2011 National Adoption Month
Capacity Building Toolkit

Honor National Adoption Month All Year!
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Dear Friends,

According to the latest data from the Children’s Bureau of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), there are 408,000 children in foster care in the United States. While historically more than 50 percent of children in care reunify with their birth parents, the remainder will require an alternate permanency outcome. Of the children in foster care who will not return home, 107,000 are available for adoption\(^1\).

More than half of the children waiting for families are children of color, over the age of seven, or members of sibling groups who should be placed together. Statistics tell us that it would take less than 1 percent of the American population to give every waiting child a home! That’s the primary focus of National Adoption Month: raising public awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families for children who are in need of a family to grow up in.

The first major effort to promote awareness of the need for adoptive families for children in foster care occurred in 1976, when Governor Mike Dukakis pronounced an Adoption Week in Massachusetts. The idea grew in popularity and spread nationwide. In 1984, President Reagan proclaimed the first National Adoption Week, and in 1995, under President Clinton, the week was expanded to the entire month of November.

Every November, a Presidential Proclamation launches activities and celebrations to help build awareness of adoption throughout the nation. Thousands of community organizations arrange and host programs, events, and activities to share positive adoption stories, challenge the myths, and draw attention to the thousands of children in foster care who are waiting for permanent families.

Today, National Adoption Month is celebrated during the month of November throughout the United States. In addition to providing national awareness of the need for adoptive families, National Adoption Month activities celebrate children and families and call our nation to action to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being for all of our children.

AdoptUSKids, a service of the Children’s Bureau, has created the “National Adoption Month Capacity Building Toolkit” to assist your organization increase awareness about adoption and to help you in your efforts to recruit and retain foster and adoptive parents while promoting National Adoption Month in November. The 2011 Toolkit builds on last year’s fresh approach to helping jurisdictions and agencies to examine and build capacity

\(^1\) The data used in this document is from The AFCARS Report #18, Preliminary FY 2010 Estimates as of June 2011, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau.
to recruit, retain, and connect foster and adoptive parents. It is organized around five areas of practice that historically have presented challenges to child welfare professionals:

- supporting and retaining foster and adoptive families
- diligent recruitment
- working with diverse populations
- proactive family finding
- interjurisdictional placements

In this Toolkit, you will find a wealth of information, strategies, and tools structured around these five topics, with an emphasis on creating lasting organizational improvements. We know that true, sustainable capacity building requires an intentional focus on building an organizational culture that supports and reflects the values and priorities that an agency is seeking to apply to its work. We have sought to provide resources that can help support your efforts to promote deeper organizational change as well as ideas that you can put to use right away in your work.

Also available are the National Adoption Recruitment Campaign Public Service Advertisements (PSAs) created by the Ad Council, in partnership with the Children's Bureau and AdoptUSKids, to recruit families for children in foster care. New PSAs have been developed and released each year since 2004. In previous years, these PSAs have been aimed at general recruitment of families for children in care as well as targeting homes for children of color, sibling groups, older children and teens, and Spanish language spots in TV, radio and print media. The 2011 campaign targets families for pre-teens—children between the ages of 9 and 12.

As you’ll see throughout this Toolkit, the members of the Children’s Bureau’s Training and Technical Assistance Network—of which AdoptUSKids is a proud member—offer extensive resources to support States, Tribes, and Territories as they build their capacity to serve children and families touched by the child welfare system. You can learn more about the Training and Technical Assistance Network and the services and resources available from its members at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/tta/.

Another great way to celebrate National Adoption Month is to display the new 2011 National Adoption Month poster, developed collaboratively by Child Welfare Information Gateway and AdoptUSKids. This year’s poster features photographs of real adoptive families—AdoptUSKids’ media spokesfamilies—and includes all new suggestions for ways to honor National Adoption Month by building individual and agency capacity. The poster is in English on one side and Spanish on the other. You can request free copies of the poster from AdoptUSKids (888-200-4005 or info@adoptuskids.org). Special thanks go to our colleagues at Child Welfare Information Gateway for collaborating on this annual project.
Should you have any questions about the National Adoption Month Campaign or need assistance, please call or email AdoptUSKids (888-200-4005 or info@adoptuskids.org). Be sure to take some time during National Adoption Month to discover the rich resources that are available on our website (www.adoptuskids.org). Additionally, the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents (NRCRRFAP) at AdoptUSKids is available to provide free, on-site technical assistance to States, Territories and Tribes to further develop or enhance statewide or local recruitment and retention efforts. For more information about these technical assistance services, visit www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment or email Mike Grimes, Associate Director, at mike@adoptex.org.

Wishing you much success as we join our efforts to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children,

Kathleen J. Ledesma, MSW
National Project Director, AdoptUSKids
Overview

FEATURES OF THE 2011 NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH TOOLKIT

The 2011 National Adoption Month Toolkit provides a rich variety of information and tools aimed at helping build agency service capacity in working with children, youth, and families in five key areas of child welfare practice: 1) Supporting and Retaining Families; 2) Diligent Recruitment; 3) Working with Diverse Populations; 4) Proactive Family Finding; and 5) Interjurisdictional Placements.

The vision is that child welfare professionals will take advantage of this year’s National Adoption Month to honor the adoptive families of today and tomorrow by helping to create enduring change in how you and your agency approach this important work. By embracing this opportunity to incorporate these important values, strategies, and techniques into your daily work, you can carry the spirit and momentum of National Adoption Month forward long after November ends.

WHERE TO FIND PREVIOUS TOOLKITS

Up until 2010, National Adoption Month Toolkits focused on general recruitment efforts and awareness-building activities. Recognizing that the previous approach to the toolkits was helpful to many jurisdictions, we still have the 2009 National Adoption Month Toolkit available online (www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/2009NAMToolkit.pdf) for continued use and access.

TOOLKIT SECTIONS

The 2011 Toolkit is organized around the five key areas of practice, as described above. Each section of the Toolkit includes the following:

- An Overview of the theme and its role in carrying the spirit and momentum of National Adoption Month forward long after November ends;
- Ideas from the Field—real-world examples of how to put the theme to work;
- Brief details on how the theme links with the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act);
- Take Action suggestions for today, this week and this month to build personal as well as agency capacity in each area or theme;
- Tools at the end of each section. Our hope is that these will become valuable additions to your collection of resources.

In addition, throughout the Toolkit are suggestions for wonderful free resources available online. You may wish to explore all of these tools and resources as you look for ways to build your capacity and that of your agency to find permanent loving families for children and youth.
NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE DATA—KNOWING THE DATA

With an estimated 107,000 children and youth in foster care waiting to be adopted, and nearly 28,000 youth aging out of foster care without a permanent family in 2010, there is much work to be done to find adoptive families and build capacity to find more families in the future!

Of the 107,000 waiting children and youth:

- 53 percent are male.
- 47 percent are female.
- 29 percent are African American.
- 22 percent are Hispanic.
- 39 percent are white.
- The average age is 8.1 years.

On average, these youth have been in foster care for 38 months—that’s more than three years—waiting for a permanency outcome.

It is important to know the national data as well as State and local data on these and other important items. Helping all levels of agency staff to be familiar with this data, as well as developing presentations and fact sheets for the public, can improve communication with potential caregivers and stakeholders in addition to helping focus recruitment efforts.

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WHY SUPPORT AND RETENTION MATTER

An essential ingredient to achieving timely permanence for children and youth in foster care is having a sufficient pool of potential adoptive families who are ready and able to meet their needs. Recruitment is certainly a crucial first step to bring prospective families through the door, but if they are not engaged or do not feel supported after their initial agency contact, then opportunities to provide permanence to children and youth waiting to be adopted may be lost. Retention and support are important keys to making recruitment efforts truly effective.

In addition to simply being the right thing to do, supporting prospective and current parents is in an agency’s best interest. Satisfied foster, adoptive, and kinship families are your agency’s best recruiters, so making sure they feel connected to the agency—and supported in their journey—is critical to building the effectiveness of recruitment efforts.

RESOURCES IN THIS SECTION

The resources in this section are designed to strengthen and enhance individual and agency efforts to support and retain families. In addition to offering perspectives to consider and key attitudes for professionals to embrace, the tools in this section will help agencies identify ways to incorporate good customer service principles into their work with families throughout the process.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR RETENTION

At its core, retention is fundamentally about treating people well, meeting their needs and providing encouragement as they go through the process of training, assessment, waiting for a child to be placed with them, as well as during and after placement. Although
Support for families can—and should—take many forms. As you directly engage with individual families, you have the opportunity to learn more about what each family needs in order to feel supported and to build a positive relationship with the agency. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Even the most motivated and resilient prospective families can become discouraged and deterred by the licensure or approval process and while waiting for a placement. Connecting them with experienced families, or other waiting families, and encouraging them to keep going can help families feel less isolated and can provide some much-needed motivation.

- Some agencies facilitate “while you wait” support groups as well as support groups for families who already have children placed with them. This allows families to build relationships and support networks that can sustain them not only as they go through the process but also as they become parents.

- Technology and the Internet may provide opportunities to build virtual support groups that can be a valuable option for families who may not be able to gather in the same physical location. An open and reciprocal line of communication with the agency plays a significant role in helping the family feel supported and respected.

- Supporting families requires providing support wherever they are. If you are working with a family in another part of the State or in another State or country, be sure to explore the resources and services available in their area. For families in other States, check out the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (see Section 5 in this Toolkit for more information).

THROUGH THE EYES OF FAMILIES: WORKING WITH CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES

An essential element of supporting families is to understand how the adoption and foster care process looks and feels from their perspective. Aspects of the home study or licensing process that may seem routine to staff may feel stressful and confusing to prospective parents. For example, parents sometimes report frustration with the length of time between each step and the required paperwork, as well as the overall process.

Agencies may find it helpful to map out their agency processes to determine where customer service could be improved or services could be streamlined, including how many forms there are and if some can be placed on a website. Even if the process can’t be changed, the timelines can’t be shortened, or the amount of paperwork can’t be reduced, the social worker representing the agency can demonstrate empathy and convey support for parents by acknowledging the complexity and realities of the process and encouraging them to keep going. Here are some tips to keep in mind:
**Family’s sense of time**—Remember that any waiting can feel like too long of a wait, especially since many prospective foster and adoptive families have been thinking about fostering or adopting for years, long before they ever contacted an agency.

**It’s all “the system”**—Families don’t differentiate between local, county, State, or Federal bureaucracies when they’re trying to get through a process. If “the system” is perceived as putting up barriers to their response to the needs of children and youth, families experience the frustration as all coming from the same source: whoever is their point of contact.

**Language matters**—The processes and the language of child welfare systems can be confusing and challenging to prospective and new foster, adoptive, and kinship families. Be mindful of how child welfare jargon and terms can be confusing to families and how this confusion makes it harder for families to figure out how to navigate the system.

**IDEAS FROM THE FIELD**

**Oklahoma’s Customer Service Training for Staff**

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services’ (OKDHS) Bridge to the Future project, funded by a 2008 Diligent Recruitment grant from the Children’s Bureau, trains and supports staff in providing good customer service to prospective and current parents. Driving Oklahoma’s focus on customer service was the identification of a limitation in their existing processes: “Customer service and support for families in the process was not always meeting the needs of families. Families would then often drop-out prior to approval.” (Described in Oklahoma’s spring 2010 presentation to other Diligent Recruitment grantees at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/professionalResourceCenter/documents/bridge-to-the-future-spring-2010-grantees-meeting-presentation.pdf).

One of the creative components of the Bridge to the Future’s customer service initiative is providing online training for staff entitled, “Customer Service: Valuing Our Resource Families.” The training has five main modules: Recruiting and Retaining Resource Parents; Our Partners: Resource Parents; Changing Perceptions; Providing Excellent Customer Service; and Customer Service in Action. The objectives for the training are to highlight:

- The importance of providing excellent customer services to our families
- Why resource families are hard to retain
- Who our families are and how to help them
- Results that describe the needs and perceptions of families from OKDHS’s research, surveys, and focus groups
- How to overcome common misconceptions about families revealed from the research
• 11 “how to” tips to provide excellent customer service
• Examples of what great customer service looks like in action

For more information about the Bridge to the Future project and to see selected project materials, go to: www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/diligent-recruitment/oklahoma/.

Connecticut’s While You Wait Program

While You Wait, a program that supports and educates families waiting to adopt from the foster care system, serves two purposes: 1) enhanced preparation of families to make lifelong commitments to children waiting to be adopted and 2) as a supplement to the amount of adoption-specific information, it can be offered in pre-service training.

Karen Miskunas, Program Manager at the Connecticut Department of Children and Family Services, shared details on the program’s creation:

When I came into my current position in 2005 we knew we had some excellent families who had come forward to adopt children from the foster care system. Like many States may have experienced, the type of children our waiting families had dreamed of parenting were not necessarily the same children in the State foster care system. We knew we needed to do something to open up this challenging conversation. We began by getting together with families who were waiting in one geographic area of the State. We brought pictures of our waiting children (which were our Heart Gallery pictures) and talked about these children and the hundreds of others they represented who are adopted every year. It was an excellent beginning for our follow-up “While You Wait” series of trainings and discussions.

From that initial meeting with waiting families, Connecticut partnered with Casey Family Services to develop the ongoing While You Wait program. Today, families are referred to While You Wait just before being licensed for adoption and are welcome to attend even after a placement has occurred. Each year more than 15 training opportunities are offered. Topics are identified based on needs identified by staff and families. Recent sessions have addressed the post-licensing process for pre-adoptive families; understanding the adoption “journey” and post-adoption supports; legal risk adoption; open adoption; adopting transracially or transculturally; understanding loss and trauma; the importance of biological family and the State’s Search Program for adult adoptees; the effects of substance abuse on child development; parenting strategies; life style issues, including nutrition; and understanding attachment. Each of the sessions is offered in a support group format emphasizing discussion rather than formal training. The feedback from families who attend the sessions has been consistently positive.
While You Wait sessions are offered in four major geographic areas, making a session accessible within an hour’s drive for most families in the state. The sessions are facilitated by a mix of State trainers, adoptive parents, and other professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, parent educators, and mental health clinicians. The program has a modest training budget, which has been able to stretch due to the willingness of some presenters to donate their services or accept a reduced payment. While You Wait is a collaborative effort of State staff with area office foster care and adoption staff, who also attend the sessions. Staff members find the sessions help to build their knowledge of adoption issues and also offer the opportunity to better get to know the pre-adoptive families. To learn more, contact Karen Miskunas at: Karen.Miskunas@ct.gov.

Our Home, Our Family Curriculum

Acknowledging the importance of supporting parents’ relationships with each other as a way to help keep foster and adoptive families stable and well-functioning after a child is placed with them, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin developed a curriculum specifically focused on helping foster and adoptive parents strengthen their relationships and communication skills. The Our Home, Our Family curriculum was developed as part of an Adoption Opportunities grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau under the Healthy Marriages initiative. It is designed to be used by foster care and adoption agencies as a post-placement support to help couples respond to the common experiences of foster and adoptive parents feeling stressed and overwhelmed by the challenges involved in parenting children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

During Adoption Resources of Wisconsin’ five-year research grant, participating families demonstrated encouraging outcomes and self-reported improvements:

- Just over 1% of couples surveyed divorced during the five-year research grant.
- 46% fewer moves for children. Fewer children (seven compared to thirteen) re-entered some type of out-of-home care. Despite many challenges, the number of children who moved, even temporarily, into alternative care was reduced.
- 97% of couples felt their family functioning had improved.
- 98% of couples reported increased knowledge, skills, and awareness.
- 99% of couples felt that others better understood their family’s challenges.
- On average, couples reported a 380% increase in confidence when dealing with children’s behavior.

