environment that values service and develop processes to monitor and improve services whenever necessary. For more information, read [*Using Customer Service Concepts to Enhance Recruitment and Retention Practices*](#), published by the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids.
- **Culturally responsive** — As described in Chapter 3, cultural responsiveness is critically important to successful service provision. One nonprofit group leader at the 2014 convening mentioned the importance of having bilingual staff since many of her agency's clients were Spanish-speaking. Other agency leaders explained that their partnerships with diverse community organizations enabled them to attract staff and volunteers who reflect the racial and ethnic background of the families they serve.
- **Clinically trained** — Many of the programs offering case management or clinical services require staff to have a degree in social work or a related field. Of the profiled programs in Chapter 3, many have the bulk of their services provided by people who have a master's degree in social

work. Other clinical providers might be licensed clinical social workers or therapists. For the evidence-based therapeutic techniques described at the end of Chapter 3, certain licensing or clinical skills are particularly important to the program model.

The selection process for staff can be as important as the characteristics of candidates. One of the nonprofit leaders at the 2014 convening explained that her organization invites stakeholders — foster or adoptive parents and individuals who have been in foster care — to participate in the hiring process for their staff. Through this process, the agency is able to better gauge what applicants know about their clients' needs and to assess candidates' ability to engage with youth and parents. A nonprofit program director noted that if you are creating a new initiative, you shouldn't just move staff

from an existing program. It's important to think carefully about the skills and qualifications staff will need most in the new program.

Another nonprofit leader at the meeting noted that her organization, with the permission of the public agency, hires state social workers and staff as hourly contractors to provide child care or do children's activities for the support program. This strategy

builds connections between the nonprofit and the state, increases the public agency's knowledge of and support for the program, and reinforces to families that the public agency understands and cares about adoption, foster care, and kinship care.

Training

Staff selection is just the beginning of ensuring competence in program delivery. Staff need information about the program model and professional development to help them perform their jobs effectively. For the programs profiled in Chapter 3 and the support services offered by the leaders attending the January 2014 convening, the most common training provided to staff includes:

- In-depth information on the program model, services provided, specific therapeutic or other techniques used, and the agency's overall mission and goals
- The effect of trauma on children and youth and how to provide trauma-informed care
- Grief and loss
- Key issues in adoption, foster care, and kinship care; adoption and permanency competence
- Cultural competence and diversity
- Family engagement or coaching
- Family preservation
- Common disabilities or challenges in child welfare, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, sexual abuse, and attachment
- Responding to challenging behaviors
- Confidentiality and maintaining boundaries

“ Effective customer or client service means that the families served feel respected, heard, valued, cared for, and supported. ”

In addition to noting key topics, public and private agency leaders at the January 2014 convening offered a variety of specific tips about training staff in support programs:

- **Promote cross training** — Several managers shared that they have staff go through the same or a shortened version of the training foster or adoptive parents are required to attend. They noted this helps staff see the role of caregiving differently and more completely. Another agency offers staff train-the-trainer workshops so they learn how to offer educational sessions to prospective and current parents and caregivers. This gives staff in-depth knowledge about key issues facing families and helps build early connections between staff and clients during the training. Another state agency held a convening of regional state staff, foster parents, adoptive parents, and youth where they learned from each other and then brainstormed how to improve recruitment and support services for families. In its brief on implementing model programs, Child Trends notes that one way to ensure organization buy-in is to include training on the program for all levels of staff, not just frontline service providers.¹⁰⁶
- **Involve parents and youth** — Many of the leaders at the convening use experienced and trained parent and youth panels in pre-service training for staff to help workers better understand the issues families are facing and to see parents as part of the service team. Other program managers reported that their primary trainers are adoptive or foster parents, kinship caregivers, or youth who have been in care. One nonprofit organization's leader emphasized the importance of having parents and youth help plan the training curriculum too.
- **Ensure orientation and ongoing training opportunities** — It is important that staff have sufficient information before they start providing services, and that they continue to develop professionally and keep up with changing needs and research in the field. Both convening attendees and staff of the programs profiled in Chapter 3 emphasized the need for upfront and ongoing training. A few programs require as many as 80 to 100 hours of training for new staff members in the program model and key issues facing their clients. Others require a week or a few days of orientation. Many leaders also report that staff must complete minimum ongoing training requirements each year. Others offer monthly in-service trainings or provide staff with an annual training budget. As mentioned in Chapter 3, many service providers are training staff in adoption or child welfare competency.

Coaching and Support

Just as ongoing training is important to ensure staff competence, so too are supervision, support, and coaching in the program model and in key issues in child welfare. Leaders at the January 2014 convening noted the following ways they help staff remain engaged, committed, and following the program model:

- **Use current technology to support staff in different locations** — Program managers reported using private Facebook groups or email groups to share resources, information, tips, and strategies with staff working in different locations. These avenues also enable supervisors and other staff members to support one another and brainstorm solutions to difficult cases.
- **Provide training and support** — As noted above, most of the program leaders emphasized the importance of ongoing training and saw it as a support to staff. Several organizations provide staff with monthly or annual training events where they learn new skills and have an opportuni-

ty to learn from and support one another. Another organization hosts an annual retreat to help support and rejuvenate staff members. Several organizations provide staff with training on self-care, vicarious (secondary) trauma, or preventing burnout. One nonprofit leader reported that her organization offers staff classes in laughing yoga or meditation, while another reported that post-adoption support staff met quarterly with an adoption-competent therapist to discuss how to keep from burning out while doing what can be a very draining and difficult job. One nonprofit program manager emphasized the importance of supporting volunteer mentors and parent or youth group leaders as well as staff.

- **Value supervisors** — One expert at the 2014 convening emphasized that it's important not to forget about supervisors. Supervisors are critical to recruiting, retaining, training, and supporting frontline staff, and programs can stumble or fail if supervisors aren't on board and supported in turn. A director at one nonprofit organization explained that they increased the number of supervisors for their peer support program since staff needed more one-on-one time with supervisors than other program staff did. Another program manager at the convening suggested training managers and supervisors in brain-based supervision techniques or tools such as emotional intelligence so they are better able to lead their staff members. A state child welfare staff member noted that training supervisors on the program model is very important because if the supervisors aren't convinced about the value of the program and the service model, they are not able to properly ensure effective implementation by frontline staff. It's also useful to train supervisors in preventing and recognizing compassion fatigue and burnout so they are able to address these issues with frontline staff.

