

DATA-DRIVEN RECRUITMENT

Key Data Elements on Foster and Adoptive Families¹

Using data effectively is a key part of conducting diligent recruitment. Most child welfare systems have good data on children in foster care and their characteristics. One of the most important — and often most lacking — areas of data is on prospective and current foster, adoptive, and kinship parents. Having useful data on prospective and current parents gives a child welfare system crucial insight into how effective their current approaches are in recruiting, developing, and supporting foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

We know that collecting, tracking, and analyzing data can be challenging for child welfare systems. There are often barriers and significant delays involved in adding new data elements to data systems; many child welfare systems also report challenges in making it possible for staff to collect and enter data consistently and in a timely manner. Recognizing that child welfare systems may only be able to track a few new pieces of data on foster and adoptive families, we have prioritized key data elements below that will help inform your efforts to recruit and maintain a pool of families and help you assess the effectiveness of your strategies and efforts.

Data Elements on Current Families

Key Question to Ask Your Data: Are our current families being fully utilized?

1 Where are our current families located in relation to where our children come from?

- Are our children being placed in close proximity to their birth families?
- Are siblings being placed together?
- What are the trends in this data?

2 How many homes have not had a placement in the past six months?

- Why have they not had a placement?
- Do these families need specific training, development, and support to help them be able to be a resource to children in need of placement? If so, how can you help the family develop their capacity to meet the needs of these children?
- Do these homes need to be either closed or referred to an agency that might be more appropriate to their interests and capabilities (e.g., the family wants a healthy infant but that is not the type of placement the agency has). If your child

Exploring this question helps your child welfare system begin to focus on whether current recruitment strategies are targeted to building a pool of families that can meet the needs of the children and youth needing placement. It can also indicate if any work needs to be done to close or refer to other agencies homes that are not utilized, freeing staff time to recruit, study and support families willing to accommodate the needs of your children/youth.

You may be able to use AFCARS data, CFSR outcome data, and possibly data from your data systems to look at this question.

welfare system is not going to place children with the family, you may want to refer them to a more appropriate agency or have a discussion with the family about developing their ability to meet the needs of children needing placement or closing their home.

¹ For this tip sheet, when referring to families we are referring to non-relative or non-fictive kin homes.

Data Elements on the Licensure/Approval Process

Key Question to Ask Your Data: How is our process working for getting families licensed/approved?

- 1** How many families have made inquiries in the past six months?
- 2** How many families have attended an initial orientation or participated in an initial orientation discussion with a worker?
 - Of those, how many families have attended pre-service training?
 - Of those, how many were certified/licensed?
- 3** How long does the process take?
 - How long was it from point of application to final certification/licensure?
 - How long was it between the milestones of the process:
 - Time from inquiry to initial orientation or discussion?
 - Time from orientation to first pre-service training?
 - Time to get all paperwork in?
 - Time for the study to be completed?
 - Time for the worker to write it up and get all needed approvals (e.g., supervisor, review team)?

Examining this question will help you determine whether there are any significant barriers or delays in the licensure/approval process. By reviewing this data, you can identify any parts of the process that might need to be changed in order to keep families moving through the process at an appropriate pace (e.g., policies that create barriers to licensure, lack of consistent good customer service and support). Answering this question also helps you identify whether you need to develop new strategies to keep families engaged during the licensure/approval process.

You may want to look in your data system to see if this information is already being collected and simply needs a query or data warehouse report generated; if it's not already being collected, you may want to track in the future.



Data Elements on Placement Capacity

Key Questions to Ask Your Data: What is our current actual capacity? Is that capacity sufficient to meet the need for appropriate placements for children currently in need of a placement and for our anticipated placement needs?

- 1** What is the true bed capacity of our homes?
- 2** How many openings do we currently have?
- 3** If a home is available to accept children:
 - What behaviors and special needs is the family trained, developed, supported, and equipped to accept?
 - Will they accept sibling groups? How large of a sibling group can they accept?
 - What ages of children will they accept?

Examining these questions will help your system determine your true capacity of placement options for children in foster care. By “true capacity” we mean the realistic number of children that each family can care for at any given time and have been approved to take. Tracking data — both quantitative and qualitative — on your true capacity will help you determine what kinds of placements options you need to increase (e.g., families that can take sibling groups of three or four, families that can take teens, etc.). This data further helps you determine if available families are in locations that will enable children to remain in or near their communities.

We recognize the reality of the shortage of foster homes that many child welfare systems face and that having a shortage can lead to overplacing children in homes. However, to accurately understand your needs for recruitment, you must have a clear picture of your true capacity of placement options, even though you may be placing more children in a home than the home’s true capacity.

You will need to work with your data system to determine the best ways to analyze your true capacity for placing specific groups of children and youth (e.g., sibling groups, teens, medically fragile children). You may also want to review your licensing/approval documentation processes to determine whether you are collecting the information you need for understanding the true capacity of approved homes, including understanding how well you are preparing, developing, and supporting families to help them be equipped to care for children with specific needs.



Data Elements on Effectiveness of Recruitment, Development, and Support Strategies²

Key Question to Ask Your Data: Are our recruitment strategies effective in finding appropriate families for our children and keeping those families engaged both before and after children are placed with them?

- 1 What brings families to our agency? How many openings do we currently have?**
- 2 What are the characteristics of families that are good at meeting the needs of the children entering care? How do we define “successful families” to guide our recruitment efforts?**
- 3 How many families have left our agency in the past six months?**
 - What are their real reasons for leaving? Do we understand and capture the real reasons why families end their relationship with our agency (e.g., families who adopt might have wanted to continue as foster parents but end the relationship with the agency because they don’t feel supported)? Do we allow families to define their reason for leaving or do we make them fit their answer into one of our pre-defined reasons?
 - What are the characteristics of families who leave?
 - What is their average tenure?

This question is helpful to determine the allocation of resources and focus of efforts to keep families engaged with your system. If recruitment strategies are not bringing in the families you need, you may need to re-evaluate those strategies and invest your resources differently to maximize resources. This may also help you determine what strategies you need to use to continually develop and support families to help them meet the changing needs of the children and youth in need of placement.

You may be able to obtain this data by conducting short periodic surveys in appropriate formats for your communities (e.g., using online surveys, distributing paper surveys, getting input at community events). You might also be able to use existing data from your data system to answer some of the questions.

² We encourage child welfare systems to focus on actively developing and supporting both prospective and current foster and adoptive families, rather than focusing on the idea of “retention.” By meeting a family’s needs, you increase their ability to address each child’s unique needs, while also strengthening their relationship with your child welfare system. The traditional view of retention suggests passively holding onto families, whereas developing and supporting involves building and nurturing a relationship with families so that they continue to feel equipped to meet the needs of children and youth. See our resources on [developing and supporting families](#).

Additional Resources

Developing a more data-driven approach to recruitment is an ongoing process for child welfare systems and aligns well with your other efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. We have many other resources available to support child welfare systems' use of data to guide family recruitment, development, and support. Our website, www.nrcdr.org, provides resources on how to use data as you build and sustain a pool of families for children in foster care and waiting to be adopted. Our customizable [Diligent Recruitment Navigator](#) offers multiple suggested discussion questions to help you examine your data on recruitment, customer service, and family engagement and support. We also provide tailored technical assistance to States, Tribes, and Territories to help you develop and implement data-driven diligent recruitment programs.



More free resources at:
www.nrcdr.org

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