Respite Care Partnerships

Families who are parenting former or current foster children face many challenges and sources of stress. Many experienced foster, adoptive, and kinship families have found that respite care provides a much-needed break and chance to re-energize so that they can provide the best possible care to their children. AdoptUSKids has provided parent support groups and associations with mini-grants of up to $5,000 to start respite care programs in partnership with their local public agencies.

Child welfare agencies interested in exploring partnerships with local support groups to expand respite care options in their area will find great suggestions and tips in the publication Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite in Your Community (www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/TakingABreak.pdf). The publication highlights program models and outcomes for many respite programs that were developed through parent group and agency partnerships. The publication is scheduled to be updated in 2012 to incorporate lessons learned from the more than 100 parent support groups that have benefitted from the AdoptUSKids respite grants.

LINKING WITH THE FOSTERING CONNECTIONS ACT

Supporting and retaining families not only helps agencies achieve improvements in placement stability and permanency for children in foster care, it can also link directly to jurisdictions’ efforts to implement and comply with provisions of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act.

- **Promoting Educational Stability**—As child welfare systems seek to improve educational stability for children in foster care, focusing on foster care placement stability is key. By supporting and retaining foster parents, jurisdictions can minimize foster care moves that result from foster parent turnover and burnout. Keeping children in stable foster care placements makes it easier for them to remain in the same school.

For more detailed guidance and information about implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, see the resources available on the Children’s Bureau’s website at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm and the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections’ website at: www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/.
**Today**

**Managers and Supervisors Can**

- Browse the National Adoption Month website (www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/nam) to look for creative projects from other jurisdictions and great resources to share with staff to support their work with families.
- Talk with staff about what they can do to improve the agency’s ability to answer calls and questions from prospective and current parents promptly and thoroughly. Explore whether there are pieces of information that could be compiled in scripts for staff, as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), or on websites to make it easier to answer common questions from parents.

**Front-line Workers Can**

- Download and read the issue of Recruiting News on retention, by the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC). The issue provides important tips and perspectives on how to support and retain parents. The issue can be downloaded at: www.nacac.org/adoptalk/retention.pdf.
- Add a message to your email signature file acknowledging the dedication of foster, adoptive, and kinship families and thanking them for caring for children (such as “On a daily basis, please acknowledge the valuable services that foster parents and kinship care givers provide to children and youth.” or “Have you thanked a foster parent today?”).
- Browse the agency’s website for important information and test the links to make sure they are all working correctly and that families can access the information they need. Immediately report any problems to the staff who manage the website.

**This Week**

**Managers and Supervisors Can**

★ Explore whether your agency has any communications strategies that include using social media tools to engage with and support families. If not, begin internal conversations about the possibility of establishing a social media presence as an effective way to expand the agency’s opportunities for communicating with prospective and current families.

★ View the archived webcast Adaptive Leadership, presented at the 2010 National Association of State Adoption Programs (NASAP) meeting, to learn ways to integrate adaptive leadership principles into your work. Brainstorm ways that adaptive leadership may help you and your staff improve how you support families. The webcast is available at: www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts/nasap-2010/.

★ Order copies of the 2011 National Adoption Month poster to give to your staff and to post in common areas around the office. You can request free posters by calling AdoptUSKids at 888-200-4005 or emailing info@adoptuskids.org.

★ Reach out to the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents (NRCRRFAP) at AdoptUSKids (www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment) to explore options for receiving free technical assistance on customer service and other ways to build your capacity to support and retain families.

★ Provide detailed, clear directions (for travel by car and public transportation) to locations for agency recruitment, orientation, and training events. Include information about where to park, building entrances, any restrictions about what can be brought into the building, and other helpful information for visitors. Distribute this information widely in electronic and hard copy formats to all relevant staff to share with prospective parents and post the information on the agency’s website.

★ Develop the agency’s website to provide as much information as is possible and appropriate about the process of adopting from foster care including what families should expect during the process and sources of support for families both before and after they adopt.

★ Prepare scripts, talking points, and curriculum or information guides for staff so that they correctly and consistently answer questions from prospective and current parents.

**Front-line Workers Can**

★ Share the handout, “Tips for Families: What To Do While You Wait,” included on page 17 of this Toolkit, with prospective parents and provide an accompanying list of resources and support groups in your area.

★ Think about the terminology used in your work that might be confusing for families. Brainstorm alternative terms to use to be more plainspoken and clear without being condescending or overly simplistic. Avoid using acronyms.
Provide a glossary of terms that families should know as they go through the foster care, adoption, or kinship care process to help them understand terms that are common within the child welfare field that they may encounter. Provide definitions of common acronyms. For examples, explore the glossaries from the North American Council on Adoptable Children (www.nacac.org/howtoadopt/glossary.html) and The Adoption Exchange (www.adoptex.org/site/PageServer?pagename=adoption_terms).

Read AdoptUSKids’ respite care guide Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite in Your Community to learn more about partnering with parent support groups to provide high-quality respite care to families. The guide can be downloaded at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/TakingABreak.pdf.

THIS MONTH

Managers and Supervisors Can

Work with local businesses and organizations to encourage them to be adoption-friendly workplaces. For more details on ways that employers can support adoption and to see organizations that have been recognized by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption as being adoption-friendly, see: www.davethomasfoundation.org/Our-Programs/Adoption-Friendly-Workplace/Adoption-Friendly-Employers---Benchmarks.

Work with staff to map out the process that prospective parents go through from their initial contact with the agency through having a child placed with them. Develop the map from the parent’s perspective, rather than from the agency perspective. Use the mapping process to identify points in the process where families are likely to experience long delays, be confused, have trouble moving to the next stage, or experience different responses depending on which workers they are working with in the agency.

Examine whether there are particular communities or subsets of prospective and current parent who aren’t currently receiving culturally appropriate support and may need specialized information or support opportunities. For example, consider developing support groups for adults who may be underserved by traditional support groups, such as adults with limited English proficiency; lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) adults; and adults living in rural areas.

Identify resources to help support prospective and current parents in their relationships so that they can maintain healthy relationships in light of the stresses that foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers often experience. For one example, look into the Our Home Our Family curriculum (www.ourhome-ourfamily.org) from Adoption Resources of Wisconsin. The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (www.healthymarriageinfo.org) also has extensive resources on supporting healthy relationships.
★ Design evaluations of the foster care, adoption, and kinship care approval and preparation processes to obtain feedback from prospective parents. Use the feedback as a basis for making improvements in forms, informational material, preparation classes, and other key parts of the process that may be confusing for prospective parents.

★ Work with the appropriate agency leadership staff to designate a few parking spots at the agency’s parking lot as “Parking for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families Only” as a way of showing that the agency values these families.

★ Take a critical look at the room(s) where the agency holds parent orientation and training sessions. Find ways to make it more welcoming and friendly—consider adding kid artwork and photos, painting the walls and other warm touches.

★ Have staff use the assessment tool “Is Your Response System Family Friendly?” located on page 19 of this Toolkit.

**Front-line Workers Can**

★ Listen to the archived teleconference entitled *Practice Issues with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families*, presented by the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections and AdoptUSKids in June 2010 to learn about key considerations in working with and supporting LGBT families. The teleconference archive and supporting materials are available at: [www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/06-16-10.html](http://www.nrcpfc.org/teleconferences/06-16-10.html).

★ Learn more about foster parent retention by reading *Understanding Foster Parenting: Using Administrative Data to Explore Retention*, a 2005 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The report, including an executive summary, is available at: [www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/foster-parenting/](http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/foster-parenting/).

★ Provide information to families about the Adoption Tax Credit and about the great resources available for parents at [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) and [adoptuskids.org](http://adoptuskids.org).

★ Look on [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org) to see registered families looking to adopt from foster care who might be a good match for children on your caseload who are waiting to be adopted.
Tools for Supporting & Retaining Families
Tips for Families: What To Do While You Wait

As you pursue adopting a child from foster care, waiting can be one of the most challenging and stressful parts of the process. We know that you are eager to have the process move quickly and that waiting for even a relatively short amount of time can be frustrating. Waiting is a normal part of the process, occurring:

• after you leave a voicemail message at an agency with an initial inquiry into adoption
• while you are waiting to attend an orientation session
• after you submit your application and until training classes begin
• until your home study process begins
• after your home study is approved
• while you are waiting to be matched with a child to be placed with you
• after you have a child placed in your home

…. and finishes at finalization!

Waiting can be frustrating, lonely, and disempowering. Although you must make many decisions (when is the right time to build our family through adoption, can we handle this, can we afford it, what age/gender of child do we want, shall I quit my job, and so on) throughout this time, mostly it feels as if this very important part of your life is not in your own hands.

During this difficult time we encourage you to use the time to learn as much as you can. Some ideas you might consider are:

• Read all about adoption. For ideas, browse the following suggested reading lists:
  • www.adoptex.org/site/DocServer/Program.Reading_List_1209.doc?docID=4361
  • www.nacac.org/howtoadopt/howtoadopt.html
• Visit your school district and introduce yourself; learn about the types of services that may be available to children with special needs.
• Check out local mental health providers, both public and private, who have experience and expertise working with adoptive families.
• Learn about adoptive parent support groups; it can be especially helpful getting to know those who are on the same journey as you.
• Identify pediatricians in your area who are sensitive to adoption-related issues and have a specialty in certain diagnoses.
• Begin to line up your support network (child care, respite care providers, therapist, pediatrician, support group, and other adoptive parents).
• Consider becoming a respite care provider for another adoptive or foster family (contract your local department of social services).
• Attend adoption-related classes or seminars in your area.
• Watch online videos about adoption (such as the videos at: www.adoptex.org/site/News2?news_iv_ctrl=1&amp;page=NewsArticle&amp;id=12381)
• Access online supports for waiting adoptive parents through groups and blogs; there are many to choose from.
• Connect with AdoptUSKids on Twitter (@AdoptUSKids) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/AdoptUsKids) to access peer and professional support, advice, and useful information.
• Explore the Child Welfare Information Gateway’s website (www.childwelfare.gov) for comprehensive information about adoption and children in foster care.
• Have fun! Attend an adoption party or a Heart Gallery exhibit, volunteer at a local organization that serves children in your city.
• Know that the child who eventually joins your home will be more than worth waiting for!

Adapted from material from The Adoption Exchange at: www.adoptex.org/site/PageServer?pagename=adoption_while_you_wait
Is Your Response System Family Friendly?

Answer each of the following questions by writing a Yes or No:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 0: Recruitment Event</th>
<th>Y / N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Is there an event planning process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Does the planning process include prospective family(ies)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Are experienced foster and adoptive families invited to participate in events?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: First Contact</th>
<th>Y / N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Have experienced and/or prospective families been engaged in developing the intake process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Is the person who responds to inquiries family-oriented?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Is the person who responds to inquiries familiar with and trained to address expectations and fears families typically present?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 Is there a timely follow-up process for responding to families?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 Is the intake process audited using the “secret shopper method to assure family responsiveness?”</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2: Initial Orientation</th>
<th>Y / N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Does someone follow-up with the family to encourage them to come to orientation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Is the schedule for orientation meetings friendly to various family schedules?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 Are the meeting locations easy to find and, if applicable, near public transportation?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4 Are hearty snacks or meals provided with a time for welcoming and conversation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 Is childcare made available?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.6 Are specific requirements of the home study process explained clearly upfront (i.e., background checks, fingerprinting, medical exams)?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.7 Are special materials or expertly adapted materials provided for special linguistic groups, non-literate groups and those who need alternate formats?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.8 Do you provide families with specific information (i.e., current demographic information) about children needing care?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.9 Do you educate families about specific, common special needs of children coming into care or awaiting permanence?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.10 Do you present training as a means for families to learn more about fostering and adopting before they make decisions?</td>
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</table>
### Step 3: Pre-service Training

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Y / N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Is training offered at times and locations friendly to various family schedules and transportation issues?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Is training offered frequently enough to keep families closely engaged in the process?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Is childcare made available?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Does the training team include experienced foster and/or adoptive parents?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Are experienced foster and/or adoptive parents included in the training activities?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Is special attention given to planning for diverse populations (i.e., foreign or sign language interpreters, reading assistants)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Are reasonably friendly provisions made for making up missed sessions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Is follow-up conducted with families who dropout?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Are exit interviews (satisfaction surveys) conducted, reviewed and analyzed?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>Does feedback from families drive quality improvement efforts?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

### Step 4: Application Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Y / N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Is the paperwork simple and straightforward?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Is the paperwork non-duplicative and streamlined?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Are special materials or expertly adapted materials provided for special linguistic groups, non-literate groups and those who need alternate formats?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Is fingerprinting available on site and processed in a timely way to reduce wait time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Does the agency provide assistance to families who need help filling out the paperwork?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Step 5: Mutual Assessment and Home Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Y / N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Is the assessment a mutual process where families are encouraged to be active partners in deciding whether they want to foster or adopt and work with this particular agency?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Are there enforced timelines and expectations for staff related to completion of the process so it does not drag on unnecessarily?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Is help provided for prospective parents who have fixable impediments (i.e., minor home repairs, beds for children, medical exams, fees, special equipment)?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Is the family fully informed about expectations for birth family involvement &amp; sibling contact (if applicable) and the special needs of the children they are considering fostering and adopting?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Are experienced foster or adoptive parents involved as “buddies,” mentors, or in other roles during this process?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
### Step 6: Licensing, Certification and/or Approval

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.1</strong></td>
<td>Have common barriers to certification or approval been identified and eliminated?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.2</strong></td>
<td>Are parents provided with copies of their family assessment/home studies so that they have a chance to fix any mistakes or misunderstandings?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.3</strong></td>
<td>Are families informed when all the paperwork is complete and licensing/approval has been achieved?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.4</strong></td>
<td>Is dual licensure/approval utilized in your area to eliminate duplication of effort and time?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Step 7: Placement

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.1</strong></td>
<td>Are prospective families provided information and support while they are waiting for placement?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.2</strong></td>
<td>Are there support groups available that waiting families can attend?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.3</strong></td>
<td>Are waiting parents treated with respect and consideration when they call the agency while they are waiting for a placement?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.4</strong></td>
<td>Are parents encouraged to provide respite and/or emergency care while they are waiting?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.5</strong></td>
<td>Are parents involved in matching and placement decisions?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.6</strong></td>
<td>Are parents provided full disclosure of all necessary information so that they can make a fully informed consent to a placement?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Count the number of questions that you answered with a “Yes” ____**

- 36 to 48 (75% - 100%) = Family friendly
- 24 to 35 (50% - 74%) = On your way to being family friendly
- 0 to 23 (below 50%) = Needs improvement

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2011 National Adoption Month Capacity Building Toolkit
Every Month is...

