

Engaging Nongovernmental Organizations to Achieve Timely Permanency for Children and Youth Waiting to Be Adopted



Introduction

In many states, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play a key role in providing foster care and adoption services, including through grants and contracts with the public child welfare agency. These organizations often have strong connections to the communities they serve and may have expertise in reaching or serving specific populations (e.g., African American families, older youth, rural communities, etc.). Engaging NGOs can help child welfare systems leverage these relationships along with the flexibility and adaptability that NGOs often have in achieving program goals.

Opportunities to Engage NGOs

- ▶ Establish or deepen partnerships and contracts with NGOs that provide adoption services to have them expand their efforts to recruit, prepare, and support adoptive families for children and youth in foster care. Many NGOs already working on adoptive family recruitment, preparation, and support have ideas for new strategies to try, pilot programs that could make a significant impact if they can be taken to larger scale, and other insights that could help more children achieve permanency if the NGO could access needed funding, partnerships, or other support.
- ▶ Connect with NGOs led by youth or young adults to engage them as key voices and advocates for ensuring that children and youth in foster care have permanent families. Many states have NGOs that are focused on empowering and supporting youth who are, or were, in foster care; these groups can be powerful allies in raising awareness about the need for adoptive families as well as key voices to direct overall efforts for prospective parent recruitment and preparation.
- ▶ Partner with NGOs that have strong relationships in specific communities from which children and youth waiting to be adopted live (e.g., specific neighborhoods, cultural communities) for help in raising awareness about the need for adoptive families for children and youth in foster care.
- ▶ Work with NGOs led by adoptive parents to tap into their insights for achieving timely adoption. In addition, explore options for having their networks of experienced adoptive parents serve as mentors to help prospective adoptive parents navigate the adoption process (e.g., home study, matching, family preparation) to keep them engaged through the process.
- ▶ Engage NGOs with specialized skills, tools, and expertise—including strengths outside of child welfare work (e.g., family-finding techniques, social impact efforts, strategic communications)—as partners to help improve the effectiveness and impact of recruitment, preparation, and postadoption support strategies. This could include creative approaches, such as partnering with NGOs experienced in applying technology strategies to social issues, or working with multidisciplinary groups (e.g., working in the field of public health to address complex challenges), and engaging with groups with expertise in making process improvements and increasing efficiency of multisector efforts.
- ▶ Reach out to NGOs that can help make home improvements as a strategy to eliminate barriers to prospective parents' ability to adopt due to needed features or space at their homes (e.g., to make home repairs, to install smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, to complete renovations that create separate bedrooms for children).
- ▶ Ask NGOs to engage their board members as leaders in their communities and as points of contact to reach additional leaders who can raise awareness about the children and youth waiting to be adopted and the need for adoptive families.
- ▶ Engage with NGOs that work with lawyers and judges (e.g., membership associations, professional networking organizations) to explore ways to collaborate on developing strategies for breaking down barriers and shortening timelines for the required court proceedings for finalizing adoptions from foster care. This could include partnering with judges' associations on creative approaches to this problem, such as opening courts on weekends specifically for finalizing adoptions.
- ▶ Connect with NGOs that work across state lines as possible partners in facilitating communication, coordination, service provision, and other elements of work that supports interstate adoption efforts when a child welfare agency identifies a good adoptive family match in another state.

