

# Framework for Developing a Continuum of Sustainable Permanency-Focused Services

*“Children need systems that are inclusive and driven by them, systems that will enable them to respond to their feelings and needs at any time.”*

— Jeroo Billimoria

## Introduction

The 10-step framework is a component of the National Resource Center for Adoption’s Permanency Support and Preservation Model. It offers a methodology for the development of a multi-level permanency plan that integrates individual, organizational, and community-based inputs. The framework builds from the Model’s guiding principles and leverages ideas from adaptive management principles, social network theory, risk-protective factor-based models of care and SAMHSA’s Strategic Prevention Framework. These principles include a focus on using data in decision making, creating an environment of sharing, learning and adaptation, and developing partnerships/relationships with stakeholders who will work together to create and maintain viable services. Each step in the framework builds upon the previous steps. States, Territories and Tribes (STTs) can use the framework to assist them in developing a comprehensive and sustainable Permanency Support and Preservation Model.

## Framework Goals

- Guide the development of a comprehensive, evidence-informed permanency support and preservation model.
- Increase the STT’s capacity to develop and implement tools and strategies that will sustain permanency support and preservation services.
- Increase the STT’s capacity to reduce risk and increase protective factors in adoptive/guardianship families.

## Framework 10 Steps

1. Preparation, Coordination, and Communication
2. Information Gathering and Assessment
3. Confirmation
4. Prioritization
5. Design/redesign
6. Planning
7. Capacity Building
8. Implementation
9. Monitoring and evaluation
10. Sustainability, Replication, Dissemination

## Step 1: Preparation, Coordination, and Communication

This step promotes the development of communication methods and community relationships that will allow for effective coordination between community, cross-system, and inter-divisional stakeholders. These relationships are critical to the development of a well-designed permanency support and preservation model. The development and coordination of these community resources is the basis for building trusting and productive relationships among formal and informal institutions. These relationships will form the foundation for the development, implementation, and sustainability of permanency-focused services for children and families involved with the child welfare system. Adequate time should be allocated to support engagement, awareness, and training activities that will create an assured level of understanding for all stakeholders, enable them to more accurately develop and implement the needed services, create the supportive environment for the changes, and define innovative ways of working together.

These relationships will also assist STTs in gathering information on the amount and types of service needs of adoptive/guardianship families. None of this can occur unless effective community networks are established and service providers receive information regarding the specific needs.

Possible tasks to support this step include:

- Explore the development of a (or work with a current) multi-purpose collaborative body consisting of public health and human service providers to develop alliances, create a shared vision, and mobilize resources for services to post-permanency families whose needs may be met by multiple agencies and across service systems.
- Identify, engage, and ensure a meaningful role in planning services by kinship caregivers, guardians, adoptive parents, older youth, and adults who have experienced guardianship or adoption.
- Explore the development of a child welfare system inter-divisional (CPS, Foster Care, Adoption, Post Adoption) coordinating committee to identify the service refinements needed to promote positive permanency outcomes.
- Develop community forums that support how community partners, leaders, families and children describe and/or identify their needs, gaps in services, and possible resolutions related to permanency support services.
- Develop communication processes for those engaged in supporting adoptive/guardianship families. This may include the development of various methods across multiple channels – shared databases, web portals, shared documents (Google docs), email, mobile, face-to-face meetings, web-conferences, telephone – to better ensure the flow of information and assist in the coordination of services.
- Develop an awareness process that ensures community and other partners have a clear understanding of the needs of adoptive/guardianship families and how these needs may change over time.
- Develop consistent networking and communication opportunities for information and knowledge sharing with families, permanency support programs, and cross-system service providers.
- Develop a reliable clearinghouse for information that is useful to all stakeholders.

*“...recognizing that effective system building entails collaboration, consensus building and partnership across stakeholder groups and across national, state, county, city and neighborhoods levels.”*

*– Building Systems of Care A Primer  
by Sheila A. Pires*

## Step 2: Information Gathering and Assessment

During this step, a plan is developed to gather and analyze information from community providers, families, and child welfare service systems that is relevant to the permanency support network. Cross-system collaboration is critical in gathering, documenting, sharing, and using information to make decisions that impact permanency. STTs have the opportunity to develop systems to collect pre- and post-adoption data that will help identify, respond, and eventually predict pre- and post-adoption needs. With the ability to statistically identify trends over a period of time or the life cycle of an adoptive family, STTs will be better equipped to construct a post-permanency model that proactively reaches out to families and accurately estimates the type, level, and volume of services that are needed.