Several of the programs in Chapter 3 provide more formal coaching or supervision to staff on the program model. The Children's Trauma Assessment Center, for example, has supervisors observe interns through one-way glass so they can provide feedback on the assessment. The Children's Home has new workers shadow more experienced workers so they learn to use assessment tools, host family group conferences, and develop service plans. Other organizations offer case consultation or weekly supervision meetings to ensure staff receive the support and information they need.

Organizational Drivers

Data

Data and data systems play many roles in ensuring program effectiveness, including assessing short-term and long-term outcomes for individuals served; tracking resources spent and activities or services offered; and guiding program changes or adjustments. Leaders in the field at the 2014 convening had the following advice about data and using data systems effectively:

- **Look at data early** — One 2014 convening participant said her agency found it necessary to look at data very early in the planning process — both to understand the needs and to determine what data they were currently collecting and what would need to change in their data collection and tracking. It takes time to make changes in data systems, so knowing what you have and what you want to be gathering is an early priority.
- **Use data to decide where investments are needed** — A state child welfare leader explained that her state uses program and outcome data to determine where more resources are need. Data on

the needs of children, youth, and parents have helped convince leaders where to invest. She explained that data showed children were often being placed with relatives, so the state increased the support services available to kinship caregivers and their families.

- **Use data to assess accomplishments** — Data on program outcomes can be a key element of performance assessment, but can also be intimidating to staff. At the 2014 convening, one leader emphasized the importance of helping staff understand the value of data. She explained that her program uses the phrase, “Data is not a hammer, it’s a flashlight.” Leaders inform staff how data can shed light on ideas to help them perform better and understand the program, rather than to document failures or mistakes.
- **Understand the power of data** — Another manager at the January 2014 convening said that data was one of the best ways to inform and engage leaders who are not involved in these issues on a day-to-day basis. She explained that data can be used to build program support and high-level commitment. A nonprofit organization leader at the convening noted that data can also engage staff. He explained that those in charge of gathering and reporting data can and should share it with others to highlight wins, note concerns, and build agency awareness of the program’s outcomes. Data can also show staff if changes need to be made, and they can then be involved in guiding those changes. Another leader agreed that data has great power with staff, especially if managers can tie data points to the program’s or staff members’ values. For example, if staff or leaders believe strongly in placement stability, data on how many moves a child or youth makes can be extremely persuasive in making the case for the need for family support.

More information on data can be found in the Evaluation section below. (See page 275.)

Team and Organizational Support Building

At the January 2014 convening, participants offered the following advice about how organizations can develop teams and change internal structures to facilitate implementation:

- **Create diverse implementation teams** — A leader of a public/private support program emphasized the importance of having a team drawn from all levels of the agency. She noted that her program’s challenges with implementation were most often due to staff reluctance. By involving staff in program planning, the organization was able to create true champions of the work who could help build support with their peers. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in its report on implementation of the foster care reform known as Family to Family, notes, “Opening the discussion to a wide group of stakeholders helps create a vision for the work that can be shared across multiple parts of the community. This shared vision provides the direction and energy needed to fuel the hard work ahead.”¹⁰⁷
- **Make sure you have at least one project champion** — Although teams are important, a number of program leaders reported that their success depended on having one or two deeply committed champions who were able to keep the process moving and guide the implementation team. These champions need the support and input of others, but are critical to the ability to keep going during challenges. A couple of convening participants noted that it’s also important to respond if a program champion leaves the agency or project. One stated that her agency’s project suffered when its main proponent left, and another explained that the implementation team was

careful to identify and prepare a new champion when they learned about a pending departure. Preparing for these transitions and working to identify multiple champions can help make staff or leader changes less disruptive. A review of successful social services programs found that all of the successful efforts had a strong project champion, and the authors and noted that it was best if the individual had influence or administrative control.¹⁰⁸

- **Keep lines of communication open** — Feedback and openness among the implementation team members are important, especially if you're working with a partnership of multiple organizations. Leaders at the 2014 convening noted that building in a regular schedule of meetings or phone calls was essential during their program planning. One nonprofit staff member emphasized the need to allow staff and partners to express concerns during planning. He noted that

when people feel heard during planning, they are more likely to be committed team players down the road. Chapter 4 has additional information about the importance of relationships and how to keep partnerships successful.

- **Partner with others** — Since all new efforts affect a broader community, sharing responsibility and information with the entire community is important. Having internal and external advocates is one of the

best ways to ensure the entire system is able to accommodate the new effort. Chapter 4 explores the value of partnerships and offers many suggestions for working collaboratively.

- **Build system-wide capacity** — A nonprofit director at the convening recommended building commitment across the agency and beyond, ensuring that directors, line staff, supervisors, and others have the information they need about the program's goal and direction. Another noted that the entire culture of an organization may need to change, particularly if the agency has a new commitment to evaluation or to support services. Leaders and project champions can help others throughout the agency to understand the importance of a new support initiative.
- **Provide avenues for leaders to continue to engage** — A county child welfare manager explained that leaders need to remain engaged and have plans to share their vision with others throughout the planning and implementation stage. Another convening attendee noted that her agency had no project director within the public agency, which made it difficult for anyone to intervene when issues arose. She recommended ensuring someone at the public agency is in charge, even if the day-to-day work is contracted out.

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Leadership Drivers

Although leadership at several levels is important in many of the other implementation drivers, it also stands alone as a significant contributor to success. Leaders must be good managers and agents of change. Attendees at the 2014 convening were in agreement about the importance of leaders in program success and offered the following strategies and tips:

- **Identify respected leaders** — A public agency representative reported that leaders were a key driver in her partnership's ability to accomplish its goals. Her agency took care to identify those individuals at each level of the agency who already had the respect of their peers and the people

they supervised. Then they worked to develop these respected leaders into project champions. By finding key people who had both passion and respect, they were able to increase commitment agency wide.