**Customer Service Month**

In child welfare work, responsive, helpful, respectful service to all of our key partners—including current and prospective families—should be a part of our work every day and every month. These daily tips offer simple ways to infuse customer service principles into your work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask the families you work with what “respect” means to them and how they like to have respect shown to them.</td>
<td>Schedule a time in your day each day to return phone calls and e-mails to current and prospective parents. Make it a priority!</td>
<td>Think about your favorite place to shop or your favorite restaurant. What do they do to provide great customer service? What tips could you borrow from them to apply in your work with families?</td>
<td>Ask to have time in a staff meeting to discuss the importance of providing good customer service to families and colleagues.</td>
<td>Type up detailed, clear directions (by car and public transportation) to the location(s) for your parent orientation events. Distribute these widely to all relevant staff to share with prospective parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greet everyone today by name and with a genuine smile.</td>
<td>Think about the terminology you use in your work that might be confusing for families. Brainstorm alternative terms to use to be more plainspoken and clear without being condescending.</td>
<td>Browse your agency’s website and test the links for important information to make sure the links are all working correctly and that families would be able to access the information they need. Report any problems to the appropriate colleagues right away.</td>
<td>Take a look at the room(s) where you hold parent orientation and training sessions. Find some ways (or solicit a local service organization) to make it more welcoming and friendly—consider adding kid artwork and photos, painting the walls and other warm touches.</td>
<td>Answer your phone right away when it rings. Answering quickly sends a message to callers that they are important and that you value them and their time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think about the questions that prospective foster and adoptive parents ask you. Develop a short document with answers to these questions to share with all prospective parents.</td>
<td>Make sure your voicemail greeting is friendly and current, updated daily, as appropriate.</td>
<td>Start a conversation with your coworkers over lunch about their best customer service experiences. Brainstorm ways that you can each incorporate those ideas into your work.</td>
<td>Try out a new customer service idea of your own!</td>
<td>Has one of your colleagues been particularly helpful to you recently? Send them a quick thank you note by e-mail and copy their supervisor. You can help create a culture that recognizes great customer service, even among colleagues!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When talking to foster, adoptive, or kinship parents today, ask them, “What’s something my agency could do to help you feel like you’re being served well?” Share the feedback you get with your colleagues.</td>
<td>Take a few minutes to celebrate your successes in providing good customer service and support to families.</td>
<td>Include clear directions and a map with the invitation to agency or community-based trainings and meetings. Also include parking and building entrance instructions.</td>
<td>Get a few parking spots at your agency’s parking lot designed as “Parking for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families only” as a way of showing that your agency values these families.</td>
<td>To whatever extent possible, provide basic refreshments for trainings and meetings with foster, adoptive and kinship families, or solicit a local service group to do this as a community service project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If your agency surveys your current foster, adoptive and kin families, take time to read the results—especially the comments—and brainstorm ways to keep the results in mind as you do your work.</td>
<td>Search online for “great customer service” and spend a little time reading about how various companies and organizations approach customer service. Take note of ideas that you could try out in your own work.</td>
<td>Move beyond the Golden Rule; think about practicing the Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as they want done unto them.” For the next level, move on to the Double Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as they would want to have done, but don’t even know to ask for or expect.”</td>
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**2011 National Adoption Month Capacity Building Toolkit**
5 Things You Can Do to Improve Customer Service—Phone Interaction with Families

For prospective and current foster, adoptive and kinship parents, much of their interaction with the child welfare agency takes place by phone. Although these interactions may sometimes seem minor, it is important to remember that each interaction with a family makes an impression—either positive or negative—and may affect the likelihood that the family will remain engaged with the agency. As you work to recruit and retain families for children, you will see more success if you find ways to strengthen your relationships with prospective families at every chance you get.

1. Answer the phone with a positive attitude
   Foster and adoptive parent retention is everyone's business. Having a welcoming attitude is the basis of good customer service.

2. Return calls promptly
   Return all phone calls to prospective and current foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers within 24 hours. Even if you are waiting for more information and can't answer all of the caller's questions, call them back to let them know that you're working on their questions.

3. Be responsive even when you can't answer the phone
   Make your outgoing voicemail message warm and friendly, and state that you'll return messages within 24 hours. Make sure that your voicemail message is current and accurately describes whether you are on vacation or are currently in the office.

4. Avoid using jargon and acronyms
   Parents are likely not familiar with a lot of the terms that are commonly used within child welfare agencies and it's not their responsibility to know all of the agency-speak. Be plainspoken and explain things in ways that your friends and family would understand, but don't speak down to anyone or be condescending.

5. Help the caller get what they need
   Your job isn't to answer the phone; it's to be helpful. If a parent (or prospective parent) is calling with one question, they likely would benefit from other related information but may not know what to ask. You're the expert, so think about what additional information would be helpful to the caller. If you can't help the caller, don't hang up until you have either made a plan to get an answer and get back to them or connected the caller to someone who can answer their questions.

This tip sheet is part of the NRCRRFAP's series of materials aimed at helping child welfare staff improve the effectiveness of recruitment and retention efforts through the use of good customer service practices. These materials offer ideas for integrating customer service principles throughout the child welfare system, recognizing that recruitment and retention are ongoing processes, rather than simply events. These tips were developed and refined based on the wisdom and experience of child welfare staff and leaders who have had significant success in engaging and retaining families for children in foster care.
10 Things You Can Do to Improve Customer Service—Prospective Parent Orientation Sessions

For many prospective parents, orientation sessions provide their first in-depth introduction to the adoption process and your agency. This interaction lays the groundwork for prospective parents’ relationships with your agency. The experience that prospective parents have at the orientation session will send important messages about how welcoming, supportive and encouraging your agency is. Focusing on ways to incorporate good customer service principles into this session can help make sure that the messages parents receive about your agency are positive.

1. Provide clear, detailed directions to the location—including directions for where to park and where to enter the building—to everyone who expresses interest in attending the orientation session. Providing this information helps reduce parents’ concerns about finding the location; it also sends a nice message that you’re anticipating their questions and wanting to help them navigate the adoption process from the very first step.

2. Reserve the best parking spots at the orientation location for the prospective parents. Arrange to ask staff and speakers to park farther away from the front door.

3. Hold the orientation session in a room that is welcoming, clean and friendly. You can help create a positive environment in the room by displaying youth artwork, pictures of youth, and photos of diverse families.

4. As part of your presentation at orientation sessions, be clear about the agency’s nondiscrimination policy and the diversity of families that you welcome (e.g., single parents, same-sex couples, people who rent rather than own homes, etc.). Being explicit about seeking a wide variety of families—and your agency’s commitment to encouraging and supporting them throughout the process—will help make prospective parents feel welcome, accepted, and valued.

5. Provide prospective parents with a map or outline of the adoption process in your agency so they can see where they are in the process and understand the expected timeframes for completing upcoming steps in the process.

6. Provide national, State, and local data on the number of children in care, the children who are waiting for adoption, and what the needs of the agency are.

7. Ensure that trainers and presenters are well informed and can speak well to a public audience.
8. Have PowerPoint presentations, notebooks and handouts that are easy to read, accurate and consistent, so that families get the same information no matter what office or trainer provides the information.

9. Presenting videos, pictures and scenarios or actual people who can give a sense of the children in foster care as well as what the agency is looking for in terms of foster and adoptive parents makes the situation more real for those attending.

10. Provide clear information about costs, fees, reimbursements, and other details that families will need in order to make an informed decision about whether to pursue foster care or adoption.
What Agencies Do to Get Best Results From First Contact to Placement

These tips are adapted from the publication *Practitioner’s Guide: Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts*. For the full list of tips for each step in the process, download the Practitioner’s Guide (http://adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/practitionersGuide.pdf).

STEP 1: FIRST CONTACT

1. Create an organizational culture where recruitment is everybody’s job from director to receptionist, including current foster, adoptive, and kinship families.
2. Prepare the person who answers the phone to answer most questions. Don’t bounce callers around from person to person.
3. Establish standards for immediate personal responses to inquiries.
4. Take a customer-service approach in working with prospective parents; apply good customer service principles in your work to help prospective parents feel welcomed, respected, accepted, and needed.
5. Provide training to all who come into contact with foster, adoptive, and kinship parents on how to handle the first call. Acknowledge cultural differences in training.
6. Periodically audit the agency’s first contact approach:
   - Use a “secret shopper” method in which agency staff call in to personally experience the quality of response.
   - Have auditors use a checklist to rate the experience and give consistent feedback.
   - Ask: Do we respond in a way that encourages the caller to bring friends to orientation?

STEP 2: INITIAL ORIENTATION

1. Have a regular, frequent schedule of orientation meetings.
2. Hold the meetings in an accessible community location (on bus route) and at times convenient to parents.
3. Provide childcare or reimbursement for childcare.
4. Explain up front what the requirements are and why background checks are necessary.
5. Provide individualized help to people with language or reading or sensory challenges.
6. Provide direct access phone numbers for the appropriate agency staff so that people can have private follow up conversations with staff.
STEP 3: PRE-SERVICE TRAINING

1. Send reminder notes a week before training starts.
2. Provide childcare for people with pre-teens and children.
3. Contract with and train foster, adoptive, and kinship parents to be part of the training team.
4. Provide on-site fingerprinting, with best quality equipment.
5. Track training attendance and offer opportunities to make up missed sessions.
6. Keep the plight of the children and their pictures in front of parents during training, so that they sustain their passion and focus.

STEP 4: APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Provide simple, straightforward application forms; revise them if they are too problematic for a lot of applicants. Keep paperwork as simple as possible.
2. Explain the application process and necessary requirements clearly and as soon as possible, usually at the first orientation, first pre-service meeting, or home visit. Remember to give parents plenty of warning so they can psychologically prepare for intrusions in their private business.
3. If the State requires fingerprints or other hard-to-get information for background checks, do it on site and as early as possible to decrease bureaucratic processing time.
4. Provide multiple ways for prospective parents to interact with agency staff and other families, including through the use of social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.). Having an agency presence on social media platforms can make it easier for families to feel connected to your agency.
5. Have a reliable tracking system for applications and related paperwork, so that requirements are complete and problems are identified and eliminated as soon as possible.
6. Have the application and other technical requirements (e.g., references, medical and background check) completed prior to starting the mutual assessment step. This practice allows time to eliminate possible glitches in advance and reduces overall wait time for parents.

STEP 5: MUTUAL ASSESSMENT AND HOME STUDY

1. Establish and adhere to strict timelines and expectations for staff related to completion of the assessment process.
2. Present the process to parents as a mutual opportunity to make a fully informed decision about fostering or adopting and to decide whether they want to work with this particular agency.
3. Conduct the assessment as a strengths-based, educational process and not as an investigation.

4. Provide individualized help and advocacy for each parent during this period (e.g., assign an experienced parent mentor or buddy or have the original recruitment worker act as an advocate).

5. Help parents eliminate fixable impediments to licensing (e.g., minor home repairs, beds for children, medical exams, special equipment needs, etc.), including financial assistance if necessary.

6. Seek to rule people in, not out of the process.

**STEP 6: LICENSING AND/OR APPROVAL**

1. Set deadlines and standards for timely completion of family assessment studies and licensing or approval.

2. Provide parents with copies of their family assessment studies so they have a chance to fix any mistakes or misunderstandings.

3. Inform families when all the paperwork is complete and the licensing or approval has been achieved.

4. Continue to contact parents regularly to inform them of current placement activity and possibilities, and to explain reasons for delays. Personal notes are also helpful and mean a lot during this period. Using social media tools to remain in touch with families can also help them feel supported and encouraged during this time.

5. Have all the necessary paperwork, training, home study, and licensing certification and/or approval completed at the time a family is ready to accept children.

6. Ask experienced parents to host “Waiting Parents” meetings, perhaps at someone’s home, to maintain families’ enthusiasm and to let them know they are not forgotten.

**STEP 7: PLACEMENT**

1. Encourage waiting families to attend parent support groups and be in touch with local foster and adoptive parent organizations.

2. Provide parents with an ongoing training calendar and send them invitations to other agency events.

3. Be responsive and considerate when parents call for information and updates on their situation.

4. Make sure parents have necessary information to make an informed placement decision and provide immediate care for the child.

5. Visit parents soon after placement to assure all requirements are met, the family and child are adjusting well, and that birth family visits are scheduled.
6. Provide follow up to support parents on an ongoing basis:
   • Conduct regular home visits
   • Have a 24-hour emergency hotline
   • Let parents know how they can connect with the agency using social media tools
   • Know the Medicaid hotline number to secure medical services
   • Provide regular training opportunities for the foster parents
   • Conduct monthly foster and adopt group meetings
   • Respond immediately or within 24 hours to parents’ telephone calls.
   • Involve parents in decision making about children in their home and agency decisions and program
Section 2
Diligent Recruitment

WHAT IS DILIGENT RECRUITMENT?

As part of its Title IV-B State Child and Family Service Plan (CFSP), each State must provide for the diligent recruitment of prospective foster and adoptive parents who reflect the race and ethnicity of children and youth in foster care for whom homes are needed.

According to the ACF Children’s Bureau’s Child Welfare Policy Manual, States should have the following components in their recruitment plans in order to comply with the requirements for diligent recruitment in the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, as amended (MEPA):

1. a description of the characteristics of waiting children;
2. specific strategies to reach all parts of the community;
3. diverse methods of disseminating both general and child specific information;
4. strategies for assuring that all prospective parents have access to the home study process, including location and hours of services that facilitate access by all members of the community;
5. strategies for training staff to work with diverse cultural, racial and economic communities;
6. strategies for dealing with linguistic barriers;
7. non-discriminatory fee structures, and;
8. procedures for a timely search for prospective parents for a waiting child, including the use of exchanges and other interagency efforts, provided that such procedures must insure that placement of a child in an appropriate household is not delayed by the search for a same race or ethnic placement.

In order to carry out diligent recruitment, the agency must know the racial breakdown in the general population of their State/county as well as in the foster care population, to understand where recruitment efforts should be directed. It involves taking an active, strategic approach in recruitment of foster and adoptive families that includes using data
to inform recruitment efforts, building community relationships, developing specialized recruitment strategies for various populations of children, youth and families, and working effectively and in culturally competent ways with diverse cultural, racial, and economic communities.

IDEAS FROM THE FIELD

Market Segmentation and Engaging the Business Community

Kentucky’s Project MATCH (Making Appropriate and Timely connections for Children), one of the recipients of a 2008 Diligent Recruitment grant from the Children’s Bureau, is using market segmentation to drive recruitment efforts and messages aimed at populations that are most likely to be strong possibilities to become foster and adoptive parents for the children in need of placement. The project has hired and trained experienced resource parents to work as diligent recruitment specialists. These specialists engage in targeted recruitment efforts using market segmentation data and research on best practices.

Using the project’s market segmentation data—which highlighted a market segment known as Town With Children who are likely to be a good pool of potential foster and adoptive parents—staff identified a restaurant (a Ponderosa Steakhouse) where adults from that market segment are likely to eat. Project MATCH staff partnered with the Ponderosa
restaurant to have the restaurant allow their employees to wear shirts promoting Project MATCH, feature a recruitment message and phone number on the sign outside the restaurant, distribute brochures about foster care at the restaurant, and generously offer a 10 percent discount to foster parents and foster care workers who dined at the restaurant during a specific week.

Learn more about Project MATCH and see examples of some of the products and materials from the project at: www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/diligent-recruitment/kentucky/.