The collection and subsequent analysis of this data will assist STTs in identifying patterns or trends related to the needs of adoptive/guardianship families. This information can be used to make forecasts and proactive plans that anticipate the

possible needs for families post permanency. In addition to identifying trends, the information can be used to obtain outcome data on existing services and intervention models. This will assist in driving improved permanency planning, refining services and intervention, and developing a coherent system of care.

*“Achieving an ambitious vision for children and youth is an extraordinarily momentous task, with no ‘cookbook’ or easy shortcuts that staff can take for granted. Instead, successful organizations use all the evidence available to them to make good judgments up front – and then constantly collect information to find out how they are doing and how they might need to fine-tune their approaches.”*

– CWLA National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare, page 80

Evaluations of the interventions will help to determine the effectiveness of services, supports, and/or treatment interventions. The data can assist to identify profiles of children and families that may be at higher risk, times in the life cycle of adoptive/guardianship families where needs are intensified, and services that families are most likely to utilize. Data gathering and analyzing the data to determine the needs for adoptive/guardianship families—both pre- and post-finalization—will require a systemic process and analysis of both structured and unstructured data elements.

Possible tasks that will support this step include:

- Gather, prioritize, and analyze internal and external structured trending data. Information in current databases (AFCARS, SACWIS, MACSIS, etc.)
- Gather, prioritize, and analyze internal and external unstructured trending data over the past five years. This may include information captured from family vulnerability/risk assessment tools, focus groups, routine and/or

ongoing case reviews, call centers, crisis lines, emails, surveys, feedback processes, federal review reports, programmatic, or agency/departmental level reports, internal management reports, quality assurance reports, citizen reviews, panels/Foster Care Review Boards reports, internal or external audits, research, evaluations, special studies connected to law suits and legal actions, task force and/or commission reports, etc.

- Develop a community assessment to identify the current state of families involved across the permanency continuum and the condition of the permanency support system. Data elements captured on the assessment could include volume of potential users, current users, potential issues, post adoption/guardianship information/data currently being collected, key gaps or uncertainties in data, understanding of the current system (disruption, dissolution rates, cross-system service usage, etc.), the current expressed needs and/or other inferred needs, the level of risk/family vulnerability, the availability of adoption/guardianship competent service providers, the state of community resources (new, mature, or nonexistent), and the strategies to enhance these through other community assets.
- Develop initial evaluation questions and capture related data sources.
- Collect and analyze data on existing post adoption services and intervention models and their outcomes (impact, fidelity, competency, capacity) and how this service array may need to be modified (expanded or revised) to respond to family needs.

### Step 3: Confirmation

During this step the accuracy of the data that was gathered is confirmed as well as the needs and trends that were identified during Step 2. If this data/information is found not to be accurate or significant information gaps have been identified, this step will focus on developing plans to gather the appropriate data and/or filling these information gaps. The confirmation of this final data/information will help guide the development of the initial plans and strategies used to develop/refine the permanency service continuum. The final identified needs should be presented to stakeholders for validation and prioritization.

Possible tasks that will support this step include:

- Confirm the accuracy and completeness of the data.
- Refine data that was found to be inaccurate, and fill any gaps found in the information.
- Develop a general consensus among key stakeholders related to the validity of the findings, and ensure stakeholders who represent broad interests within the STTs are taken into account.
- Cross-reference the needs identified with the information families are reporting and/or experiencing.
- Confirm the accuracy of the information, and prepare for Step 4.

#### Step 4: Prioritization

Traditionally during Step 2, more needs are identified than can be responded to in the short term. Once needs are confirmed, it is necessary to identify priority areas that will be developed into the initial permanency support and preservation plan. Listed below are questions that will help with prioritization:

- What are the most significant needs?
- Where can improvements be made on current services?
- What are the cross-system opportunities and/or constraints?
- What will happen if we don't respond to a particular need?
- Who is the most appropriate provider/responder to this need, and how does this relate to their priorities?
- What strengths exist that can be built upon?
- Which actions will have the greatest impact on the desired outcomes?
- What resources (staff, funds) are available?
- How readily can the problem be responded to?
- Does the problem relate to a specific population?