- **Involve leaders at all levels** — One state child welfare manager reported that her agency invites key administrators and community members to events hosted by the family support program. This generates increased support at higher levels and can make families feel valued. Another program staff member said his agency invites board members to events with children, youth, and parents. This strategy builds awareness of the need for the work among leaders and helps increase the number of people who think the program is valuable.
- **Ensure leaders respect staff and value their roles** — Several child welfare managers at the convening explained that true leaders respect staff and include them in program design and development. Others explained good leadership is about knowing how different staff approach their work and learning how to get the most out of each person. Involving those who are detail oriented in data analysis and someone with a big picture focus into program design may be the best way to engage people effectively.
- **Build leadership skills** — One public agency manager at the meeting noted program managers might not have all the skills they need to lead a new initiative and build organizational and community consensus for the work. Her agency engaged a coach who helped the manager develop the leadership skills she needed to implement the new project and build a team of champions.
- **Share leadership** — Meeting attendees emphasized the need to share leadership and even identify successor leaders early in program planning. They noted that programs can struggle if too much responsibility and leadership is held by one person alone. Successor or co-leaders can help smooth transitions during staff turnover as well.

Reaching Families and Serving Them Effectively

A key step in the implementation process is determining whether the program will have the ability to reach families and successfully engage them in services. If families don't feel comfortable with the host organization and service providers, they may not want to reach out for help or may not take full advantage of the services provided.

Organizations offering support to adoptive, foster, and kinship care families can use the tool below — *Assessing Agency or Organizational Capacity to Engage Families in Support Services* — to measure their current capacities to engage families and identify areas for improvement. Each measurement in the tool reflects an engagement strategy agencies can use to expand their ability to connect with families who need support. The strategies involve many of the implementation drivers identified earlier, including staff characteristics and training, organizational culture, and leadership.

If the tool helps you identify areas where your agency needs improvement, you may want to develop a plan to increase your rating in those areas. One suggestion is to create a short-term work group to address one or a small group of strategies. The group can then brainstorm and recommend how to make improvements. For example, consider an agency that realizes it doesn't have a formal strategy for the item in the tool that states "The organization ensures continuity of staff as much as possible. When staff changes occur, the agency has a formal plan to ensure continuity of the case or the

relationship between provider and the family.” The agency’s work group might develop a plan that whenever staff are promoted or resign, staff have a two-week period where they call or email their clients and let them know they are leaving and introduce either the replacement staff member or a supervisor or other staff member who is filling in.

If there are many areas where you need improvement, you may want to pull together a team to help you prioritize where to focus attention. The team can look for themes and commonalities – Do you score lower in strategies that relate to flexibility and accessibility of services? Does it seem like many of the areas for improvement relate to not having parents and youth involved as staff or advisors? By looking for themes, you may be able to see and then address broader organizational cultural issues. If you have identified things to be changed about your organization’s culture, it’s important to get high-level leaders involved in any change efforts. Infusing an organization with a true commitment to family engagement takes leadership and investment.



Assessing Agency or Organizational Capacity to Engage Families in Support Services

This tool is designed to help agencies, support groups, associations, and other organizations providing support to adoptive, foster, and kinship care families assess their ability to reach families who need to be served and ensure these families are willing and able to access services. It should be completed by a staff member or leader with extensive knowledge of the program and the organization. Please note that all questions may not be applicable to your program.

Please rate your organization’s success in each of the following areas.

Administration and Program Planning

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
The organization has a specific written strategy on how to reach families and encourage them to use services as needed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Parents and youth were actively involved in planning of the support program.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization has articulated principles on the value of parents and youth as service providers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers value the role of parents and youth.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Administration and Program Planning

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
Program managers and leaders value the role of parents and youth.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Parents and youth are in leadership roles.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization has ongoing partnerships with parent- or youth-led organizations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers providing services receive training in core permanency issues affecting children in adoption, foster care, and kinship care, including grief and loss; developmental domains; disabilities and challenging behaviors; attachment; the effect of trauma; and brain development.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers are trained on skills of working with children, youth, and families, including active listening, teamwork, collaboration, effective communication, and conflict resolution.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The above two types of training are offered to staff and volunteers regardless of when they join the program (training is not just offered one time to staff hired at the program's inception).	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Parents and youth are engaged in providing training for staff and volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization provides ongoing professional development for staff and volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers receive training in cultural competence and providing culturally responsive services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers receive training in how to accommodate any disabilities the parents or other family members may have.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Administration and Program Planning

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
The organization ensures continuity of staff as much as possible. When staff changes occur, the agency has a formal plan to ensure continuity of the case or the relationship between provider and the family.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Supervisors evaluate staff on their skill in and success at engaging families.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Supervisors create a plan with staff to reinforce and strengthen their approach to supporting families.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization has a process to identify, review, and respond to any barriers parents report in accessing services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization has a policy on how to respond to conflicts between staff and families or volunteers and families.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization collects and incorporates both formal and informal feedback from families on the program design and effectiveness of services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Outreach

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
The program seeks and actively engages participants in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization conducts specific and varied outreach activities to share information with families who are not being served.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff or volunteers working with families during the placement process encourage parents to access support and services after placement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Outreach

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
Staff encourage families to join support groups or participate in other services before a placement is finalized.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Outreach is conducted by parents or youth who have personal experience with adoption, foster care, or kinship care.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The agency has a successful strategy to reach families before they are in crisis.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Service providers have access to the names of all foster care, kinship foster care, guardianship families, and families receiving adoption assistance to conduct program outreach.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The organization offers regular social events to families to keep them connected to the service provider and one another.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Service Delivery

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
Staff and volunteers include adoptive, foster, and kinship care parents.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers include individuals who are or were adopted or are or were in foster care or kinship care.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The program offers parent mentors or liaisons for families.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers providing services have demonstrated skills in active listening and empathy, conflict resolution, and effective communication.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Service Delivery

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
Staff and volunteers have training that enables them to recognize and validate the challenges families face.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The program has a formal process for assessing families' strengths and needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff have clearly articulated boundaries and guidelines about working with parents and children.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The program has flexible service hours.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The program offers flexible service locations or other ways to receive services.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The program offers accommodations necessary for parents or family members who have disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers respond to questions and inquiries within one business day.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers use family- or youth-friendly language in their work (including not using acronyms or jargon and not defining children or families by their diagnoses or challenges).	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers follow a family-centered philosophy and listen to parents and children.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
Staff and volunteers respect parents, children, and youth and use strengths-based methods.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Service Delivery

Family Engagement Strategy	Rating or Response
Staff and volunteers encourage parents to become involved with other members of the adoption, foster care, or kinship care community.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The agency/organization provides or promotes creative ways for families to maintain connections with one another between events or meetings (if applicable).	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement
The agency/organization provides an opportunity for families to report challenges or barriers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/> Needs improvement

Evaluating Program Outcomes and Implementation

As mentioned briefly above, program evaluation is key to shaping your program and services and determining if your services are having the desired impact on children, youth, and parents served. The logic model you develop for program planning is an important tool in creating your evaluation strategy because it has identified your desired outcomes and the activities you expect to result in each goal or objective.

