

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.