

February 2, 2023

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 23-12

The purpose of this All County Letter is to provide information on the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement and Support Program and the Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement and Support. The programs support dedicated and specialized permanency work to identify and engage family members for children and non-minor dependents in foster care.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

CALIFORNIA HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
744 P Street • Sacramento, CA 95814 • www.cdss.ca.gov



GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

February 2, 2023

ALL COUNTY LETTER NO. 23-12

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
ALL CHIEF PROBATION OFFICERS
ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS
ALL FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY DIRECTORS
ALL FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES IN CALIFORNIA
ALL CDSS ADOPTION REGIONAL OFFICES

SUBJECT: **EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT, AND
SUPPORT PROGRAM AND THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN
FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT**

REFERENCE: [ASSEMBLY BILL 207 \(CHAPTER 573, STATUTES OF 2022\);
CHAPTER 5.6 \(COMMENCING WITH SECTION 16546\) OF PART 4
OF DIVISION 9 OF THE WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE ;
ASSEMBLY BILL 179 \(CHAPTER 249, STATUTES OF 2022\),
SECTION 148, PROVISION 23 \(BUDGET ACT OF 2022\)](#)

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this All County Letter is to communicate the requirements for participation in the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support (EFFES) Program and the provisions available to support implementation through the establishment of The Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support.

BACKGROUND:

Research shows that children placed with their own relatives and extended family members have greater placement stability, fewer emotional and behavioral problems, and more connections to their biological families and social-cultural communities. The Budget Act of 2022 allocated \$150 million General Fund (GF) in one-time funding, available for expenditure through June 30, 2027. Funds allocated under this section and the local match described in paragraph (2) of subdivision (c) shall be used for specialized

permanency work, including culturally responsive, family-centered, and trauma-informed family finding and engagement services. Services shall focus on establishing and maintaining permanent connections for foster children with their relatives and extended family members.

An additional \$750,000 GF in ongoing funding was allocated to create the Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Support and Engagement to provide culturally appropriate training and technical assistance to county child welfare and probation departments, participating tribes, and foster care providers to enhance their practices, policies, and efforts for family finding, support, and engagement.

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) will work with the County Welfare Director's Association of California (CWDA) and the Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC), and consult with Tribal Governments, to 1) establish the methodology for allocating program funds, 2) determine the opt-in process for counties and Tribes interested in participating in the EFFES program, and 3) determine the program data collection and outcome measure reporting requirements. Following tribal consultation, CDSS will release additional guidance regarding opt-in procedures, allocations, and requirements for participating Tribes that have or will enter into a state/tribal agreement pursuant to [Welfare and Institutions Code \(WC\) Section 10553.1](#) or in accordance with 25 United States Code. 1919.

EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT PROGRAM

The EFFES program funding must be used for specialized permanency services and supports that augment existing funding. Funds may not supplant funds for existing family finding and engagement programs; however, counties and Tribes may use funds to expand their existing programs. The funded activities shall include any of the following activities described in [WIC Section 16546.5\(e\)](#):

- (1) Training of staff on family finding and engagement practices, and models (e.g., Cultural Brokers, Upfront Family Finding, Wendy's Wonderful Kids) approved by CDSS, in consultation with counties, stakeholders, and the advisory committee. Approved practices and models will be posted on an ongoing basis on the Center for Excellence website and specific tools, resources, trainings, and consultants will be available through the Center for Excellence to support counties in implementing approved practices and models.
- (2) Staffing and tools to identify, locate, and engage persons related to the child by blood or marriage, identification, and engagement of other family-like relationships, and in the case of an Indian child, to make active efforts to engage with the tribe to determine the child's extended family members, as defined in [WIC section 224.1](#).¹ This may include use of internet and social media tools,

¹An Indian child's extended family members shall be as defined by the law or custom of the Indian child's tribe or, in the absence of such law or custom, shall be a person who has reached the age of eighteen and who is the Indian child's grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister, brother-in-law or sister-in-law, niece or nephew, first or second cousin, or stepparent.

genograms, database searches, and other technological tools to support family finding. If a county is planning on purchasing a technology tool to support family finding, this will require an Advance Planning Document (APD) that shall be submitted through the normal APD process.