The evaluation plan needs to address how you will track services provided and people served, assess outcomes achieved, and monitor how the program operates. Whatever your evaluation plan is, it's important that staff understand what they need to do and how, and that the resulting data provides the information you need to fulfill reporting requirements and build your case for continued funding and support.

A well-thought-out and executed evaluation plan is essential to being able to make thoughtful, intentional modifications to your program or services as necessary over time and to sustain services into the future. Data from the evaluation offers evidence to internal and external leaders, community members, and potential funders about the value of your work and your agency's or partnership's ability to make a difference in the lives of adoptive, foster, and kinship care families.

Track Services Provided

At a minimum, your program evaluation is likely to include a system for tracking the activities or services offered and the children, youth, and parents receiving each service. Tracking methods vary, with programs using databases, tracking forms, spreadsheets, case records, and other means. With case records, the agency may have a file on each family and then record which services are provided to members of the family. Some programs use databases with a record for each family where staff can identify their needs and goals and services provided over time.

Organizations may use a tracking form for each event or service and have staff note how many or which individuals or families receive that service. Staff may also track the reason for contact. The Washington state kinship programs, for example, track the reasons caregivers need financial assistance and the purpose of contacts with the kinship navigators.

Evaluate Outcomes

Most programs do more than count activities and services — they seek to determine if the services are helping children and youth in adoption, foster care, and kinship care and their families. Below we outline a number of ways the programs in Chapter 3 evaluate the effect their services had on the children, youth, and parents served. While evaluation plans vary greatly in quantity and depth, the key is to develop a strategy that is reasonable given your staff and resources, but is rigorous enough to determine if your investment of time and funding is paying off.

It is ideal to determine how you will assess impact as part of your planning process. This can help ensure that you are offering services linked to your desired outcomes and that you have the staff and data capacity you need from the beginning to conduct the evaluation and analyze results. As in other aspects of implementation planning, representatives of successful programs suggested involving parents, youth, and community members in identifying key outcome indicators. At the Native American Youth and Family Center, for example, tribal elders and community members were asked during focus groups to identify what a healthy youth looked like. The evaluators then took these descriptions to create desired outcomes for the organization's youth development work and designed an assessment tool to measure these outcomes.¹⁰⁹

Some key indicators used by the programs profiled in Chapter 3 include:

- Improvements in child or youth behaviors or well-being
- Increased parenting skills or knowledge; decreased parental stress
- Enhanced family stability or functioning
- Case outcomes such as permanency or placement stability
- Satisfaction

Below, we explore the types of tools program staff can use to measure the outcomes listed above.

Assessment Tools

Many programs supporting adoptive, foster, and kinship care families use assessment tools, both to guide case planning and to assess outcomes. Several programs in Chapter 3 use child and youth assessments, such as the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool, at the beginning of service to determine the client's needs and goals and set a baseline. They then use the tool again over time or at the end of services to determine if the child or youth is doing better. Assessments can measure trauma symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or anger; negative behaviors; and factors related to resiliency such as leadership, social skills, and ability to adapt. Programs also used pre- and post-tests, skills surveys, and other tools to assess parents' knowledge in areas such as child development,

understanding trauma, and responding positively to difficult behaviors. The authors of *Implementation Resource Guide for Social Service Programs: An Introduction to Evidence-Based Programming* recommend using existing assessments when possible because it can save you time and also ensure that your instrument has been tried and tested.¹¹⁰

Specific programs using assessment tools include:

- Both Mockingbird and the Native American Youth and Family Center measure youth's connections to their community of origin or cultural background. The Native American Youth and Family Center also measures children's and youth's healthy relationships, coping capacities, and other attributes using a tool designed specifically for the agency.
- Tennessee's Adoption Support and Preservation program uses tools such as the [Parenting Stress Index](#), Post Traumatic Stress Index, and [Child Behavior Checklist](#). Bethany's ADOPTS program also has clients complete a parental stress index before and after receiving services.
- Anu Family Services and Placer County Permanency Support Services use the [Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths \(CANS\)](#) assessment tool in case planning and evaluation.
- The Child Wellbeing Project uses the [North Carolina Family Assessment General Services + Reunification](#), [Devereux Early Childhood Assessment](#), and [Casey Life Skills Assessment](#) tools.
- Edgewood Center for Children and Families conducts pre- and post-assessments of families' strengths.
- The Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition uses the Global Assessment of Relational Functioning and other tools for families receiving crisis intervention services.

Collection of Case-Level Data or Case Review

Many of the programs in Chapter 3 – particularly those using a case management model – record client-specific data to assess placement stability, permanency, and need for additional services. The Children's Home, for example, tracks placement status for children and youth up to 12 months after case management services are completed. Seneca Family of Agencies tracks placement changes, educational attainment, respite care used, family functioning, and children's behaviors. Treehouse tracks a variety of educational indicators and outcomes for children and youth served, such as attendance and graduation rates.

Surveys of Parents and Youth

Many of the programs in Chapter 3 use surveys to assess whether parent or youth participants are satisfied with the services received and to solicit comments about the program. Surveys often ask for reports about knowledge gained, family stability, satisfaction with services, and changes in children's behaviors. Some examples include:

- The Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association conducts pre- and post-tests of parents' knowledge to assess the value of trainings.
- Mockingbird asks parents to report on whether they and their children or youth feel less isolated than before participating in the program.

- Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections uses in-person surveys at the end of trainings, counseling sessions, or support groups to ask parents to report broadly about the value of the organization's services. This in-person approach has generated better response rates than doing a periodic survey by mail or email.
- Camp to Belong has youth participants complete pre- and post-camp surveys to assess their connections with siblings and feeling of belonging and positive attitude.
- For the Bethany ADOPTS program, parents are asked 12 months after services end to report on changes in the family's life or in children's behaviors. Children and youth are asked about how they are feeling and if they are getting along with their family.
- In addition to assessing children using a trauma checklist, Fostering Healthy Futures asks parents to report on their children's mental problems or use of mental health services. KEEP also asks caregivers to report on children's behaviors.