Data-Driven Recruitment

Denver’s Village, a 2008 Diligent Recruitment grant project of the City and County of Denver, uses a data-driven, community-centered approach to improving permanency outcomes for youth. The project uses Community Based Recruitment Teams (CBRTs) in geographically assigned communities, in collaboration with the Family to Family program and the Denver Indian Family Resource Center. Each CBRT uses demographic data specific to the geographic area in which they are recruiting, ensuring that the recruitment strategies in each area are informed by detailed information about the populations in the targeted area. This use of community-specific data enables targeted recruitment and outreach, which helps maximize the effectiveness of recruitment efforts. More information about the Denver’s Village project is available at: www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/diligent-recruitment/colorado.

TARGETED RECRUITMENT—ONE STRATEGY FOR DILIGENT RECRUITMENT

A familiar truism goes: If you want to catch fish, you’d best cast your net where the fish are. Targeted recruitment is the process by which States, Tribes, and Territories strategically focus their recruitment efforts in neighborhoods and communities where families can be found that are most likely to be a resource for the children in their care. Targeted recruitment may include:

- faith-based communities,
- military families,
- other community-based methods that target specific communities who can meet the needs of children in foster care.

Five fundamental elements of targeted recruitment

Effective targeted recruitment efforts:

- **Are Data Driven**—Agencies research and build their recruitment strategies based on demographic characteristics, values and behaviors to better identify potential successful families.
- **Are Culturally Competent**—Agencies continuously develop skills in working effectively with the various social, racial, and ethnic groups who reflect the diversity of children in care

- **Use the Right Messages and Media**—Agencies’ messages appeal to the targeted parents’ values and are placed where parents are likely to respond

- **Are Retention Obsessive**—Agencies do everything in their power to value and support foster and adoptive parents at every stage of the process; otherwise, even the best recruitment practices are in vain

- **Use Community-based Methods**—Agencies reach out to, and build meaningful relationships with, the communities they serve, delivering services in ways that are most accessible and appropriate for each community

Market segmentation is one tool that agencies can use to target their recruitment efforts to families who are most like their successful families. Market segmentation uses a jurisdiction’s child and family data to target the “who, how and where” questions of recruitment:

- **Who**—Understanding the characteristics of prospective parents
- **How** to best reach the prospective families
- **Where** to place the recruitment message

The answers to these questions, then, inform the branding, messaging, location, community partnerships, retention strategies and action steps of State and local recruitment plans.

For more information about market segmentation and ways to apply it to targeted recruitment efforts, download an overview of the market segmentation process ([www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/market-segmentation-process-overview.pdf](http://www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/market-segmentation-process-overview.pdf)) or contact the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents at AdoptUSKids ([www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment](http://www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment)).

**LINKING WITH THE FOSTERING CONNECTIONS ACT**

- **Promoting Educational Stability**—Targeted recruitment, market segmentation, and other diligent recruitment efforts can not only help jurisdictions find more families for children, but these strategies can support efforts to keep children in stable placements (both foster and adoptive placements) and in their own communities and their own schools, which can help make it possible for children in foster care to have educational stability.
- **Adoption Incentives**—By diligently recruiting adoptive families—especially families for children with special needs and youth ages nine and older—jurisdictions can achieve permanence for more children who are waiting for adoption. In doing so, States and Territories may also be able to benefit from the federal Adoption Incentive program that was reauthorized as part of the Fostering Connections legislation. The incentive payments that States and Territories earn will then provide additional funding to help support child welfare services.

For more detailed guidance and information about implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, see the resources available on the Children’s Bureau’s website at: [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm) and the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections’ website at: [www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/](http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/).
**Take Action: Diligent Recruitment**

**TODAY**

*Managers, Supervisors and Front-line Workers Can*


- Put up a sign in the office that says, “Great retention efforts are key to effective recruitment” to help remind everyone of the critical role retention has in recruitment.

- Subscribe to E-Notes, the monthly electronic newsletter of the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents at AdoptUSKids ([www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment](http://www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment)). Each month, E-Notes delivers a variety of best and promising practices via email.

- View the archived webinar *Engaging Community Stakeholders: Strategies for Effective Recruitment*, presented by the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention at AdoptUSKids and featuring 2008 Diligent Recruitment grant recipients sharing insights into effective and creative strategies to engage community partners. The free archived webinar is available online at: [www.adoptuskids.org/content.aspx?k=webinar-archives](http://www.adoptuskids.org/content.aspx?k=webinar-archives)

**THIS WEEK**

*Managers and Supervisors Can*

- Watch—and share with staff—the two-part video, *Compliance With the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, as Amended, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, sponsored by the Children’s Bureau, in coordination with the National Resource Center for Adoption. The video is available at: [www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts/mepa/](http://www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts/mepa/).

- Take a look at the agency’s recruitment materials and strategies to see if the agency is reaching out to the communities where the children entering care live and where prospective adoptive parents live. Brainstorm ways to increase connections with these communities.
Order copies of the 2011 National Adoption Month poster to give to your staff and to post in common areas around the office. You can request free posters by calling AdoptUSKids at 888-200-4005 or emailing info@adoptuskids.org.

Examine the schedule for your agency’s prospective parent orientation meetings and be sure they are scheduled at family-friendly times and community-based locations that are convenient and accessible to parents.

Find out what other jurisdictions are doing with Federal Diligent Recruitment grants by browsing the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents (NRCRRFAP) at AdoptUSKids’ webpages on the grantees’ projects (www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/diligent-recruitment/).

**Front-line Workers Can**

* Post messages near your desk from youth about their desire to have a permanent family. This can serve as a daily reminder of the importance of serving youth well as you seek families for them.

* Download and read previous issues of Recruiting News, a valuable recruitment and retention resource from the North American Council on Adoptable Children. Past issues of Recruiting News are available at: www.nacac.org/adoptalk/adoptalkarticles.html#recruitingfamilies.

**Managers and Supervisors Can**

* Reach out to the NRCRRFAP to find out more about market segmentation and whether it might be a valuable tool to use to guide the agency’s targeted recruitment efforts. Information about the NRCRRFAP’s free technical assistance is available at: www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment.

* Use data to inform decision-making by working with colleagues to examine the agency’s data on the number of foster parents who adopt and the overall percentage of the agency’s adoptions that they represent. See how the agency’s data compare to the national data, which show that 54 percent of adoptions from foster care are by the child’s foster parent. Then undergo the same process with the number of relatives who adopt; nationally they account for 32 percent of adoptions from foster care.
Tools for Diligent Recruitment
Recruitment Strategies Checklist

This checklist can be used as a tracking tool or annual review of the recruitment activities for each child or youth on your caseload or in your adoption program. It should be adapted to include the recruitment activities that are specific to your agency and those that will fit the needs of the children and youth in foster care in your jurisdiction. A master list could also be developed from the individual checklists and used as a supervision or management tool.

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<tr>
<th>Child or Youth Name:</th>
<th>DOB:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Foundation for all Recruitment Activities</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>How was youth involved and supported?</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child or Youth Assessment and Preparation¹</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written or Updated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case File Mining for relative or kin search and engagement²</td>
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<td>Child or Youth Narrative³</td>
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<td>Written or Updated</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Date of Event:</th>
<th>Outcome:</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photolisting</td>
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<td>State or regional website</td>
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<td>AdoptUSKids website</td>
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<td>Media</td>
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<td>Newspaper</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Television (Wednesday's Child)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media platform (Facebook, Twitter, website, or blog feature, etc.)</td>
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<td>Heart Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wendy's Wonderful Kids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption Party/Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other(s)</td>
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**


³ [adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/photolisting.pdf](http://adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/photolisting.pdf)
Characteristics of Successful

RECRUITMENT PRACTITIONERS

Successful recruitment practitioners have similar qualities and characteristics. As you review the following list, ask yourself, “How do I rate on each of these?” and check the box of the ones you believe you’ve mastered, and place a circle in the box of the ones you are in process of developing. Recognize that no one person is successful at developing and using all of these qualities, nor is successful recruitment achieved solely through the efforts of a single individual. The key is to look for ways to reinforce your current strengths and pursue opportunities to develop more of these qualities.

Strength-focused and Respectful
- Sees parents as resources to be developed, not excluded
- Non-judgmental in nature and humble
- Not afraid to ask for help from peers or resource parents
- Family advocate

Determined and Dedicated
- Sense of urgency
- Willingness to go the extra mile
- Barrier busting attitude—finds a way around a difficult situation
- Detective-like qualities when searching for lost relatives
- Inquisitive about different cultures and always willing to learn more

Strong Communication and Collaboration
- Good communication skills—verbal and writing
- Team player
- Good judgment
- Good trainer
- Not intimidated by community groups or public speaking
- Ability to explain and break down tasks
- Common sense
Improving Recruitment Outcomes: 
11 Things a Practitioner Can Do

   Foster and adoptive parents are the most important resource we have to provide for the children we serve. How you treat them will determine whether they stay in the process and, ultimately, become part of your team. Try to put yourself in their shoes at every stage of the process. How would you like to be treated?

2. Be informed about local, State and national recruitment initiatives and calendar.
   This information will help you schedule your work so you can be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to the possibility of an influx of inquiries, as well as inform families you talk with at events, classes, in the course of work and people you meet in your community.

3. Look for ways to participate in your agency’s community recruitment projects, regardless of what your job is.
   From the agency director to the person who answers the telephone, recruitment is everybody’s business! Successful agencies encourage all staff and resource parents to be mindful of the need for families wherever they go and help out with recruitment.

4. Know the characteristics and needs of the children in your area who need foster and adoptive parents.
   Speak optimistically and honestly about the children who need care and the role of the foster and adoptive parent. As prospective parents go through the process, continue to provide them with reliable information to make informed decisions about fostering and adopting, including full disclosure regarding the children, their needs and the service needs of birth families. Respect the parents. Give them the opportunity to explore areas where they may have doubts. Trust their ability to make good decisions for themselves. This can be done at all stages of the process.

5. Be knowledgeable about all of the steps in the continuum from recruitment through to placement and post-placement support.
   Prospective parents will have lots of questions. Be prepared to answer them whether you are answering the phone, providing training, or doing a home visit. Promise to get back with answers to questions you can’t respond to on the spot, and then follow through with this promise!

6. Work to rule people in, not out of the process.
   It is important that the practitioner realize that the most ordinary, and sometimes unusual, people have grown into amazing resource parents with training and
support. Most of the time parents present themselves to the agency for an altruistic purpose. They have passion and emotion about this. Our challenge is to learn how to maintain that passion and turn it into informed and sustained commitment.

7. **Utilize seasoned foster and adoptive parents whenever possible to help support new parents through the process.**

Many agencies are partnering with their resource parents and/or parent groups to help in recruiting. Parents handle initial inquiries, participate in home visits, are part of the training team and provide support to new parents during the process. Agencies that do this are modeling the team process from day one.

8. **Identify and collaborate with other community partners and organizations.**

Networking with community groups and partnering on recruitment efforts can be satisfying, supportive and productive for the practitioner. Faith based and community based organizations which endorse your efforts can bring new families to your door. These organizations can also provide space and resources to make your orientation and training meetings more accessible to parents. You are likely to get better attendance as a result.

9. **Be a team player.**

Everybody who has a hand in recruiting and preparing families to foster and adopt can be made to feel that they are part of a team in a very important endeavor. This is a complex process that involves handoffs from recruiter to trainer, to family assessment worker, to placement worker, etc. All involved should have the same value system and a sense of urgency about completing the work as soon as possible.

10. **Be sensitive to the prospective foster and adoptive parents’ sense of time.**

The longer it takes to move from step to step, the less likely the family will stay in the process. However, if a parent is treated well and helped to feel part of the team early on, he/she is more likely to stay the course. It is important to be honest about the reasons for delays when they occur and to help the parent use this time in productive ways, e.g., involve them with other foster, adoptive or kinship care parents, or enlist them to provide respite care.

11. **Understand your role in and the importance of tracking and evaluation to improve recruitment outcomes.**

Organizations that are customer-oriented are beginning to look at the quality of their interactions with resource families at every stage in the process. They need cooperation from people on the “front line” to get good data and feedback.

*This tip sheet is based on material from “Practitioner’s Guide: Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts” by AdoptUsKids. It is available online at [http://adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/practitionersGuide.pdf](http://adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/practitionersGuide.pdf) at no cost.*
Elements of Diligent Recruitment

1. **Data**
   Reliable and accurate data about the children and families served is essential to the design and support of any diligent recruitment efforts. The essence of diligent recruitment is the comparison of data regarding the population of children in care as compared with the general population. The analysis of this comparison guides the recruitment efforts to the communities that are representative of the children in care.

2. **Planning**
   Effective recruitment begins with a rigorous analysis of the data and then using the data analysis to set goals, establish priorities, and organize the work to achieve the goals. The NRCRRFAP is available to assist jurisdictions with each of these steps.

3. **Customer Service**
   Satisfied parents bring in other satisfied parents. Likewise, poor customer service can detract from recruitment success.

4. **Resources**
   Successful recruitment and retention requires adequate resources (staff, materials, and budget, etc.) to support the work and provide follow-up services.

5. **Recruitment Methods**
   It is important that the agency balance the strategic use of a variety of recruitment methods in order to meet the current and future needs of children and youth in care.

6. **Targeted Recruitment Methods**
   Targeted recruitment is the process by which agencies strategically focus recruitment efforts by demographic characteristics, interests, neighborhoods, and communities where families can be found who are willing and able to foster or adopt the children needing placement.

7. **Branding and Messaging**
   Effective recruitment materials utilize language and images that appeal to targeted audiences and lead them to action. Consistent use of the brand and message in all recruitment materials and outreach efforts is important.
8. **Agency Partnerships**

   It is important to establish positive relationships with faith- and community-based organizations and businesses once an agency has determined where targeted families live, recreate, shop, and worship.

9. **Retention**

   The key to recruitment is retention and being mindful of retention throughout the process. Effective recruitment requires that agencies’ staff focus retention efforts at every stage of the process, from the first call through post placement.

10. **Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement**

   All recruitment initiatives should be evaluated to determine what strategies worked well and identify those that may need to be modified or eliminated.
THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Child welfare agencies work with people from incredibly diverse communities and populations, and with very diverse backgrounds. Being able to engage with individuals and communities in culturally competent ways is crucial for staff in order to be able to serve children and families effectively. As staff seek to recruit, retain, and support families, they will benefit from thinking inclusively and expansively about where and how they may find prospective families who will be able to provide loving, safe, permanent homes for children.

Diversity goes far beyond race and ethnicity and may include additional characteristics, such as family structure and marital status (single adults, two-parent families, or multigenerational families who live as a unit); age and socio-economic status; civilian or military; sexual orientation and gender identity; type of home (single or multi-unit); owner or renter; and location (urban, suburban or rural); among many others. Viewing diversity in this broader sense provides a useful lens in helping people recognize that many, if not most, interactions with prospective and current parents, youth, and colleagues are, in fact, cross-cultural interactions.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES THAT FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS

AdoptUSKids has identified several populations of prospective parents who are less likely to make it through the process of becoming foster or adoptive parents than other prospective parents. Due to a variety of factors, prospective parents who are Native American; African American; Military/Global; Hispanic; or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender often experience additional challenges in navigating the foster care and adoption processes.