- (3) Outreach and engagement of the child and family team members and all other current and prior service providers, case managers, and other connections to the foster child, to identify and engage possible family and family-like connections.
- (4) Plan development and case management for the child, family, and family-like connections to identify and address any barriers to establishing or reestablishing positive, loving, and supportive relationships. Counties and participating Tribes shall engage children continuously in plan development, case planning, and services of importance to the child.
- (5) Implementation of model programs, strategies, or promising practices identified by the department in consultation with Tribes, CWDA, CPOC, and child and youth advocacy organizations. The model programs, strategies, or promising practices include, but are not limited to, model programs, strategies, or promising practices that focus on up front family finding and engagement and that focus on family finding and engagement techniques to find permanent families and relationships for foster children who have been in out-of-home foster care for 24 months or longer, who are not living with a relative, for whom reunification is no longer in the case plan, and who have not been placed with a family who is in the process of adopting them or assuming guardianship over them.

AVAILABILITY AND ALLOWABLE USES OF FUNDS

Counties and Tribes that elect to participate in the Program will be able to access funding beginning in fiscal year 2022-23. Counties and Tribes who choose to participate in the Program must opt in by June 30, 2025. After June 30, 2025, allocations from those counties and Tribes that did not opt in by June 30, 2025 will be allocated to counties and Tribes that did opt in. All funds must be expended by June 30, 2027.

A participating county shall utilize family-finding workers who have experience or training in family-finding strategies and practices, which may include lived experience.

Family-finding workers must be assigned to family-finding engagement responsibilities as their fulltime duties. A participating county may elect to contract with a nonprofit community-based organization to provide the services described in this section.

COUNTY MATCH

Counties will need to demonstrate a **50 percent match of local funds**, which may include in-kind contributions of services or other resources from the county or community-based

organizations, to the state funds being offered through the program. Additional information on the match requirement and claiming instructions can be found in the forthcoming County Fiscal Letter.

COUNTY OPT IN PROCESS TO RECEIVE FUNDS

Counties that choose to opt into the EFFES Program will be able to do so by submitting a written plan which includes:

- Certification that the county has or will hire family-finding workers who have experience or training in family-finding strategies and practice and who are assigned to family-finding responsibilities full-time (the family finding workers may be employed by the participating county or a nonprofit community-based organization).
- Explanation of how the county will provide the required match of local funds, which may include in-kind contributions of services or other resources.
- Explanation of how the county intends to use the funds.
- Explanation of the family finding models, programs, strategies, or promising practice the county intends to implement.

A county that elects to opt into the program may begin accessing funds upon written notification from CDSS that the county's written plan has been approved, which will include the date of its approval.

DATA AND REPORTING

Participating counties will be required to collect and report program data in accordance with written instructions issued by CDSS. This data shall include, but is not limited to, information regarding training completion, strategies, and models utilized by the county and services provided.

Participating counties will track and report on outcomes achieved by the program, in accordance with written instructions issued by CDSS. Outcomes to be tracked, as well as data collected from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) Percentage of children initially or subsequently placed with a relative or nonrelative extended family member (NREFM).
- (2) Percentage of children placed in a family setting.
- (3) Placement stability experienced by children in out-of-home care.
- (4) Length of time to permanency for children in out of home care through reunification, guardianship, or adoption.
- (5) Racial disproportionality of children who experience placements in congregate care.

- (6) Racial disproportionality of children who experience placement disruption.
- (7) Percentage of children placed with relatives or NREFMs after having been in out-of-home foster care for 24 months or longer in a nonrelative placement and subsequently been subject to family finding and engagement.

The CDSS will consult with Indian tribes that enter into agreements with the department pursuant to [WIC Section 10553.1](#) or 25 U.S.C. Section 1919 to develop procedures for program data collection and reporting and tracking and reporting program outcomes measures for Indian tribes, consortia of tribes, or tribal organizations.

THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT

The CDSS has contracted with University of California, Davis to launch the Center for Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support (CFE) to support efforts to keep children and youth connected to their biological and extended families. The CFE will provide multi-tiered, culturally appropriate training and technical assistance. This may include but is not limited to conducting evidence-based, organization-specific assessments of implementation activities, and strengthening trauma-informed practices and programs related to family finding and engagement.

The CFE will provide training and technical assistance for counties and Tribes that have opted to participate in the EFFES program. Specialized trainings and support will be available to county welfare agencies, probation departments, participating tribes, and foster care providers to enhance their practices, policies, and efforts for family finding, support, and engagement. The CFE will also provide training on how to engage children and young people in the family finding process. All trainings will utilize family finding and engagement and permanency subject matter experts. The training and technical assistance may include, but is not limited to, all the following:

- (1) Conducting evidence-based, organization-specific assessments of quantitative and qualitative data related to permanency outcomes and operations.
- (2) Strengthening trauma-informed permanency practices and programs.
- (3) Development and training of workforce, by role, regarding how to support permanency, family finding and engagement, and improvement of staff skills and practices.
- (4) Providing guidance and research on the latest high-fidelity, evidence-based permanency and family finding and engagement models and practices.
- (5) Peer-to-peer learning opportunities for counties, participating Tribes, and providers to share and leverage best practices for permanency and family finding and engagement program and practice development and sustainability.