Interviews or Focus Groups with Individuals Served

When survey response rates are low or program staff or evaluators want more detailed information, interviews with clients are a great option. Interviews often provide a much deeper analysis of a family's situation, although they are time consuming for both staff and the family members. For a random selection of its kinship caregivers, A Second Chance, Inc. conducts a home visit to interview caregivers about services received. One program leader at the January 2014 convening said her program's staff do an exit interview with any foster parents who are leaving the program to discuss their needs and what is and isn't working.

Another evaluation option is a focus group with a selection of parents or youth served. In focus groups, evaluators can gather more in-depth information from multiple people at once. Focus groups can generate a rich discussion that highlights themes among various families served. One of the agencies at the January convening reported that their program holds two focus groups each year to talk with parents served about their needs; results have helped shaped program changes.

Gathering and truly hearing and using youth and family input not only helps ensure services are designed to best meet families' needs, but also shows respect for families' opinions when the input is used to make changes. This level of respect can make families feel better about the service-providing agency and feel more invested in the program.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Some programs are able to analyze whether the investment of resources in the program saves money by reducing the need for other services. One program director at the January 2014 convening noted that her nonprofit is careful to track data on problems they are preventing, such as the need for out-of-home placement. The organization can then use this data to highlight the value of their supportive services.

Cost-benefit analysis can also be used to assess if there is a better way to provide services. The Seminole Tribe, for example, reviewed whether it made more financial sense to provide services using staff or outside providers. Their analysis showed that in their case, it would save money to use staff, and the Family Preservation Department made the change.

Randomized Control Groups or Longitudinal Studies

A few support programs for adoptive, foster, and kinship care families use randomized control groups to assess if outcomes are different for those served than for those receiving other traditional services or no services. A properly designed and randomized control group is one of the best way to be sure that services provided are actually having their desired impact, and is the gold standard in determining if a program is evidence based. Both Fostering Healthy Futures and KEEP have used control groups to assess the impact of the program, and The Children’s Home is in the process of running a study using a control group.

Other organizations are able to follow families for a longer period to see if program impacts persist over time. In its longitudinal study, UCLA TIES is collecting annual data on families for up to five years. The programs using control groups or longitudinal studies typically employ the instruments or tools described above in their efforts to assess progress on desired indicators.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Efforts to evaluate program outcomes and assess program operation and strategy can be part of larger, ongoing continuous quality improvement efforts in your child welfare system. Through continuous quality improvement, child welfare agencies typically use teams of staff at all levels of the agency and children, parents, and other stakeholders to identify, describe, and analyze strengths and problems. They then test, implement, learn from, and revise solutions. With continuous quality improvement, agencies gather information about outcomes and processes and examine the links between them.

In an August 2012 information memorandum, the Children’s Bureau identified five components of an effective continuous quality improvement system:

- Strong administrative oversight and written standards
- Quality collection of quantitative and qualitative data
- Ongoing review of case files
- Analysis of data and dissemination to stakeholders
- Use of data to guide changes in programs and process¹¹¹

More information on continuous quality improvement in child welfare is available at [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) and [Casey Family Programs and the National Resource Center on Organizational Improvement](#).

Source: Children’s Bureau, Information Memorandum ACYF-CB-IM-12-07: Establishing and Maintaining Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Systems in State Child Welfare Agencies (2012), accessed September 12, 2014, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/im1207>

Assessing Program Operation and Strategy

In addition to measuring outcomes, evaluation can also be useful in guiding program activities and services and making needed adjustments. Surveys of parents and youth, focus groups, and interviews are excellent ways to gather information about what families need, which services are most valuable, how well services are being provided, and if changes are warranted.

Two participants at the 2014 convening noted that surveys of staff or professional experts resulted in different answers than surveys or focus groups with parents or caregivers. In one example, professionals thought kinship caregivers most needed improved training and early support, but the caregivers were satisfied with those services and said they need more long-term post-permanency support. The program changed its outreach based on this input from families to emphasize the available post-permanency services.

One county child welfare leader at the 2014 convening explained that her support program hosts focus groups twice a year to see if families' needs are changing and has adapted services to reflect changing needs. Others at the meeting agreed that ongoing input from clients is very valuable and often results in program enhancements. For example, if an in-person support group isn't attracting attendees, follow-up surveys or discussions with families might clarify the root cause from several possibilities such as poor location, transportation problems, no child care, or inconvenient scheduling. Examining why families are calling in a crisis might help program staff identify additional preventive supports that can prevent future crises for other families.

One state agency leader at the convening noted that evaluation results can be used to modify services based on local or regional needs. In her state, they found that in some communities, no one would come to a "parent support group," but they would come to a gathering if it was called a coffee and chat session. Another public agency represented at the convening has hosted focus groups of foster and adoptive parent support staff to identify trends in service needs. The resulting data was surprising to program leaders, and they used it to change how they trained staff and operated support groups.

Having staff and leaders review services provided and outcome results can also help guide operations. With careful data collection, for example, managers might learn that families who participate in multiple services are seeing greater improvements on assessments than those who participate in only one activity. Or data might show that families who receive services for a minimum of 12 months do better than those who are supported for only three or six months. Data like these can help staff guide families to engage in additional services or change how services are offered in ways that are more likely to achieve positive outcomes.

With evidence-based programs in particular, program assessment can also include tools to determine if staff are using the program model properly. For example, organizations using the KEEP support and training techniques videotape sessions to ensure staff are maintaining fidelity to the program model.

Other Advice on Evaluation

Specific evaluation tips from the attendees at the 2014 convening include:

- **Hold regular program reviews** — Several program leaders reported that they have ongoing program assessment meetings, some as part of larger continuous quality improvement efforts. One explained that her county’s public/private partnership hosts a monthly program review meeting with providers, supervisors, and managers. Working with a set agenda each time, participants review data and discuss what appears to be working and what isn’t. They develop an action plan to address anything that needs to be changed. For example, early data showed the program wasn’t serving many families with children under age five, so they decided to adapt their outreach strategy to help families understand the child assessment as an educational opportunity for the children. Another public/private partnership hosts a quarterly review where attendees look at case data and feedback from families to determine if they need to make changes to either enhance program operations or improve outcomes.
- **Bring in evaluation expertise** — One nonprofit manager at the convening said her organization felt a bit overwhelmed by the data it needed to gather. They decided to partner with a local university’s social work class. Now program staff collect the data while students process and analyze the information. A number of the programs in Chapter 3 have worked with universities or other evaluation experts to design or conduct program evaluations.
- **Be specific about goals** — Another convening participant recommended having benchmarks to strive for, such as that 95 percent of families served remain together. Then the agency looks at its data related to each benchmark to see where staff can make changes or invest more time, attention, and resources to achieve their desired goals.