There are many valuable resources available to support you and your agencies as you engage with these communities and help break down the additional barriers that they face. AdoptUSKids has several publications and technical assistance available through its National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents (www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment) related to working with diverse populations.
The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (www.nrcpfc.org) has multiple resources available on their website on working effectively with specific communities. Child Welfare Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov) also has a wealth of resources related to each of these communities and ways that the child welfare field can engage them more effectively. The National Resource Center for Tribes (www.nrc4tribes.org/home) is another wonderful source of information specifically related to Tribal child welfare issues.

**INDIVIDUALS, DIVERSE POPULATIONS, AND COMMUNITY**

As we all work toward increasing our cultural competence, it is important to be aware of the power of words. “Community” is one word that can convey many different meanings and connotations, especially when working cross-culturally. One definition of community is “a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests.” Although many people consider themselves to be members of multiple communities, we caution against automatically thinking of individuals as members of any particular demographic community (e.g., “a member of the LGBT community” or “a member of the Hispanic community”). As you reach out to diverse populations of prospective foster and adoptive parents, it is helpful to think of people as individuals who may or may not consider themselves to be connected with particular communities.
IDEAS FROM THE FIELD

**Tribal Customary Adoptions**

California has enacted legislation that allows Tribal customary adoption to be recognized by the California courts. As reported in the April 2011 issue of *Children’s Bureau Express*, Tribal customary adoption allows for the transfer of custody of a child to adoptive parents without terminating the rights of the birth parents. The new law is the first of its kind in the United States and also permits eligibility for Adoption Assistance benefits for Tribal customary adoptions.

The Tribal STAR program of the Academy for Professional Excellence, San Diego State University School of Social Work has a collection of information and resources about the new legislation available at: [www.theacademy.sdsu.edu/TribalSTAR/resources/customaryadopt.htm](http://www.theacademy.sdsu.edu/TribalSTAR/resources/customaryadopt.htm). Resources available include fact sheets for county and tribal social workers, agency memoranda, sample forms, a PowerPoint presentation, and training opportunities.

**Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute**

*The Need*

Children and youth of color are overrepresented in the child welfare system as well as in the population of children and youth whose parents’ rights have been terminated. While the presence of ethnically, culturally, and racially-diverse individuals in leadership roles in child welfare adoption services does not in itself ensure that children and youth who share these characteristics will be adopted, this presence may facilitate greater openness on the part of adults or communities of color to trust the child welfare system.

Furthermore, ethnically, culturally, and racially-diverse leadership may be of invaluable assistance to the child welfare system for the identification of barriers faced by minority individuals and families while suggesting viable strategies for overcoming barriers.

*The Program*

The National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) established the Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute (MALDI) to provide and enhance the leadership skills of potential and emerging leaders of color from across our nation. These leaders are selected from States, counties, Tribes or State regions that have a high number of children of color awaiting adoption and or high disproportionality rates. In the selection process, efforts are made to ensure diverse-regional representation. Also, these emerging leaders are provided mentors from the National Association of State Adoption Programs (NASAP) who work with the participants as they complete 12 months of job-related project assignments (Action Research Projects) which increase their technical expertise as well as their leadership capacities with concurrent structured mentoring.
The Participants
Participants in MALDI are selected from the States, counties, and Tribes with large numbers of children/youth of color awaiting adoption and/or may be overrepresented in the child welfare system. Mentors are recruited from the current members of NASAP and from the “mentees” resident state. These mentors are provided training in effective mentoring and coaching and are supported by NRCA staff throughout the mentoring process.

The Institutes
MALDI will run in two phases over a two-year period. Each phase will involve two on-site Learning Institutes, running three days over a two-year period. The first on-site Learning Institutes for Phase III of the MALDI was held in August 2010, in Detroit, Michigan. The final Learning Institute for Phase III was held in Detroit, Michigan, in August 2011.

The Expert Faculty
Faculty for the Institutes are prominent leaders in the adoption field from the Children's Bureau, universities, public and private adoption agencies, legal/judicial organizations, and national advocacy organizations.

This information is taken from the MALDI website (www.nrcadoption.org/programs/maldi/home-2/). The website has additional detail about the program and its participants.

All Things Are Possible: No Limits Adoption Recruitment for African-American Children
In 2005, the Children’s Bureau's National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) established the Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute (MALDI) to enhance the leadership skills of minority adoption leaders from around the country. Florida's Department of Children and Families enrolled an adoption leader, Minnie Jenkins, in MALDI, and Ms. Jenkins was able to return to her State and apply her new skills to develop an adoption program for older African American children.

The program she created, All Things Are Possible: No Limits Adoption Recruitment for African-American Children, involved child-specific recruitment for 10 African-American youth, aged 9 and older. Ms. Jenkins provided training and technical assistance to the youths’ case managers to help them with recruitment and with preparing the youth for adoption. She developed a number of tools, including:

- A 6-month individualized child-specific recruitment plan
- Placement log
- Traumatic events log
- Log of all prior caregivers and significant adults in the youth’s life
- Form letter to send to prior caregivers and significant adults who could become committed caring adults in that youth’s life
The child-specific recruitment plan included many ideas for identifying potential families, updating the youths’ files, and using a variety of media to promote the youth and make his or her story known to as many families as possible. Ms. Jenkins helped the case managers implement the plans, serving as a mentor and resource. By the end of the project, two youth had finalized adoptions, one sibling group of three had been placed with an adoptive family, one sibling group of three had been matched with a preadoptive family, and two children still did not have identified families.

More information about the project, including details on how Florida has adapted to the project model to serve many more of the longest-waiting teens in foster care in the state, is available at: www.childwelfare.gov/management/funding/funding_sources/sitevisits/african_american.cfm?page=summary.


LINKING WITH THE FOSTERING CONNECTIONS ACT

- **Option to Implement a Guardianship Assistance Payments Program**—Under the Fostering Connections law, a State may choose to provide federally supported kinship guardianship assistance payments on behalf of children to relatives who assume legal guardianship for children for whom they have provided care as foster parents. As jurisdictions focus on the diversity of the children in foster care and the diversity of options for achieving permanency for children, they may see that guardianship with kinship caregivers provides the best option for providing permanency for children while respecting families’ relationships. Details about how to implement and operate a Guardianship Assistance Payments Program are available from the Children’s Bureau at www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm

For more detailed guidance and information about implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, see the resources available on the Children’s Bureau’s website at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm and the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections’ website at: www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/.
TODAY

Managers, Supervisors and Front-line Workers Can


* Do a quick walk-around assessment of the photos and other images in the agency’s office, viewing the office through the eyes of prospective families. Consider racial and ethnic diversity, age, family structure (e.g., single parents—both male and female, married couples, same sex couples, etc.). Is the diversity of families the agency is trying to recruit reflected? Are new photos needed to increase the inclusiveness and diversity represented by the images?

THIS WEEK

Managers and Supervisors Can

* Review the presentation by AdoptUSKids entitled Barriers and Success Factors in Adoption from Foster Care: Perspectives of Lesbian and Gay Families. The presentation can be downloaded at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/LGBT-Barriers-and-Success-Factors-in-Adoption.pdf.

* Using a map of the area the agency serves (neighborhood, district, city, county, etc.), mark the locations where recruitment and orientation events have been held in the past year, using one color to indicate recruitment events and a different color to indicate orientation sessions. Do any patterns emerge? Are there areas the agency isn’t reaching?


* Order copies of the 2011 National Adoption Month poster to give to your staff and to post in common areas around the office. You can request free posters by calling AdoptUSKids at 888-200-4005 or emailing info@adoptuskids.org.
**Front-line Workers Can**

- Watch the presentation by Dr. Ruth McRoy *Overcoming Barriers to Minority Adoption/Disproportionality*, presented at the 2008 Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute. The archived presentation is available at: www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts/maldi-2008/.
- Find a cultural competence self-assessment tool to use to gauge individual cultural competence and to identify possible areas for strengthening competence. You could start by reflecting on the questions in the tool at the end of this section (“Moving Toward Cultural Competence: Key Considerations to Explore”).
- Learn more about ways to do family assessment and preparation well with diverse families. A great resource is the family assessment and preparation material from the National Resource Center for Adoption’s Adoption Competency Curriculum, available for free at: www.nrcadoption.org/acc/participant.html.

**THIS MONTH**

**Managers and Supervisors Can**

- Identify three or four community organizations that serve diverse populations and reach out to them. Begin building relationships with them to help the agency with long-term recruitment and retention strategies. Perhaps the agency has a meeting space that can be made available to the organizations or it could partner on recruitment and orientation events. It is important to think about what’s in it for the other organization to partner with the agency.
- Begin a dialog with your staff about whether there are untapped resources of potential foster and adoptive parents that your agency could do more to reach out to and support. For example, in many parts of the country, single parents—especially single men—are an underutilized permanency resource.

**Front-line Workers Can**

- Identify organizations and resources that can provide information about working effectively with the particular communities that you are engaging or wish to engage. For example, AdoptUSKids has free publications on working with families from diverse communities, including LGBT communities, Hispanic communities, African American communities, faith communities, and military communities (available at: www.adoptuskids.org/resourceCenter/atcPublications.aspx). The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections also has multiple resources on increasing cultural competence working with diverse communities, including LGBT communities. These resources are available at: www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/hottopics.html at no cost.
Tools for Working with Diverse Populations
Recruiting and Retaining LGBT Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families—Sending a Welcoming Message

Many child welfare agencies are recognizing the importance of engaging with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) prospective families as a way of partnering to find stable placements and achieve permanence for more children in foster care. Recruiting and retaining LGBT families, however, requires much more than just breaking down institutional, formal barriers between a child welfare agency and LGBT prospective parents; it requires creating a welcoming, inclusive environment and finding a way to express welcoming messages to the individual people the agency wants to engage. With the many barriers that LGBT families have historically faced—and often continue to face—in pursuing foster and adoptive parenting, child welfare agencies who wish to work with LGBT families should be intentional about building trust and creating a welcoming atmosphere and organizational culture. Taking these steps can help your agency build your capacity to reach out to LGBT families and retain them. The tips below highlight key considerations to keep in mind and provide suggestions for specific ideas you can use as you seek to create a welcoming environment.

Always keep in mind the power of language and specific words—Words can be very emotionally loaded, both positively and negatively. Words can also play a key role in communicating the fundamental values and priorities of an agency and setting the tone for interactions between an agency and prospective parents. For instance:

- Find resources in your local LGBT community to help you determine appropriate and respectful terminology for diverse populations that you serve.
- Avoid using the word “homosexual” when referring to gay or lesbian people, as it is considered a clinical word that has a connotation of pathology.
- Review terminology that your agency uses that might be misinterpreted by prospective parents. For instance, LGBT prospective families might interpret terms such as “traditional families” as meaning that they are not welcome even if an agency simply uses the term to refer to foster and adoptive families who come to the agency through traditional routes.

Remember, a picture is worth a thousand words—Review the photos and images your agency uses in recruitment materials, publications, and around the office to ensure that the families in the photos reflect the diversity of prospective families you wish to engage, including same-sex couples and single parents. If prospective LGBT families don’t see families like themselves in any of the images your agency projects, they may find it more difficult to trust the agency and feel welcome.
Look for ways to frame statements in inclusive and affirming ways—Avoid using forms, questions, and words that reflect any assumptions that all prospective parents fall into particular groups. Even seemingly innocent questions can send a message that you aren’t welcoming to LGBT prospective parents. For example:

- Instead of asking if an applicant is married—whether on a form or in a conversation—you can ask if someone has a partner or will be co-parenting.
- Instead of using the words “husband” and “wife” on forms that prospective or current parents must complete, use more neutral words such as “Parent 1” and “Parent 2” or “Applicant 1 and 2.”

Be congruent—Using welcoming words and images can help your agency make a positive initial impression as you reach out to new LGBT prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families. Once you have prospective families engaged, be sure that your agency will continue to be welcoming and culturally competent. If your agency sends mixed messages about whether or not LGBT individuals are welcome, your recruitment efforts may do more harm than good in trying to build new community connections.

Special thanks and recognition go to the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s All Children – All Families initiative. This tip sheet was informed extensively by the content and approach of the All Children – All Families materials, including the All Children – Training Curriculum and the Promising Practices in Adoption and Foster Care guide.

This tip sheet is part of a series of materials developed by the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents at AdoptUSKids (NRCRRFAP) aimed at helping child welfare agencies and staff recruit and retain more prospective parents by building agency capacity to engage and work with diverse communities in effective, culturally competent ways. By assisting States, Tribes, and Territories in further developing their cultural competence, the NRCRRFAP hopes to make it possible for agencies to have a diverse pool of prospective parents as placement options for children in foster care. For more information about how the NRCRRFAP can help increase the effectiveness of recruitment and retention efforts in your jurisdiction, visit: http://adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment
Why Should I Go the Extra Step to Place a Child for Adoption with an American Military Family Living in Another Country?

AN UNTAPPED PERMANENCY RESOURCE

Love knows no boundaries. This simple statement reflects a profound concept that children who are waiting for adoptive families may be able to find the permanent, loving home that they need and deserve with a family who lives in another State or even another country.

A pool of prospective adoptive families that so far has been mostly untapped by States, Territories, and Tribes is American military families—many of whom are living temporarily in other countries—who are interested in adopting children from the U.S. foster care system. Some jurisdictions have been finding creative ways to engage these families in order to achieve permanency for children who are waiting to be adopted by overcoming real and perceived barriers across State and even country borders. An important first step is for child welfare professionals to acknowledge any hesitancy they have about exploring adoption by families who are, or may soon be, living in another country.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO ADOPTION BY MILITARY FAMILIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Barrier or Concern</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why would we send our children away to another country?</strong> It’s better for a child to be here in the USA in foster care than having to learn a whole new way of life in another country. These children have had to move enough already.</td>
<td>American military families are U.S. citizens who are temporarily living outside the U.S. for a tour of duty. In addition to it being fundamentally good practice to seek all possible options for achieving permanency for children in foster care waiting to be adopted, it is a requirement. Section 471 (a)(23) of the Social Security Act requires that a State not “deny or delay the placement of a child for adoption when an approved family is available outside of the jurisdiction.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>It’s important for children to stay within their own culture.</strong></td>
<td>Whether a child moves to a family down the street, across town, or in another country, that child experiences having to adapt to a new culture and family life. Children who are adopted by military families can experience life on a military installation, which in many cases is similar to small-town America. Children adopted by military families living in other countries gain the benefits of learning about a new culture and being increasingly prepared to live in diverse cultures and settings.</td>
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**Perceived Barrier or Concern** | **Response**
--- | ---
Why would I place a child with a military family since that would mean that they have to move all of the time? | Children in foster care already experience many moves without the benefit of having a permanent family. A child who is adopted by a military family will likely still move periodically, but those moves will happen along with their family, who will help the child prepare for, and adjust to, a new setting with the security of a loving family. In addition, military installations are structured essentially the same in all locations, and the Department of Defense schools provide U.S. curricula, so children in military families experience quite a bit of consistency even when their families move. There are also extensive support services available on military installations.

We already struggle with doing interjurisdictional placements just across State lines. I can’t imagine how we’d do international placements or figure out the paperwork and procedural requirements. | Many of the strategies that agencies currently use to find adoptive families used to be thought of as challenging or too hard to do, and yet many children have been placed with permanent families thanks to dedicated workers overcoming perceived obstacles. There have been many children from foster care placed with military families overseas. It is probably easier than you think.