*"We must never be complacent about the need to do more to improve services for children at greatest risk."*

*– Margaret Eaton, Chairman  
of the Local Government  
Association in England*

#### Step 5: Design/Redesign

During this step, prioritized needs will be compared to the current service array. This review will help to determine if new strategies, interventions, or services need to be developed and/or if existing services can be reframed to meet the identified needs. In some situations, new programs/services will need to be implemented. The development of the initial logic model will support the design process and is a critical component in Step 5.

The "one size fits all" or "cookie-cutter" approach when designing, developing or refining permanency support services is not appropriate in working with children and families. Services should be responsive to the life cycle and culture of adoptive/guardianship families. This will require preparation and after-care supports or services for children, foster/adoptive families, and their community. The enhancements should be offered to all families, regardless of the families' relation to the children. A highly rigid service approach, including only predefined services and timeframes, will not adequately meet the changing needs of children and families moving to permanency. Finally, once the service array is identified, the organization should develop a theory of change that identifies the most significant strategies for designing or redesigning the service array.

Possible tasks that will support this step include:

- Develop the initial theory of change.
- Define the continuum of services/supports (from preparation through post-finalization) that are needed.
- Identify the evidence-based practice models and the specific theory, knowledge, and approaches that will be used to develop services.
- If appropriate evidence-based practice models are not available, define how new practice models/expectations will be clearly defined and monitored.

- Outline the initial process modeling (flow charts) on how the services/supports will be delivered.
- Identify the impact on the current policy and procedures, and the areas that will need to be refined.
- Identify the funding and financial implications of the designs.
- Define how the design/redesign will inform the evaluation process.

## Step 6: Planning

The work from the previous steps gets translated into a plan with goals, objectives, and action strategies. The plan will be framed around the finalized logic model and should help stakeholders work in concert toward the achievement of the agreed upon goals and objectives. The logic model will also inform the evaluation process and provide the structure for assessing and adjusting the programs and services over time. The evidence-based models or best practices that were selected in the design step will be operationalized and resourced, and the costs of implementation (if any) will be determined. Informal services and supports as well as other resources that are needed to successfully implement the plan will be identified.

Possible tasks that will support this step include:

- Assess the types and levels of resources that will be available to address the identified needs. This will include assessing the readiness and ability to implement the evidence-based models that have been selected and the resources that will be needed.
- Finalize the logic model and theory of change.
- Define the competencies needed to implement the identified evidence-based practice models and the specific theory, knowledge, and approaches selected.
- Determine the qualifications that staff need to possess to support successful implementation of the core components of the intervention. Develop appropriate job descriptions and interview processes.
- Develop a preparatory (initial), on the job, supervisory/coaching and booster training process to support the evidence-based practices selected.
- Develop a plan to increase staff's ability to use adaptive leadership, change management, and implementation-science concepts.
- Develop improved communication coordination mechanisms (agency to agency, peer to peer, use of mentors, or programmatic navigators).
- Define the staffing case levels and/or general capacity requirements of each service/support.
- Analyze barriers presented by the community, agency or current processes in order to increase successful implementation, i.e. geographic barrier etc.
- Identify linguistic and/or cultural barriers and responses/resources.
- Define the informal support networks, such as community/neighborhood organizations or religious communities that are essential to supporting families in their community.
- Complete a projection of the number of families and types of services needed along with an estimate of the future usage of all the families or groupings.
- Develop the permanency support and preservation plan for the continuum of services/supports that identifies goals, objectives, strategies, initial policies, procedures and practice outlines, time frames, assignments and roles, and responsibilities.
- Develop the training plan based on the evidence-based practices selected, adaptive leadership, change management, and/or implementation science.
- Complete plans to resolve linguistic and/or cultural barriers.
- Develop collaborative partnerships and shared technology to coordinate points of entry to services/supports that will streamline access and assist post-adoptive families in connecting with desired services.
- Establish cross-system and cross-departmental workgroups to coordinate planning related to responding to the needs of pre- and post-adoption families within the human service delivery system.

## Step 7: Capacity Building

STTs will need to implement the plans developed above to ensure that the capacity exists to implement the evidence-based models that have been selected. Training and education are critical aspects of this Step.