Addressing Common Implementation Barriers

Beginning a new initiative or program isn’t easy, and leaders need to be prepared to respond as obstacles arise. Below we present a few major barriers participants at the January 2014 convening identified and their suggestions to overcome them.

Change Is Difficult

Child welfare agency leaders and staff are typically facing many priorities at once, and it can be daunting to think about implementing a new effort, especially while also addressing child protection crises, child deaths, or other system reform initiatives. Even without these specific pressures, tackling any new program can be challenging, and leaders are likely to face resistance. At the 2014 convening, leaders offered the following advice:

- **Listen to children, youth, and parents** — A nonprofit staff member advised involving youth in efforts to persuade the agency or community of the importance of efforts to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families. He noted that no one wants to say no to children or youth, and these young people can make a very strong case. A state agency manager added that parents can also help convince doubters. Raising the voices of those who have lived an issue is a powerfully persuasive tool.

- **Bring in national experts** — One state child welfare leader said her agency found it valuable to bring in national experts or leaders of successful programs to build the case for new services or supports. By showing what others have been able to accomplish, these experts from around the country were able to inspire staff, supervisors, managers, and other leaders. She added that it worked well to combine program or data experts with those who have experienced foster care, adoption, or kinship care. Those who have personal experience can make change seem more important and more possible.
- **Take small steps and celebrate successes** — One public agency manager suggested taking baby steps to accomplish some early goals and then building from there. She said that once you've shown that change is doable and you can succeed, it's easier to convince others to join the effort. Another state leader agreed that quick wins can motivate and inspire staff, leaders, and the community, and can both energize champions and convince doubters. Another state staff member recommended viewing change as a marathon rather than a sprint, acknowledging that implementing a new program takes several years and requires dedication and a steady pace.
- **Spread out responsibility** — Several participants at the convening emphasized that sharing responsibility for implementation makes it more manageable. One said that her organization began by placing all the responsibility on one project director, but realized it should have designated a number of workgroups to tackle different aspects of the reform. Another noted that finding and supporting families for children is everyone's responsibility — from the top of the agency to all line staff. Building a broad base of support across the agency for your efforts is key to succeeding with a new initiative.
- **Relate any proposed changes to existing efforts** — One public agency manager said her agency's implementation process benefitted when they were able to relate new initiatives to what they were already doing. Her county was able to make efforts to implement new support services to improve outcomes for children and families part of a broader continuous quality improvement effort underway in the county. Focusing on similarities to existing programs or change processes helped others see where the new idea fit and realize the change wasn't that significant.
- **Have open discussions** — A state child welfare leader reported that her agency found hosting open discussions was incredibly valuable. When people were able to come together, raise concerns, and learn about the importance of permanency and support, they were able to accept the risk of change.
- **Accept that it will be a challenge** — One county child welfare manager explained that it's important to acknowledge and accept the challenge. She noted that resistance to change is natural, and truly accepting this as a given makes it easier to handle obstacles when they happen. She also said the workshops her team received on implementation science enabled them to develop reasonable expectations and plan for what troubles might arise.

Leadership Changes

Many participants at the convening listed leadership changes as a significant barrier to progress. When an agency director changed, the change effort often lost momentum or changed in some significant way. Convening attendees offered the following advice to prepare for or weather leadership changes:

- **Document the effort and the need** — A public/private team agreed that they were able to survive leadership changes because they had a document describing the effort, providing background on the goals and objectives, and summarizing what had already happened. They used this document to educate new leaders and they believe it kept new leaders from shifting priorities. Another state’s team said they focused on articulating the need for the program and identified specific champions within the agency who were responsible for sharing the message with new leaders.
- **Have more than one champion** — One state experienced serious setbacks when the project’s champion left the agency; another organization’s program manager advised other agencies to engage more internal champions from the beginning. A broader leadership team can carry the work forward even when key leaders leave.

A New Emphasis on Data Can Be Difficult for Staff

A number of convening attendees cited staff reluctance about collecting data as a barrier to implementing a more evidence-informed program. Issues for staff included fear that data would be used against them, worry about the time it would take from client services, and a lack of understanding of the value of data. Convening attendees recommended:

- **Explain what the data measures and why it matters** — One state adoption manager noted that his agency took the time to explain how each data element is measured and calculated so staff at all levels understood what it meant. Another highlighted that if staff understand how data can and should drive program implementation and adjustment, they may be more likely to support data collection and analysis and any resulting program changes needed.
- **Break the data down** — One attendee reported that her agency found success by sharing with staff only data specific to their work. Her agency found that when data was directly applicable to a person’s job, that person would use the data and was willing to gather it when needed. Another convening participant agreed data needs to be specific to have value. When her agency was able to view data at the county level or even department level, everyone was able to understand why it mattered in their day-to-day work. By drilling down to the most relevant statistics, multiple agencies were better able to use data as a tool to assess outcomes and guide decision-making.
- **Highlight successes** — One state leader said her agency used data to celebrate what the program was doing well by creating data dashboards that clearly presented the most relevant data on how children, youth, and families were faring. By keeping the data visible to staff, her agency was able to increase commitment to the effort.

Problems Can Be Demoralizing

With any system reform or change effort, setbacks will happen. They are a normal part of the change process, but can hamper implementation if they cause leaders and champions to lose hope. At the January 2014 convening, participants suggested the following strategies to respond to this barrier:

- **Admit failures or mistakes, but do so carefully** — One state child welfare leader said her agency found value in publicly admitting what hasn’t worked. In her experience, people then came forward to help brainstorm solutions and work together to achieve the program’s goals. A nonprofit leader agreed, but also noted the importance of balancing how you discuss problems so that you are clear you are looking for solutions, not punishing or blaming anyone who was part of the setback.

- **Plan learning opportunities** — A county social services manager at the meeting explained that her project has been careful to frame problems as learning opportunities. At regular review meetings, staff bring issues forward and the team discusses how to respond and if changes should be made. A nonprofit agency director agreed that healthy systems look at what happened and ask how to prevent similar problems from happening again, just as hospital systems have teams to review deaths or serious medical errors. Efforts such as these are part of effective continuous quality improvement systems.

