

# A Roadmap to Achieving Success in Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention

Children do best in families. For children and teens in foster care, stable foster parenting is one of the most powerful ways to help them heal and thrive.

Yet, many states struggle with foster parent shortages and high turnover.

Past approaches to foster parent recruitment often have focused too narrowly on recruiting “enough” families and have overlooked the underlying problems that cause many families to give up or walk away from foster parenting.

We must do better. We can do better. Solutions exist.



## Policy #1 Implement data-driven recruitment and retention practices

Winning policy approaches include maintaining a foster parent census to closely track the availability of foster families to meet the needs of children and teens in their community; making the first placement the best placement by using targeted recruitment and pre-match strategies; and gathering and using feedback from foster families to continually improve practice by conducting surveys, focus groups and exit interviews with foster families to understand their experiences, what they need to succeed and their reasons for quitting.



## Policy #2 Provide foster parents with timely access to trusted, dedicated staff and to peer support

Winning policy approaches include investing in crisis mobile response services to help stabilize placements when high needs or emergencies occur; hiring experienced foster parents to serve as dedicated peer support workers to train and coach foster families in caring for children with greater needs; and supporting kinship navigator services to support relative caregivers.



## Policy #3 Engage foster parents in decision-making

Winning policy approaches include establishing foster parent advisory boards; improving notification of foster parents about court proceedings; and training caseworkers on information sharing with foster parents about the child’s health and education needs.



## Policy #4 Support relationships between birth and foster families

Winning policy approaches include recruitment plans that target prospective foster families who have an interest in coaching and mentoring birth families; shared parenting policies that include comfort calls and icebreakers; and caseworker training on family engagement practices such as team decision making.



## Policy #5 Prioritize placements with family members

Winning policy approaches include kinship firewalls that put in place a special approval process needed for non-kin placements; removing licensing barriers for kin who can provide a safe and stable placement; and requiring family-finding at first contact.



## Policy #6 Ensure timely access to physical and mental health services

Winning policy approaches include ensuring children have access to medical homes and trauma informed care; providing state-of-the-art training to help foster parents and workers understand and manage children’s physical and behavioral health needs; authorizing foster parents to consent to routine medical care; and facilitating sharing of health information through electronic information exchange.