Possible tasks that will support this step include:

- Hire or reassign qualified staff per the staffing case levels and/or general capacity requirements of each service/support.
- Implement the training plan based on the evidence-based practices selected, adaptive leadership, change management, and implementation science.
- Implement the preparatory (initial), on the job, supervisory/coaching and booster training process to support the evidence-based practices selected.
- Implement a plan to increase staff's ability to use adaptive leadership, change management, and implementation science concepts.
- Implement improved communication coordination mechanisms (agency to agency, peer to peer, use of mentors, or programmatic navigators).
- Develop staff, community and adoptive/guardianship family leaders and provide them with specialized training and information so that they can become implementation experts and help other staff, service providers, and adoptive/guardianship families.
- Analyze barriers presented by the community, agency, or current processes in order to increase successful implementation, i.e. geographic barrier.
- Identify linguistic and/or cultural barriers and responses/resources.
- Define the informal support networks, such as community/neighborhood organizations or religious communities that are essential to supporting families in their community.
- Develop fidelity tools/processes that will measure how consistently and accurately staff are implementing the selected evidence-based interventions.
- Implement the selected adaptive leadership, change management, and implementation-science concepts.

*"Responsibility must be shared among professionals and non-professionals, among community members and non-community members, across disciplines, and among all entities. It takes everyone, working together, to create environments and communities within which children and youth can flourish."*

*– CWLA National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare, page 38*

## Step 8: Implementation

The implementation step is focused on carrying out the various elements of the plan. It is the "doing" part of the process.

Possible tasks that will support this step include:

- Implement the permanency support and preservation plan for the continuum of services/supports.
- Complete the roll out of the selected evidence-based constructs.
- Implement fidelity observation tools and gather feedback.
- Confirm services and supports are located where children and families are primarily located in the STTs.
- Confirm services and supports are available when children and families need them, e.g., after hours, weekends.
- Provide consultation and coaching to sites and service providers.
- Implement the plan to coordinate the possible points of inquiry/entry into post services and supports; i.e., 211, websites, internal referrals, community providers, mental and physical health providers.

## Step 9: Monitoring and Evaluation

This step begins at the start of the model-development process and is informed by the design, planning, and implementation steps. The evaluation plans for the methodical collection and analysis of program information about program activities, family staff and community characteristics, and outcomes. The logic model should be used to identify the critical evaluation questions by describing the organization plans, creating methods to monitor what is happening, and



providing feedback to help improve services. The evaluation results will help determine what services should be sustained and support the ongoing funding of programs found to be successful.

Possible tasks that will support this step may include:

- Describe monitoring methods, timelines, and responsible parties.
- Assist in monitoring fidelity to the design and implementation steps.
- Refine the data collection and reporting processes to ensure that critical information is channeled back to those who need it in a form that can be used.
- Describe outcomes and lessons learned.
- Gather information on the mentoring, navigator, parent-to-parent, and community-support networks.
- Assess the communities and the multiple service systems adoption/guardianship competency.
- Assess the impact of the collaboration among multidisciplinary service providers.
- Identify unique needs for permanency support services based on risk and protective factors.
- Describe barriers to access post-adoption services.
- Assess effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of services.
- Prepare staff, partners, and stakeholders to use assessment information on a regular basis to guide the ongoing implementation of the service-delivery model.
- Compare the effectiveness of informal vs. formal services.
- Compare actual outcomes to predictive forecasts.
- Use evaluation information on a regular basis to guide the development, refinement, and delivery of services and supports.

### Step 10: Sustainability, Replication, Dissemination

It is critical in this step to capture the philosophy, structure, and processes for developing the framework as well as to determine how it will be sustained. Once completed, this step will assist other community sites, providers, and policymakers in incorporating this model into how they provide support to families. A replication manual that speaks to the development of permanency support and preservation services should be developed. The manual will be based upon the development of an adaptive strategic prevention framework and utilize the reports, observations, interviews, focus groups, and surveys with the staff and stakeholders, as well as feedback from post-adoption providers.

Possible tasks that will support this step may include:

- Identification of the services/supports (core components) that should be sustained.
- Explore possible funding strategies.
- Identify the resources that were used along with the minimum amount of resources required.
- Critical lessons learned and evaluation outcomes, including how identified barriers were addressed.
- Develop an overview of the community and family engagement activities.
- Review of the use and development of formal and informal services.
- Review staffing and program-development elements.
- Discuss systemic replication among other public and/or private providers.

*“It is hard to be moved around all the time. Permanency is important because then we can feel like we belong and settle, rather than get moved around and feel worthless because we feel that no one wants us.”*

*– Quote from Kaylee, youth in foster care, posted on  
Time for Reform: Too Many Birthdays in Foster Care*