Funding

One of the biggest challenges for any social service program is funding, and support services for adoption, foster care, and kinship care are no exception. Although many of the support program leaders we talked with at the January 2014 convening had stable funding sources, they still struggled with the demand for services and the need to do more with less. The section that follows is a more detailed analysis of potential funding streams, but below are a few tips shared at the convening:

- **Use data to make your case** — One meeting participant explained his agency used data to bring about change by highlighting previous efforts that had succeeded. By sharing information about evidence-based practices, the team was able to convince others to join the effort. Whether the data is about what others have done successfully or is specific to your program site, data such as that presented in Chapter 1 can show how investing in child well-being, placement stability, and permanency can save money in the long run.
- **Build external support** — Several program leaders noted that having community leaders, such as foundation staff, county commissioners, governors, state commissioners, and tribal council members, engaged in and informed about the work can help ensure more reliable funding and support. If these leaders are aware of the need to find and support families for children and youth in adoption, foster care, and kinship care, they may be more willing to invest scarce resources in services that have demonstrated value. As noted earlier, several programs invited external community leaders to conferences, support groups, and other events so they would see the value of services firsthand.
- **Engage community members** — Many of the programs in Chapter 3 and those represented at the January convening use volunteers as one way to keep program costs down. One adoption support program manager explained that when there is no staff for a particular service, it's worth exploring whether a network of volunteers can do the job. Her program has been able to rely on volunteer leaders for in-person support groups and an online support community. Another nonprofit leader identified a group of individuals who had inquired about adoption or foster care, but didn't move forward with the process. These individuals wanted to contribute somehow, so the agency ran background checks, and did a few hours of training, including having them hear from youth in care. Then the team began planning and volunteering at respite events for young people in care. Over time, the volunteer group began paying membership dues to support the agency's activities and has hosted fundraising events for recruitment and support services. One participant at the convening suggested hosting community lunches where youth and parents tell their stories to business leaders. Once they hear directly from the people they might be helping, many community members are more willing to make in-kind or monetary donations to the program.

Funding Support Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families

Most programs to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families in this guide rely on diverse sources of funding, with significant public investment (federal, state or tribal, and county) paired with private sources such as foundation or corporate grants, donations, and other nonprofit fundraising efforts. In its review of states' publicly funded post-adoption support programs, the Donaldson Adoption Institute reports the following funding sources, with federal Title IV-B, Part 2, being the most common:¹¹²

States' Use of Funding Streams for Post-Adoption Services		
Funding Stream	# States (n=41)	% of States
Title IV-B, Part 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Adoption Support & Promotion	34	82.90%
Adoption Incentive Funds	20	48.80%
State Child Welfare Funds	18	43.90%
Other Federal Funds	8	19.50%
Other State Funds	8	19.50%
Title XX, Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)	7	17.10%
Title IV-B, Part 1, Child Welfare Services	6	14.60%
Title IV-B, Part 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, purposes other than adoption	5	12.20%
Title IV-A, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	2	4.90%
Early Periodic Screening and Diagnostic Testing (EPSDT)	2	4.90%
Federal Grants, e.g., Adoption Opportunities	0	0.00%

Federal Funding Streams¹¹³

There are a number of federal funding streams that can be used to offer support services for adoptive, foster, and kinship care families. The most common are outlined below.

Title IV-B, Part 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program

Covered services include adoption promotion and support, family preservation, family reunification, and family support. The law requires states to spend a “significant portion” of Title IV-B, Part 2, funds on each covered area. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services instructs states to spend at least 20 percent in each area, including adoption promotion and support, although states can obtain waivers. In 2012, states planned to spend about 21 percent of Title IV-B, Part 2, funds on adoption promotion and support. About 23 percent was to be spent on prevention and support

services and another 25 percent on crisis intervention. Both of these services can serve adoptive, foster, and kinship care families.¹¹⁴ Many programs in Chapter 3 use Title IV-B, Part 2, funds, including Tennessee's Adoption Support and Preservation, Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections, and DePelchin's CPS Post Adoption Program.

Title IV-B, Part 1, Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services

Among other purposes, funds can be used to promote safety, permanence, and well-being of children in foster or adoptive placements. For 2012, states planned to spend only about 2 percent of funds on adoption promotion and support. They planned to spend about 13 percent on preventive and support services, which may have served foster, adoptive, or kinship care families. These funds can also be used to train foster and adoptive parents.¹¹⁵ Only about half of tribes responding to a National Resource Center for Tribes survey reported that they are currently accessing Title IV-B funds.¹¹⁶ Title IV-B, Part 1, funds are used to support post-adoption services in Colorado, Louisiana, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Utah, and Wyoming.¹¹⁷

Title IV-E

Although Title IV-E is primarily for foster care maintenance, adoption assistance, and guardianship assistance payments, it can provide funding for some supportive services. The Foster Care portion of Title IV-E can be used for support services such as case planning, management, and review and training for foster parents. Adoption Assistance funds under Title IV-E can be used to support placement costs and other administrative activities related to adoption and training for adoptive parents. The Guardianship Assistance Program of Title IV-E can cover the same types of services for families with children in guardianship placements.

For tribes, access to Title IV-E funds is still limited because most do not have a direct Title IV-E agreement with the federal government; most rely on accessing funds through cooperative agreements with states. Several tribes have direct Title IV-E agreements now and about half of the tribes recently surveyed by the National Resource Center for Tribes reported accessing Title IV-E funds through a tribal-state agreement.¹¹⁸

A few of the programs in Chapter 3 — the Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association and the Child Wellbeing Project, for example — use some Title IV-E funds. Two programs, KEEP and The Children's Home, have been able to use funds from a Title IV-E waiver to provide support services.

Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

Passed in 2008, the Fostering Connections Act expanded federal eligibility for adoption assistance benefits, which has resulted in savings for states and those tribes receiving Title IV-E Adoption funding. The law requires these jurisdictions to reinvest these savings in child welfare services and many jurisdictions are specifically investing the money in supporting adoptive, foster, or kinship care families. In Minnesota, for example, the legislature designated that both Adoption Incentive and Foster Connections Act reinvestment funds be spent on post-adoption support services, including peer support. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, passed in fall 2014, requires states to invest at least 30 percent of these savings on post-adoption and post-guardianship

services and services to sustain other permanent outcomes for children and youth, with 20 percent designated for adoption and guardianship support. In addition, Fostering Connections funded – and the Preventing Sex Trafficking Act continued – Family Connections Grants, which have enabled some jurisdictions to fund kinship navigator and similar programs.