Our State has no money to place children in other countries. | Keeping children in foster care indefinitely creates many ongoing, direct costs for a child welfare system, so failing to pursue permanency options for children due to costs ignores the financial costs of keeping children in foster care. Short term costs maybe higher, but the long term savings of placing a child in a permanent family outweigh the initial fees. Of course, there are great long-term human costs to children who languish in foster care and age out of foster care without a permanent family.

This just seems too overwhelming and too hard to figure out. | More than 29,000 youth in foster care age out every year with a permanent family; a disproportionate number (compared to the general population) of these young adults end up homeless, incarcerated, under-educated, and perpetrators or victims of crimes. If there are qualified, loving families available to provide permanence to youth in foster care, we should pursue all options for connecting youth with those families, wherever they are.

**REASONS TO CHOOSE MILITARY FAMILIES**

- The military is racially diverse, and the colleagues and neighbors of military families are always ready to embrace newcomers.
- They have developed ways to sustain emotional and tangible connections to friends and extended family members, despite distance and periodic moves.
- They have easy access to adoption benefits.
• There are extensive family support resources on military installations.
• Military families tend to be flexible and mission-driven.
• The military community represents diversity in race, culture, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and background. Children can find people of all ethnic backgrounds as well as many multiracial families within this community.
• Housing costs are covered so bringing in additional children is less of a financial consideration.
• Traveling and living abroad are great educational opportunities for the whole family.
• Children are proud to see their new parents in uniform. Many children from foster care have found their niche in the military as well.

HOW TO GET STARTED

The process for placing a child with a U.S. military family—especially one currently living in another country—may vary depending on where the family is stationed. To learn more about how the process may work:

• Review the AdoptUsKids publication: Wherever My Family Is: That’s Home! Adoption Services for Military Families, which can be downloaded at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/militaryGuide.pdf.

• Contact the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents at AdoptUSKids for training and technical assistance on all forms of interjurisdictional placements, including with military families based in states or countries other than the child’s. Find out more about the Center at www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment.

• Contact organizations such as AdoptUSKids (www.adoptuskids.org) or The Adoption Exchange (www.adoptex.org) for referrals to agencies that are experienced in working with the U.S. military population. These included: Adopt Abroad, Inc. (www.adopt-abroad.com) and Voice for International Development and Adoptions (VIDA) (www.vidaadoptions.org), to name just a few.

• Explore the website for The National Military Family Association (www.militaryfamily.org/your-benefits/adoption) to review benefits and tips for military families contemplating adoption.
Moving Toward Cultural Competence: Key Considerations to Explore

KEY ATTITUDES AND APPROACHES

Increasing your own cultural competence requires: a belief that it is important to become more culturally competent; an acknowledgment that you don’t—and can’t—know everything about every culture, including your own; and a recognition that becoming more culturally competent is a perpetual journey, not a destination to be reached.

As you work on moving toward cultural competence, keep in mind:

• Regardless of the various groups that someone belongs to, each person is an individual with unique preferences, strengths, and perspectives and wants to be treated as such. Each of us wants to be respected and understood as an individual, not just as a member of some demographic group or category.
• Erring on the side of being more respectful and formal, rather than less, is a good starting point.
• It’s okay to admit that you don’t know something and to ask to be taught.
• Flexibility and adaptability are key factors in working effectively with diverse populations.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As you continue on your journey toward becoming more culturally competent, there are some key areas to explore and questions to ask yourself regardless of the population with which you are working. These questions are intended to help you:

1. Increase your awareness of others’ worldviews
2. Gain knowledge about others’ practices, understandings, interpretations, and culture
3. Value the particular culture that you seek to understand better
4. Build skills to understand, communicate with, and relate to that culture

The topics and questions below are by no means exhaustive, but they provide a basic framework to use as you seek to increase your competence in working cross-culturally. These questions and considerations are aimed at helping you think about ways to increase your own understanding and ability to work effectively and respectively with other cultures. Note: these are not questions to ask directly of the families with whom you work.

A great first step is to reflect on these questions as they apply to your own life. By increasing your own self-awareness and understanding of how being part of certain groups...
and communities has shaped your experiences and attitudes, you will be better equipped to gain a richer understanding and appreciation of other cultures.

**Self-Identification**
- How do members of the group refer to themselves and members of their group?
- What terms are considered most respectful? Which terms are disrespectful or inappropriate?
- How can you find out from individuals the terms that they prefer?

**Cultural Identity**
- How do you think members of the group view their cultural connections?
- Might they identify themselves as members of sub-groups rather than, or in addition to, broad groups?

**Language**
- Do members of the group share a language?
- Do they face any language barriers?
- How formal or informal do members of the group prefer to be with language?

**Communication Styles**
- Are there common communication styles and approaches that should inform your interactions?
- How much importance does the community place on nonverbal communication, directness vs. subtlety, humor, eye contact, etc.?
- What potential conflicts or misunderstandings may arise due to differences between your communication style and that of members of the group? How can you try to avoid these misunderstandings?

**Family, Relationships and Parenting**
- Are there key patterns in relationship roles and family dynamics among members of the group?
- How do members of the group define the concept of “family” (e.g., Is family thought of as the nuclear family, or is there a more expansive, inclusive concept of family)?
- Do members of the group have common approaches to parenting and disciplining children?

**Religion and Spirituality**
- What role, if any, does spirituality or religion play with the group?
- What holidays, if any, are important to members of the group, and how are those holidays celebrated?
• Do members of the group tend to view religion and spirituality as something that can be discussed publicly, or is it a private topic?

**Traditions**

• What traditions and shared experiences are highly important to the group?
• What key life events and experiences are celebrated or otherwise marked by the group?
• Does the group have unique or rare traditions that may be misunderstood by others outside of the group?

**Key Strengths**

• What strengths (e.g., humor, extended family networks, resilience, connection to community, tribal affiliation, relationship with elders, etc.) does the group celebrate and rely upon for success?
• Do members of the group identify key sources of resilience and empowerment, either individually or for the group as a whole?
• Are there attributes that members of the group see as strengths, but that others may view as challenges or barriers (e.g., interdependence—a shared sense of supporting and sharing resources; having a close network of trusted confidants—strong relationships that have been established by building a rapport and a commitment to share information with only those who have been proven to be trustworthy; etc.)?

**Discrimination and Barriers**

• What forms of discrimination and barriers—both historical and current—does the group experience?
• Are there areas of particular sensitivity that you should be aware of related to discrimination and challenges (e.g., legal, financial, social, etc.) that members of the group experience?
• Are there ways to discuss—and provide strategies for overcoming—potential challenges that members of the group may encounter?

**Taboos**

• What subjects, topics, and issues are off-limits for discussion?
• Are there topics that are deemed private and only discussed within groups of trusted family or friends?
• Are there respectful ways that sensitive or taboo subjects can be approached if information is needed for family assessment, etc.?
Key Indicators of Cultural Competence in Child Welfare

- Agency philosophy, policy, and practice are culturally relevant at all levels and are regularly reviewed and updated.
- Services and forms are provided in the language and dialect of those being served.
- Staff at all levels of the organization are representative of the cultural groups served.
- Program policies and procedures are developed in the cultural context of the populations served (i.e., value systems, family definitions and traditions, gender and age, etc.).
- Programs and work settings exemplify cultural preservation and celebration and are accessible in the communities served.
- Oral language interpretation is provided, and translated materials are culturally adapted, particularly to assist and advocate for families whose only language or primary language is not English.
- Empowerment strategies and respect are evident throughout the organization.

This material is adapted from the AdoptUSKids’ publication Practitioner’s Guide: Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts, excerpted from the “Cultural Competence in Child Welfare Curriculum” (Spaulding for Children, National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption).
WHAT IS PROACTIVE FAMILY FINDING?

Every child in foster care who is waiting to be adopted has a past that includes connections to, and relationships with, many adults—including birth family members, siblings and other significant people in their lives. Far too often, children are denied ongoing connections with these important relationships; by denying these connections, agencies may miss some of the best opportunities to achieve permanence for children. Proactive family finding embraces the richness of a child’s history and looks to past relationships as a source of potential ongoing family connections.

Family finding (also referred to as family search and engagement) can involve a wide variety of strategies, including case mining, interviewing youth for significant relationships as well as relatives, conducting Internet searches and reconsideration of relatives who were previously ruled out or never considered as permanency resources. Engaging youth to learn about adults who have provided them encouragement and support at any point in their lives can also open up many new possibilities to pursue for potential adoptive parents.

RESOURCES IN THIS SECTION

In this section, key attitudes and principles that embody effective family finding are highlighted. Simple steps that can be taken to incorporate family finding strategies into efforts to provide permanence for youth are provided, as well as tools to think about how to get started doing proactive family finding, highlight key characteristics of successful adoptive and foster families and illustrate the strategies and attitudes that one recruitment program uses to guide its family finding efforts.
GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FINDING A FAMILY

Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement, a great resource developed by the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC) and the California Permanency for Youth Project, lays out seven guiding principles for family finding efforts:

- Finding a family is a youth-driven process.
- Every youth deserves, and can have, a permanent family.
- Youth have the right to know about their family members; family members have the right to know about their youth.
- Youth should have connections with the biological family, regardless of whether they will live with them, unless there is a compelling reason not to.
- With support, most youth can live in a home rather than in foster care or institutions.
- Family and fictive kin help develop, plan and achieve the youth’s permanence.
- The goal of Family Search and Engagement (FSE) is permanency, through reunification, guardianship, adoption or another form of permanent commitment; long-term placement in foster care is not a permanent plan.

IDEAS FROM THE FIELD

International Family Finding

The following is excerpted from an article in the May 2011 issue of Children’s Bureau Express. For the full article, see: www.cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=126&sectionid=2&articleid=3166.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 mandated that agencies engage in intensive efforts to locate children’s grandparents and other adult relatives when a child enters foster care. It didn’t limit these efforts to the child’s State of residence or even to the United States. However, few agencies are prepared to conduct searches in other countries for relatives of children in foster care. International family finding requires a reliable network of social work connections around the world—the kind of network that the Baltimore-based International Social Service-United States branch (ISS-USA) has. In 2009, ISS-USA teamed with the New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Rutgers University to win a Family Connection grant. Their project involves training social workers in seven New Jersey counties in intensive international family finding efforts.

The project staff estimated that approximately 1,500 children in the New Jersey foster care system have relatives in other countries. However, when the project got underway,
project staff discovered that caseworkers were sometimes reluctant to refer cases to ISS or not sure about how international family finding worked. During the first year of the project, staff conducted a needs assessment survey of workers to which approximately 1,000 caseworkers responded. The results showed a number of reasons for the low referral rate:

- Some workers didn’t understand that making connections with a child’s relatives abroad did not necessarily imply placement abroad. It could also mean connecting with a relative who would send birthday cards or provide links to family or cultural identity. It could even mean termination of parental rights so that the child could be adopted.
- Many workers didn’t know how to do international family finding or how to start.
- Workers didn’t know if there would be support in their office for international family finding or resources for communicating with foreign family members. (In fact, New Jersey offers a “language phone line” with real-time translation.)
- Some workers had a difficult time believing that it could ever be in the best interests of U.S. children to place them in a foreign country.

The project staff set out to address this combination of institutional and personal issues that kept caseworkers from using international family finding. Workers in counties that received intensive training learned how to work with children and their families early in the process to identify all relatives—domestic and international. Workers also learned to connect with a family’s neighbors and place of worship to find out if a child had family abroad. After learning of a possible family connection, the worker would refer the case to ISS, so they could continue the search through ISS social workers in the foreign country. If the decision was eventually made to consider placing the child with the relative abroad, the ISS worker in the other country would arrange for a home study and all services a child might need.

Project staff wrote a curriculum for international family finding and conducted all-day trainings with DCF-DYFS staff, which were completed at the end of 2010. Since then, the number of cases referred for international family finding has shown a remarkable increase—while there were only 82 inquiries about referrals in all of 2010, there were 139 inquiries in just the first quarter of 2011.

**Permanency Partners Program**

The Permanency Partners Program (P3) in California uses a model of involving retired social workers to focus on child welfare’s “cold cases”—those involving older youth in foster care for whom no permanency option has been identified and who have a case plan of Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (formerly known as long term foster
care). The program primarily serves youth ages 12 to 18 and siblings of those youth, seeking out people with whom the youth have important connections with the goal of achieving permanency for youth through adoption, guardianship, or reunification.

As described in the program’s fact sheet, the P3 social workers pursue the following activities in attempts to identify permanency options for youth on their case load:

- Read the case records in order to identify previously missing significant connections in the child's life.
- Regularly collaborate with regional staff through face-to-face conferencing, emails, and written documentation.
- Collaborate with the youth to explore the youth’s wishes and desires and to follow up on leads obtained from the youth regarding the identities of missing connections.
- Utilize Due Diligence and Internet search engines to locate the missing connections.
- Conduct in-person and telephone contact with the identified connections, once located.
- Assist with setting up initial contacts between the youth and connections and provide on-going support to both the youth and the connections while the relationship is developing.
- Work in conjunction with the primary CSW, the youth and the adult connection to explore permanency options.
- Assist with referrals to Departmental resources such as Adoption Safe Family Act (ASFA) for relative/NREFM [non-relative extended family member] home assessments, Team Decision Making, Family Group Decision Making, Family Preservation, and elsewhere as needed.


LINKING WITH THE FOSTERING CONNECTIONS ACT

- **Notifying Relatives of Child's Foster Care Stay**—As jurisdictions develop strategies and build their capacity to comply with the requirement to notify relatives when a child enters foster care, they have the opportunity to use those same strategies to engage in proactive family finding for children who are already in care and in need of permanency options.
- **Waiving Standards for Relative Foster Homes**—As jurisdictions engage in proactive family finding, they may locate relatives who are interested in caring
for children but who may not be able to meet all of the foster parent licensing requirements. Thanks to the Fostering Connections law, States have the flexibility to waive some non-safety-related requirements on a case-by-case basis to allow relatives to be licensed as foster parents.

- **Maintaining Sibling Connections**—Extended family members and family friends may be particularly committed to keeping siblings together—or supporting their connections if they can’t be placed together—and be willing to make accommodations in order to allow sibling groups to be placed together. As States seek to comply with the requirement to make reasonable efforts to place siblings together, proactive family finding efforts can be a valuable strategy for identifying placement and permanency options that will facilitate keeping siblings together.

For more detailed guidance and information about implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, see the resources available on the Children’s Bureau’s website at: [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm) and the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections’ website at: [www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/](http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/).
**Managers and Supervisors Can**

- Set aside specific time to meet periodically with staff to discuss case file mining procedures and approaches. If leaders aren’t already doing so, make plans to integrate case mining activities and findings into family team meetings and other key permanency planning steps, or find another systematic way to integrate family finding efforts into permanency efforts.
- Bookmark helpful resources that will provide important information when you or your staff need to find out about foster care and adoption approval requirements in other states for situations in which you identify possible permanent families in other states. A great resource is the State Specific Guidelines page on the AdoptUSKids website (www.adoptuskids.org/resourceCenter/rrtPackets/chooseState.aspx).

**Front-line Workers Can**

- Browse the description of family finding tools available from the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness (a partnership between the California Permanency for Youth Project and the Seneca’s Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness) listed at www.senecacenter.org/perm_search-tools to learn about some options for searching for relatives, family friends, and other possible permanency resources for children in foster care.
- Make a list of every child on your caseload who is not in a placement that can be a permanent home. Review information on family finding and begin to strategize how to look for permanent connections for each of these children.