- (6) Fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion that actively invites the contribution and participation of those who are most impacted and is representative of diverse identities and communities.
- (7) The CFE will be operational by March 1, 2023, to provide training and technical assistance for counties, participating Tribes, and providers. The training available at this point will not be all inclusive and additional training will be added throughout the operation of the CFE.

The creation of the CFE and the services it will offer will be in alignment with the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM). The [ICPM \(Integrated Core Practice Model\) Guide](#) can be found on the Department of Health Care Services website as well as outlined in [All County Information Notice I-21-18](#). The CDSS and UC Davis are intentionally using ICPM practice behaviors and State level behaviors to select CFE participants.

The vision of the CFE is based on the values of the ICPM and include an emphasis on family driven and youth guided practices, community driven supports and culturally and linguistically competent trainings and technical support, all provided through a trauma aware lens. If you would like more information on ICPM please see the [CDSS ICPM Home Page](#).

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the Resource Family Support & Permanency Branch at (916) 651-8100 or the Center for Excellence mailbox at Centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By

ANGIE SCHWARTZ
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division

EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY FINDING, ENGAGEMENT, AND SUPPORT PROGRAM
WRITTEN CERTIFICATION AND FUNDING PLAN

_____, 2023

California Department of Social Services
Attention: Resource Family Support and Permanency Branch

Director Johnson:

The purpose of this notice is to inform the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) that _____ County [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] has reviewed the information provided in the attached All County Letter (ACL), and elects to **opt into** the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement, and Support Program.

_____ County [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] agrees to the conditions set forth in the ACL, including but not limited to, adhering to funding requirements, allowable activities, and the data collection and reporting requirements.

_____ County [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] certifies that the county [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] currently utilizes or will utilize dedicated family finding workers who have experience or training in family finding strategies and practices, and whose exclusive responsibilities will be family finding, engagement and support. Family finding workers may be employed by either the participating county [Child Welfare Agency/Probation Department] or a contracted nonprofit community-based organization.

Signature(s) of Child Welfare Director/Chief Probation Officer
or Authorized Representatives

Date

CDSS will accept electronic signatures in lieu of traditional manual signatures. Counties that choose to opt into the EFFES Program are required to submit a written plan addressing the questions on the following page. Only written funding plan is needed if the county's child welfare agency and probation department choose to opt into the EFFES Program together, but both agencies will need to sign off on the submission to provide the necessary certification.

Counties may begin accessing funds upon notification from CDSS that the county's written plan has been approved and will include the date of approval. Please submit completed plans to: centerforexcellence@dss.ca.gov .

1. Allocated funds must be used for specialized permanency work, including culturally responsive, family-centered, and trauma-informed family finding and engagement services.

Please explain the following:

- a. How does the county intend to use the funds?
- b. What activities will the funds be used for? Funded activities shall include any or all of the following items. Please describe the county's plan for any chosen funded activities below.

- I. Training of staff on family finding and engagement practices and models.

Describe your county's plan for training of staff here.

- II. Staffing and tools to identify, locate, and engage persons related to the child by blood or marriage, identification, and engagement of other family-like relationships, and in the case of an Indian child, to make active efforts to engage with the tribe to determine the child's extended family members, as defined in Section 224.1. This may include use of internet and social media tools, genograms, database searches, and other technological tools to support family finding.

Describe your county's plan for identifying, locating, and engaging related persons here.

- III. Outreach and engagement of the child and family team members and all other current and prior service providers, case managers, and other connections to the foster child, to identify and engage possible family and family-like connections.

Describe your county's plan for outreach and engagement of child and family team members and other current and prior case-related providers and persons here.

- IV. Plan development and case management for the child, family, and family-like connections to identify and address any barriers to establishing or reestablishing positive, loving, and supportive relationships.

Describe your county's plan for plan development and case management for familial connections here and addressing barriers to permanent connections here.

- V. Implementation of model programs, strategies, or promising practices identified by CDSS following required consultation.

Please describe the family finding models, programs, strategies, or promising practice the county intends to implement.

2. Please explain how the county will provide the required match of local funds, which may include in-kind contributions of services or other resources.