Adoption Incentive Program

These federal incentive funds must be spent on child welfare services such as those covered by Titles IV-B and IV-E. Many states and counties use Adoption Incentive funds to offer post-adoption and similar support services. States currently have three years to spend their Adoption Incentive monies and funding varies year to year based on increases in adoptions, which means the funds may be best used for short-term or pilot projects. The Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections program is funded in part with Adoption Incentive funds.

Medicaid

Medicaid funds child welfare services such as targeted case management, therapeutic foster care, and health and mental health care for many children and youth in foster care, adoption, and kinship care. Quite a few of the California-based programs profiled in Chapter 3 use Medicaid funds, particularly the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment program, to provide support services for adoptive, foster, and kinship families.

[July 2013 guidance](#) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services encouraged states to use “trauma-focused screening, functional assessments and evidence-based practices (EBPs) in child-serving settings for the purpose of improving child well-being.” The guidance also emphasizes that states can provide an array of home- and community-based services for individuals who have a significant need.¹¹⁹

The Affordable Care Act expanded the use of home- and community-based care waiver services for children and youth in foster care. As detailed in the Bridges to Health profile in Chapter 3, New York has used this option to offer coordinated medical and mental health care for children and youth in foster care. Alabama and Louisiana have similar systems of care.¹²⁰

Social Services Block Grant

The Social Services Block Grant can be used to address five specific goals, including reducing unnecessary institutional care by supporting home-based care; preventing child abuse and neglect; and supporting reunification. These funds are available to tribes only through a competitive application process to the states. Colorado, Louisiana, New Mexico, South Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia, and Wyoming use Social Services Block Grant funds to support post-adoption services.¹²¹

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

Although this funding stream is first designated to economic support, States, Tribes, and Territories can use remaining TANF funds to provide family support services, including services to help children in the care of relatives or services to help children remain in their homes. TANF is a particularly relevant source of funding for kinship support programs. About 50 percent of states use TANF funds to support kinship caregivers outside the foster care system.¹²²

Adoption Opportunities

Over the years, this discretionary grant source has provided funds that enable States, Territories, Tribes, and other public and nonprofit organizations the chance to offer post-adoption services and services to reduce or address trauma. Funding priorities and amounts change each year.

Older Americans Act

The Act's National Family Caregiver Support Program offers funds to States and Territories to meet the needs of a variety of older Americans, including those 55 and older who are caring for children and youth younger than 18. Nationally, many kinship programs, including the Washington state kinship programs profiled in Chapter 3, use this funding stream. The act also created the Native American Caregiver Support Services program, which enables tribal organizations to offer home- and community-based supports and can be used for support for kinship caregivers.

Other Federal Sources

Other federal sources of funds to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families include:

- **Bureau of Indian Affairs** — For federally recognized tribes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs social services funding is an important source of funds for foster care and other child welfare services.
- **The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** — Through its Children's Mental Health Initiative, States, Tribes, Territories, and other jurisdictions can develop a home- and community-based system of care to support children and youth with serious emotional disturbances and their families.¹²³ The Administration's Mental Health Block Grant also provides States and Territories with the opportunity to serve children under age 18 who have a diagnosable behavioral, mental, or emotional condition that significantly affects their daily life. The Substance Abuse Block Grant can also be used for supportive services to families. Other discretionary grant programs offer opportunities for State, Tribes, Territories, and other public and nonprofit organizations to meet the mental health needs of children and youth. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is a primary funder of the trauma programs mentioned on pages 55 to 58 and of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, which developed the parent resource curriculum described on page 58.
- **Keeping Families and Children Safe Act (formerly Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act)** — Through the Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, both States and Tribes are able to access funding to prevent child abuse and neglect, including programs such as family support, respite, parenting programs, and peer support.
- **Chafee Foster Care Independence Act** — The act funds life-skills support for older children and youth in foster care who are likely to age out of care; services can include emotional support such as mentoring and educational support. In many states youth in adoption and guardianship are also eligible for services.
- **Title V of the Social Security Act (Maternal and Child Health)** — This section of the Social Security Act funds grants to states to address child and maternal health, particularly for mothers, children, and youth in rural areas and who have limited financial resources. Services covered can include health assessments and follow-up treatment and systems of coordinated care for children with special health needs.

- **Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)** — Part C of the Act enables states to fund services for children birth to two who have disabilities and their families.

State, Tribal, Territorial, and Local Funds

State, Tribal, Territorial, and county funds are a significant source of funding for programs to support adoptive, foster, and kinship care families. Many programs use general funds to support services for these families, while others have specific legislation designating monies for support services. In Illinois, for example, the state's Family Preservation Act specifically mentions preserving adoptive and guardianship families. In Washington state, the legislature created the Kinship Support Services program and designates funds specifically for this purpose. In many cases, having the program's goals identified in legislation has helped provided a stable and growing source of funds. Other states have laws designating certain federal funding streams be used for support services, such as the investment of Adoption Incentive funds in particular types of programs.

County child welfare funds are an important funding source for county-operated systems. Local jurisdictions may contract with agencies to provide support services as in Placer County (CA) or pay a per diem for services, as the counties do for kinship services provided by A Second Chance, Inc.

In addition to designated child welfare funds, programs often use state or local mental health funding streams or support from other public agencies or departments. UCLA TIES for Families, for example, receives funding from the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health. The Seminole Family Preservation Department partners with the tribe's Departments of Education and Health to provide necessary services to children and youth in foster care. Kennedy Krieger enhances its foster care support services with funding from the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration.

Other Funding Sources

For the most part, the programs profiled in Chapter 3 don't rely solely on public funding. Several of the nonprofit organizations have United Way funding, almost all raise donations from individuals or businesses, and many have successfully obtained foundation grants to support their services. In addition, many of the nonprofits have special events and other fundraisers to build community commitment to the work and to raise money for support and other services. As with the federal and state funding streams described earlier, funding sources may not be those dedicated to child welfare. Program leaders reported receiving grants from health care organizations or funders with a focus in mental health, community development, education, and related fields. For kinship care programs, Area Agencies on Aging are a key funding source.

In some cases, programs share costs with families served by charging fees for trainings or events or by asking families to use adoption assistance or insurance to cover therapeutic services.

In-kind donations and volunteers are also key for many programs. Several of the programs with university partners — Fostering Healthy Futures and UCLA TIES, for example — rely on student volunteers or interns as part of the program model. Most of the programs providing material support such as food, clothes, or supplies benefit from community donations of goods.

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