**TODAY**

**Managers, Supervisors and Front-line Workers Can**

- Watch *Digital Stories* videos about the experiences of youth who were formerly in foster care and their search for permanent connections. Discuss your reactions and brainstorm implications with your colleagues. The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections has digital stories from youth available online (www.nrcpfc.org/digital_stories/_youth/index.htm). The Seneca Center also has two videos, as well as information about how to request the free video with more stories, available at: www.senecacenter.org/perm_digitalstories.

Explore the importance of doing good child assessment and preparation as part of proactive family finding efforts. Download the Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation Module from the National Resource Center for Adoption’s Adoption Competency Curriculum at: www.nrcadoption.org/acc/participant.html.

Order copies of the 2011 National Adoption Month poster to give to your staff and to post in common areas around the office. You can request free posters by calling AdoptUSKids at 888-200-4005 or emailing info@adoptuskids.org.

**THIS MONTH**

**Managers and Supervisors Can**

* Download and use the organizational self-study tool that is part of the *Family Engagement Web-Based Practice Toolkit* from The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCPFC). The tool is designed to review overall agency readiness and administrative policies, and identify program strengths and challenges in engaging and working with families. The tool is available at: www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/fewpt/self_study.htm.

* Develop key discussion questions and talking points for staff to use in conversations with youth in foster care about what permanence means to them. When sharing these questions with staff, talk with them about how to plan for talking about permanence with each youth on their caseload to help them be more comfortable and prepared for the conversations.

* Show segments of the AdoptUSKids video *The Road to Adoption and Foster Care* at a staff meeting and discuss how to improve permanency efforts at the agency. (Don’t have a copy? Request one using the order form at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/Order_form.pdf)

**Front-line Workers Can**

* Watch the video on meaningful family engagement from the 2010 Policy to Practice Dialogue. The video is available at: www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts/policy-to-practice-2010/.

* Ask each youth on their caseload which adults (currently or in the past) in their lives have been important to them and whom they trust. This can be the start of good conversations about adults that might be able to provide permanence.
Tools for Proactive Family Finding
Working Strategies and Solutions


Concurrent Planning for Youth Permanency: For older youth in the system, a number of activities should occur simultaneously and on an ongoing basis until a permanent family is identified. For instance, while it is often likely and best that a family can be found among those already known to the youth, the utilization of traditional recruitment resources should not be delayed pending the outcome of those efforts. Similarly, the other supportive interventions described below should also be provided in order to maximize every opportunity to find, nurture and sustain permanent families.

Preparing a Child/Youth for Permanency

- Listen as the child/youth expresses hopes and fears about family life.
- Understand that a child/youth’s initial “No” to adoption is only the beginning of the conversation. It should not diminish efforts to identify a permanent family whom may or may not adopt the child/youth.
- Provide individual and group therapeutic and educational interventions to help the child/youth understand his/her life and to plan for the future. Make permanency considerations a part of this planning.
- Teach interpersonal and family skills. Address emotional and behavioral issues that impact relationships.
- Provide the child/youth with opportunities for contact with other children/youth who have achieved permanence.

Identifying Potential Family Connections Already Known to the Child/Youth

- Listen for family connections that the child/youth may have already or for existing relationships that have the potential to become family.
- Contact significant adults identified by the child/youth. Engage them in helping to plan for the child/youth’s permanency. Not all of these adults will have the potential to become permanency resources; but some might have the potential to form long-term, caring relationships.
- Review records carefully to identify any significant adults now or previously in the child/youth’s life who can be engaged in helping with permanency planning.

(continued on next page)
• Make a thorough search for relatives, using case record information plus specialized locator services and technology. Update searches that may have been unsuccessful in the past.

• Don’t rule out adults whose relationships with the child/youth began on a professional level—therapists, teachers, child care staff, etc. Do not allow policies regarding dual relationships, which are designed to protect children/youth, to be used as a barrier to pursuing what may be the only option for permanency.

Support the Process of Family Making

• Avoid power struggles whenever possible while persistently working towards permanency. For instance, understand a child/youth’s reluctance to consider adoption when there is, as yet, no specific, identified family to meet. At the same time, keep looking for a family.

• Provide reassurance that the child/youth has power in the process, but ask that he or she be willing to meet a potential family when one is identified.

• Recognize that relationship building is a process. Provide ongoing interventions and support to the child/youth and caring adults in order to move the adoption forward.

• When moving towards permanency for the older child whose birth parents or other caregivers have difficulties in functioning, develop safety plans. Provide individualized education about mental health issues, chemical dependency, and personal safety.

• Do not allow a child/youth’s need for treatment in a group care setting to undermine potential connections with a permanent family. Remember, that permanency is a relationship, not a place. Encourage treatment/residential facilities to participate in planning for the child/youth’s future by recommending that the child/youth have at least one visiting resource family. This can be a relative, foster family or other resource family who can assist the child/youth in forming relationships outside the facility and in “practicing” family relationships and/or family living.

• Recruit, train and pay young people who have been adopted as adolescents by the agency to serve as peer mentors or case consultants in adolescent cases.

Pursue Traditional Adoption Recruitment Avenues

• Utilize all available recruitment resources, such as state, regional and national exchanges; adoption events; recruitment via media; etc.

• With reluctant child/you, keep the conversation going regarding his/her participation in recruitment.

• Empower the child/youth to take charge of using as many recruitment tools as possible. For example, let the child/youth produce a or write a vignette, etc.
• Update photos and materials at least yearly to reflect the child/youth’s growth and development.

• Provide opportunities for the older child/youth to meet and to interact with prospective adoptive families. For example, involve the child/youth in picnics, agency mentoring programs, visits to families in residential facilities, etc. if the child/youth is comfortable with these recruitment strategies or activities.

• Implement an adoption preparation program that addresses the child/youth’s questions and fears, assists the child/youth in accepting permanence and prepares him/her to move into a permanent family.

**Cultural Competence**

• Culture strongly impacts the meaning and boundaries of family.

• The racial and cultural characteristics of staff should reflect the racial and cultural characteristics of the children/youth and families served.

• Cultural competence is necessary to identify and to evaluate permanency options.

• Among factors that should be considered are the child/youth’s sense of identity and preference regarding the racial/ethnic makeup of a potential adoptive family, as well as ways to keep the child/youth connected to his or her heritage.

**Quality Assurance**

• Incorporate monitoring and measurement of permanency interventions into each agency’s case review and quality assurance programs. Develop such programs where they are not already in place.

• Assure that all computer-based, monitoring systems include questions that will remind caseworkers and supervisors to revisit the discussion about permanency for the child/youth in foster care. Caseworkers need to continue their efforts to find permanence for that child/youth.

• Review cases of children/youth older than a certain age for progress on permanency planning and implementation more frequently than other cases.
Characteristics of Successful Foster and Adoptive Families

1. **Tolerance for Ambivalent Feelings**

   Successful resource families keep going when “the warm, mushy feelings are gone.” They do not judge themselves too harshly for experiencing negative feelings toward the child and/or the child’s birth family. They understand that they may feel angry without acting on that anger. They have empathy for both the child and the birth family.

2. **Firm and Controlling Qualities**

   They are comfortable giving direction and providing structure for their children. As the adults in the family, they take the lead in the relationship in a strong and caring way. They try to anticipate behaviors, interrupt negative behaviors early and provide praise and physical affection. They are not deterred by a child’s protest or withdrawal.

3. **Flexible Expectations**

   When involved with children, they have realistic, flexible expectations of themselves and their children. They do not work to remake the child, but strive to help the child achieve success by acknowledging and appreciating small steps toward goals. They demonstrate flexibility in their expectations about the outcome of the placement.

4. **Tolerance for Rejection**

   They are able to withstand testing behaviors by their foster/adoptive children, including hurtful, angry, rejecting behaviors. They do not take it personally if the child is rejecting, because they recognize the rejection as the child’s fear of closeness. They realize that the child’s tie to the birth family, former foster families and others is not a rejection of their new parents.

5. **Ability to Delay Parental Gratification**

   They are aware that the relationship with their foster/adopted children may not be reciprocal. They can give nurturance without receiving much in return. They can postpone their own rewards and not equate the child’s behavior with their failure as a parent.

6. **Sense of Humor**

   They are able to use humor to cope with the stress that can result from foster or adoptive parenting. They can laugh and vent feelings, finding humor in daily exchanges with their children and/or birth parents.
7. **Ability to Meet Personal Needs**

They know how to take care of themselves. They refuse to be martyrs and recognize that taking personal time as a couple and as individuals is necessary. They take breaks from the child, using support systems, respite care and other resources to do this.

8. **Ability to Use Resources**

They seek and accept help. They learn how to identify and access help and support. They may do this on a formal or informal basis, seeking assistance ranging from self-help support groups to professionally facilitated therapy. They let others into their family system to get the additional support they need.

9. **Flexible Family Roles**

They share the responsibility of parenting and nurturing. They look to the total family system to find answers for problems. Parents are able to detect signs of “burnout” in their partner, and share the care-giving role for the children. Such flexibility greatly increases the likelihood of success.

10. **Spirituality**

Resource families possess a spiritual or religious belief that supports altruism and providing care for others. They have acquired a sense of meaning and basic satisfaction with where they are in life.

These 10 characteristics develop over time. Successful resource families are those willing to grow and change in order to maintain their commitment to their child. They are also families who feel good about asking for help and use it appropriately.

Extreme Recruitment™
Top 10 List

10. **No linear thinking:** We try ALL recruitment tools at once. General recruitment is reactive; Extreme Recruitment™ is proactive.

9. **Get out from behind the desk!** Diligent search is done in the field, talking to relatives. It is not done in front of a computer.

8. **Don’t take no for an answer.** Teenagers may say that they don’t want to be adopted. Although they may not want to be adopted by a stranger, they DO want to be reconnected with their biological family. Youth never stop longing to get back to their birth families.

7. **The number of strangers we can recruit is finite; the number of relatives we can recruit is infinite.** The average American has 300 living relatives.

6. **Biological family is more likely to adopt kids with the toughest challenges.** They can provide love without conditions much more readily than strangers.

5. **Weekly meetings are necessary.** Too much happens with Extreme Recruitment™ from week to week. If not, then the team is not trying hard enough.

4. **Consensus drives Extreme Recruitment™, not 100% agreement.** Hear everyone’s viewpoint. If unanimous agreement is not reachable, go with the majority.

3. **Pay attention to educational issues.** The youth and their pre-adoptive family have enough on their plate. Get the youth’s educational concerns taken care of BEFORE the child is placed.

2. **Build trust with the family.** The youth’s biological family has suffered incredible loss and grief. Honor it. Apologize to the family for the hurt that the child welfare system has caused.

1. **It’s not just about permanency; it’s about identity.** Long-term foster care strips youth of their identity. Extreme Recruitment™ gives it back.
WHAT IS AN INTERJURISDICTITIONAL PLACEMENT?

In the broadest sense, an interjurisdictional placement involves the placement of a child from one jurisdiction with a family who resides in a different jurisdiction. In a State with a county-administered child welfare system, for example, children, families and workers may encounter interjurisdictional issues between counties. More often, however, the term “interjurisdictional” is applied to placements involving movement of a child across State, Territory, or country boundaries.

Federal law makes it clear that States are not permitted to use jurisdictional barriers as a justification for delaying or denying permanence for a child. As specified in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, and reinforced by the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006, States are required to consider interjurisdictional placements; to simply not consider interjurisdictional placement options is a violation of Federal law and places the agency at risk for sanctions and corrective action.

RESOURCES IN THIS SECTION

This section:

• provides an overview of the importance of embracing interjurisdictional placements as one of many important strategies to find families for waiting children and youth;

• describes the role of two key interstate compacts in facilitating interjurisdictional placements;

• highlights a creative idea from the field about developing partnerships with bordering jurisdictions; and

• offers suggestions for ways to take action to build capacity for making interjurisdictional placements.

This section includes the following tools for interjurisdictional work:

• checklists for sending and receiving States;

• an agency assessment tool for interjurisdictional placement effectiveness; and

• detailed information about the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance.
The Role of Interjurisdictional Placements in Achieving Permanence

“Love knows no boundaries.” This simple yet profound statement expresses an important attitude to have in finding families for waiting children. Child welfare systems are separated by various jurisdictional boundaries—cities, counties, boroughs, States, Tribes, Territories, and countries—and those boundaries can represent significant barriers. Child welfare professionals, however, have the potential to facilitate the timely movement of children and youth across these jurisdictions to achieve what every child and youth needs and deserves: a permanent family.

Even if you or your staff haven’t been involved already in an interjurisdictional placement, chances are that you will be soon. With the increasing focus on kinship care and relative searches for youth in foster care as well as increased use of the Internet and other forms of electronic and social media, more and more agencies are increasingly locating viable permanency resources and family connections in other jurisdictions—sometimes all the way across the country or even in another country. Being prepared to facilitate an interjurisdictional placement—either as a sending or receiving agency—can help make it possible for children to achieve permanence more quickly.

Concurrent Planning with an Interjurisdictional Approach

A significant strategy in foster care and adoption work has been attempting to place children as close to home as possible, keeping children near the communities, schools, and friends who are most familiar. Embracing the value of interjurisdictional placements does not require rejecting the idea of trying to keep children close to home; both practices are important strategies to consider in pursuing permanence for children. Just as concurrent planning emphasizes and embraces the need to simultaneously work toward reunification and alternative permanency options for youth, agencies should concurrently seek adoptive families for youth both close to home and in other jurisdictions. Taking this concurrent approach helps waiting children achieve permanence sooner, rather than having to wait for local permanency options to be ruled out first; a youth’s chances for a permanent family are maximized by a broad search for a family.

Working with Military and Global Families

An interesting twist to the common image of interjurisdictional placements is placing children with military families stationed abroad or in the U.S. It may take extra effort to recruit, prepare and support military families to adopt waiting children, but agencies may find excellent resources for children waiting to be adopted among this population. The adoption journey can become even more complicated for military families who are subject to relocation to different jurisdictions and even out of the country, but many agencies and workers have found the military has great support systems for their families and ways to help them work through the complications in order to adopt from foster care. For a great resource on working with military families from recruitment
Global families are another rich permanency resource for children in foster care. On April 1st, 2008, the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption entered into force in the United States, thus changing the terrain for international adoptions by American couples. The Hague Convention also expands permanency options for children and youth in the U.S. foster care system for whom reasonable efforts and diligent searches have not been successful in finding an adoptive family, providing a global landscape for identification of relative and non-relative families in other countries. AdoptUSKids is currently working to build the capacity of jurisdictions to embrace both American families living abroad and foreign nationals as desired resources for waiting children. This work includes identifying and sharing promising practices for working with global families, analyzing relevant data and policy and developing resources for jurisdictions that are interested in working more effectively with global families.

THE ROLE OF INFRASTRUCTURE IN INTERJURISDICTIONAL PLACEMENTS

The role of infrastructure in making interjurisdictional placements happen cannot be overstated.

Simply put, this means that when a social worker needs to do a search for a family, or has found a family for a child across county, State, or international jurisdictions, they know how to do it. Detailed process and procedures, from beginning to end should be clearly spelled out.

AdoptUSKids offers information on setting up contracting in the publication Dollars and Sense: A Guide to Achieving Adoptions Through Public-Private Contracting. The publication can be downloaded for free at: adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/militaryGuide.pdf. AdoptUSKids also provides free technical assistance on contracting and other elements of facilitating interjurisdictional placements.

THE ROLE OF INTERSTATE COMPACTS IN INTERJURISDICTIONAL PLACEMENTS

Two interstate compacts play important roles in supporting interjurisdictional adoptive placements of children when these placements are across State lines:

- The Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) was conceived in the 1950s, with the intent of ensuring safety and well-being for children in care being moved across State lines for the purpose of adoption. Today, ICPC is a statutory law in all 50 States, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Compact
guarantees that each member jurisdiction’s laws and procedures are met and that the youth’s placement is properly managed and finalized. The ICPC also defines the roles of both the sending and receiving State or agency so that each entity understands and carries out its respective responsibilities. A new ICPC has been developed and some States have already enacted the new compact. At the time of publication, the new ICPC is not in effect. More information and updates on the status of the new ICPC can be found at: www.aphsa.org/Policy/icpc2006rewrite.htm. See the Tools on page 85 at the end of this section for checklists for sending and receiving States involved in interstate placements.

- The Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA), established in 1986, is an agreement among States that governs the delivery of medical services and adoption subsidies for children adopted from foster care who qualify for these benefits and who live in States other than their States of origin. Like the ICPC, it is designed to facilitate State-to-State coordination and planning for children who are adopted. ICAMA was designed to insure that children and youth with special needs moving across State lines for the purposes of adoption and their adoptive families would receive medical and other needed services. ICAMA is a binding agreement among member jurisdictions, currently including 49 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Great Resources on Interjurisdictional Placements

In 2010, AdoptUSKids released Beyond Borders: Achieving Child Permanence Across Geographic Boundaries, a DVD with interviews from a variety of child welfare professionals about interjurisdictional placements. Companion technical assistance materials are due for publication in late 2011. For more information on these resources and to view the video, visit: www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/interjurisdictionalResources.aspx. To order free copies of the DVD, go to: adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/Order_form.pdf.

ADOPTION EXCHANGES AND PHOTOLISTINGS

Photolists and adoption exchanges play a vital role in facilitating interjurisdictional placements. The role and importance of adoption exchanges—including the role of the national AdoptUSKids’ photolisting site—was eloquently described by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau in the 2007 funding announcement for AdoptUSKids:

“...the Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-239), which became law on July 3, 2006, is intended to accelerate interjurisdictional placements by mandating that certain interjurisdictional placement activities be completed within prescribed timelines. A national foster care and adoption information exchange may play a key role in helping States meet these mandates.
An adoption exchange is a service that helps agencies match waiting children with prospective adoptive parents by maintaining two lists: (1) children, often older children; children of color; and children with special needs who are available and waiting for adoption; and (2) adoptive parents who have been approved as potential placements for these children.

A State exchange lists children and families from a single State, while a regional exchange lists children and families from several surrounding States. The national exchange lists children and families from all over the United States and is expected to work with and assist both regional and State exchanges. Exchanges often employ Internet technologies, in addition to the standard book-format of photolistings, to provide information.”

In recognition of the valuable role of photolistings in expanding permanency options for waiting children, Congress called for the creation of the AdoptUSKids photolisting website (adoptuskids.org). The AdoptUSKids’ photolisting is a free service that can help agencies connect waiting children with adoptive families. More than 15,700 children who have been featured on the AdoptUSKids photolisting now live with permanent families. AdoptUSKids can arrange for an individual or group training (via web or teleconference) on its features and how to use it not only to photolist waiting children but also how to make potential matches of waiting children with one or more of the 4,500 home studied and approved prospective adoptive families from all parts of the country who are registered on AdoptUSKids.

IDEA FROM THE FIELD

Border Agreements

Jurisdictions, within the laws, policies and rules that govern them, may establish agreements that promote effective procedures to support interjurisdictional practices. For example, within a State whose system is county or regionally organized, a border agreement might allow agency workers to cross specific county or regional borders to conduct home studies or placement supervision. A border agreement might also allow prospective families to complete pre-service training in another county or region, in order to provide for accessibility and timeliness. In an interstate situation, States that share borders might negotiate a cooperative border agreement that ensures timely response to home study requests by the receiving State.

Collaboration and communication are essential in order for jurisdictions to create effective border agreements. Jurisdictions that have executed border agreements emphasize the importance of paying close attention to the details in developing and implementing a border agreement. Among other things, it is critical to:

- include ALL key stakeholders – internal and external;
- create a work plan that will be carried out by an inter-jurisdictional workgroup;
ensure thorough knowledge of each jurisdiction’s laws and policies guides negotiations; acknowledge the deal breakers; and, yield and compromise, but remain determined, remembering always the children, youth, and families who will benefit from the end result.


LINKING WITH THE FOSTERING CONNECTIONS ACT

- Working with Tribal Child Welfare Systems—Facilitating interjurisdictional placements encompasses more than simply considering placements between two States; some interjurisdictional work involves coordination between a State and a Tribe. The Fostering Connections law contains multiple provisions that have implications for how States, counties, and Territories interact with Tribal child welfare systems and engage in interjurisdictional placements with Tribes. As more Tribes pursue direct Title IV-E federal funding to operate child welfare systems, States will likely encounter more cases in which they will be involved in interjurisdictional placements across Tribal and State boundaries. The Fostering Connections law also requires that States negotiate in good faith with any Tribe that is interested in developing an agreement with the State for federal child welfare payments.

For more detailed guidance and information about implementation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, see the resources available on the Children’s Bureau’s website at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm and the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections’ website at: www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/.
**Take Action:**

**Interjurisdictional Placements**

**TODAY**

**Managers, Supervisors and Front-line Workers Can**

- Print the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) Sending and Receiving State Checklists (see details on page 85 of this toolkit) and put them up on office bulletin boards. The checklists are also available at: www.adoptuskids.org/resourceCenter/atcPublications.aspx.
- Browse the ICPC website (icpc.aphsa.org) to learn more about the resources available related to interjurisdictional placements.

**THIS WEEK**

**Managers and Supervisors Can**

- Peruse information about adoption assistance benefits available in each State, available at: www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance/.
- Read the AdoptUSKids’ publication *Dollars and Sense: A Guide to Achieving Adoptions Through Public-Private Contracting* to learn more about ways to use purchase of service, including for interjurisdictional placements. The publication can be downloaded at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/dollarsAndSense.pdf.
- Contact your State ICPC administrator to learn how many interstate placements have occurred in the State (both sending and receiving placements) and have them identify a few workers who have experience with the interjurisdictional process. These staff could be great resources.
- Order copies of the 2011 National Adoption Month poster to give to your staff and to post in common areas around the office. You can request free posters by calling AdoptUSKids at 888-200-4005 or emailing info@adoptuskids.org.
Read Wherever My Family Is, That’s Home! Adoption Services for Military Families to learn about creative strategies for working with military families to find permanent families for waiting children and youth. Many of the strategies and tips in this guide are also helpful in interjurisdictional placements with non-military families. The publication can be downloaded at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/militaryGuide.pdf.

**Front-line Workers Can**

- Become familiar with the resources on the Association for Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (AAICAMA) website at: www.aaicama.org/cms/
- Work with one youth or one prospective adoptive family to develop a video or other creative presentation to be shared with a possible family or youth match in another jurisdiction.

**Managers and Supervisors Can**

- Review the descriptions of children that your agency has photolisted on the AdoptUSKids website. By providing up-to-date, accurate descriptions of children who are photolisted, you can increase the chances of finding permanent families for children.
- Explore options for using social media tools to help your agency’s efforts to facilitate interjurisdictional placements, such as featuring children awaiting adoption on a Twitter of Facebook account for your agency. This exploration should include a thoughtful assessment of your agency’s capacity to use social media effectively and—as with all child-specific recruitment—ensure that children are prepared appropriately for any recruitment efforts that share information about them publicly. The National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents at AdoptUSKids (www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment) can help agencies explore these considerations. The archived webinar Social Media and Social Networking in Child Welfare (online at: www.cwla-demo.westat.com/conferences/webinars.html) is a great starting point for learning about social media use by child welfare agencies.
- Show the Beyond Borders: Achieving Child Permanence Across Geographic Boundaries DVD from AdoptUSKids and use it to discuss ideas with staff on how
to improve services in this area. You can watch the video at: www.adoptuskids.org/professionalResourceCenter/interjurisdictionalResources.aspx or order free copies of the DVD using the order form at: www.adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/Order_form.pdf.


- Hold a focus group, send a survey, or reach out by phone to families who have adopted children from other States to hear what could have made the process easier and smoother for them.

- Hold a focus group with youth to discuss the idea of permanency options in other jurisdictions. Ask youth what appeals to them about living somewhere else, what concerns they have about an interjurisdictional placement, and what workers and families could do to make a move to another jurisdiction smoother for them.

- Map out your agency’s interjurisdictional policies, procedures, and contracting mechanisms. Make a plan to address any gaps in knowledge, policy, or procedures.

**Front-line Workers Can**

- Find out who in your agency is registered to use the photolisting on the AdoptUSKids’ website (www.adoptuskids.org) and see if you can use the photolisting service as well to list waiting children and search for families.

- If your agency uses a State or regional adoption exchange, explore ways to use the exchange more actively as a tool for finding permanent families for waiting children.

- Look at families on the AdoptUSKids website who might be a match for children on your caseload who are waiting to be adopted.
Tools for Interjurisdictional Placements
ICPC Checklists

In collaboration with the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (AAICPC) and the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), AdoptUSKids has developed checklists for sending and receiving States. These checklists provide an overview and generalized description of how the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) might operate for children and youth being placed across State lines with recruited, general applicant families for the purpose of adoption. Not all steps in the checklists will apply to all situations in every State. Consult with your State ICPC Compact Administrator at: (www.icpc.aphsa.org/states.asp) if in doubt.

You can download the free checklists from the AdoptUSKids website. Please use the links below to download the checklists.

**ICPC Receiving State Checklist**

**ICPC Sending State Checklist**
### Is Your System IJ Effective?

#### Part 1
Answer each of the following questions by checking in the column for “Yes” or “No”

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<th>Training</th>
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<td>Are case managers and supervisors provided training related to ICPC?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are case managers and supervisors provided training related to ICAMA?</td>
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<td>Are case managers and supervisors provided training for use of the AdoptUsKids child and family databases in identifying potential matches?</td>
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<td>Are case managers and supervisors provided training related to placements under the Hague Adoption Convention?</td>
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<td>Are private agency personnel provided training related to ICPC and Hague?</td>
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<td>Are judges and attorneys provided training related to ICPC and Hague?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is information about ICPC and ICAMA included in pre-service training for families?</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>System Supports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your agency/system have ICPC/ICAMA specialists at the local/regional level?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your system offer expeditor services to support and facilitate IJ placements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your system give official caseload credit for interjurisdictional work completed by staff on behalf of a sending state?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your system provide incentives for the timely completion of studies and reports related to IJ placements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has your system developed and disseminated a mini-bench book or crib sheet for judges that outlines procedures involved in interstate placements?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has your agency/system conducted a systematic review in the past 2 years of how it processes ICPC cases, both incoming (receiving) and outgoing (sending)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>IF yes, has your agency/system created and implemented a plan to correct issues identified (if applicable)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has your agency/system conducted a systematic review in the past 2 years of how it processes ICAMA cases, both incoming (receiving) and outgoing (sending)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>IF yes, has your agency/system created and implemented a plan to correct issues identified (if applicable)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has your agency/system conducted a systemic review of court processes involving interjurisdictional placements in the past 2 years?</td>
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<tr>
<td>IF yes, has your agency/system worked with judicial leadership to create and implement a plan to correct issues identified (if applicable)?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Recruitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your agency register and feature available children/youth on the AdoptUsKids.org photolisting and/or a State or regional electronic adoption exchange?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your agency register approved foster/adopt families on AdoptUsKids.org and/or a State or regional electronic adoption exchange?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your agency/system permit workers to utilize the child/family database at AdoptUsKids.org and/or a State or regional electronic adoption exchange to identify potential matches for children/youth?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your agency/system actively recruit families at nearby military bases?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does your agency/system have protocols for follow-up with families from other jurisdictions who inquire about children/youth?</td>
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</table>

PART 2 – From Part 1 above, identify THREE (3) items marked “NO” that, if addressed, has the potential to enhance permanency options for youth by improving IJ practice in your agency/state/jurisdiction?
Conclusion

Throughout this Toolkit there is a wide variety of ideas, suggested activities and resources aimed at helping individual staff and agencies build your capacity to promote and support adoptions from foster care. Our hope is that you have found many ideas in this Toolkit that can be put to use right away, as well as multiple ideas that agencies will embrace in order to create broader improvements and make systemic changes in how you work with current and prospective parents.

As you seek to continue to build your capacity and skills for this work, keep in mind that there are many valuable resources available to assist you and your agencies; some of them are listed on the next page under “Adoption and Foster Care Resources Online.” Members of the Children’s Bureau’s Training and Technical Assistance Network are available to provide free technical assistance to States, Tribes, and Territories on a wide range of child welfare issues. You can download the directory of the Training and Technical Assistance Network at: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/tta/cbtan.pdf.

National Adoption Month is a wonderful opportunity to devote special attention to, and raise public awareness of, the thousands of children across the country who are waiting for permanent families and to the thousands of families who have already adopted children from foster care.

National Adoption Month is also an opportunity to be a catalyst for you and your agencies to look to find ways today to make lasting change for tomorrow, so that future children who come into contact with the public child welfare system in the United States don’t have to wait long for a permanent, loving family.
Adoption and Foster Care Resources Online

ADOPTUSKIDS’ PUBLICATIONS (DOWNLOAD FOR FREE AT ADOPTUSKIDS.ORG):

- Recruitment Work Plan Guide for Adoption and Foster Care Program Managers
- Practitioner’s Guide: Getting More Parents for Children From Your Recruitment Efforts
- Family Pocket Guide (for families entering the adoption and foster care process) Available in English and Spanish
- Lasting Impressions: A Guide for Photolisting Children
- Finding a Fit that Will Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Adoptive Families with Waiting Children
- Wherever My Family Is: That’s Home – Adoption Services for Military Families
- Dollars and Sense: A Guide to Achieving Adoptions Through Public-Private Contracting
- Barriers & Success Factors in Adoption from Foster Care: Perspectives of Families & Staff
- Improving Adoption Practices: Parents & Caseworkers Talk About Barriers & Success Factors in Adoption and Foster Care (video)
- ICPC Receiving State Checklist and ICPC Sending State Checklist
- Nuestra Familia, Nuestra Cultura (Our Family, Our Culture): Promoting & Supporting Latino Families in Adoption and Foster Care
- Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Respite Care in Your Community
RESOURCES

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) statistics
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/afcars

Adoption Exchange Association
www.adoptea.org

AdoptUSKids
www.adoptuskids.org

Child Welfare Information Gateway
www.childwelfare.gov
This important website provides a comprehensive listing of foster care and adoption resources by State. Copy and paste this link into your browser and then specify the State for which you would like to view these resources: www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/index.cfm?event=viewSearchForm

National Indian Child Welfare Association
www.nicwa.org

National Resource Center for Adoption
www.nrcadoption.org

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp

National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Families at AdoptUSKids
www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment

North American Council on Adoptable Children
www.nacac.org

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/