



Building a Kin-First Communication Strategy

The journey of building a strong kin-first culture within an agency can take time. Alongside practice changes, leaders and staff can help raise awareness and cultivate buy-in among their teams and external stakeholders. Leaders and staff can also help address any doubts or preconceptions individuals may have about placing children with kin by intentionally seeking out regular opportunities to share and discuss the benefits of kin-first practices.

This worksheet is designed to help you become a champion for kin-first practices in your agency by communicating the benefits of a kin-first approach in ways that are tailored for specific stakeholder groups. The GPL has developed and refined this worksheet through its experience working with jurisdictions across the country that are striving to cultivate a strong kin-first culture within child welfare agencies. Follow the prompt in the box below to begin:

Personal Reflection

Why do you believe in kinship care? Write down the messages and stories that have resonated with you from personal experience and professional practice.

Now that you have written your personal motivation for championing kin-first approaches, use the prompts below to think about specific stakeholders in your agency or community and how you might tailor your messaging to resonate with them. *(For ideas or help getting started, see the example on page 4.)*

Communicating the Benefits of a Kin-First Approach	
WHO	Who are the people in your agency and community who play critical roles in building a kin-first culture? What role do they each play in strengthening placements with and supports for kin caregivers? <i>(Think about caseworkers, managers, service providers, families, legal professionals, elected officials, etc.)</i>
	Select one of the stakeholder groups you listed above that you want to prioritize for engaging in conversation about the benefits of kin-first approaches. Why did you select this audience?
WHAT	What framing will resonate most for these stakeholders? What will you emphasize? <i>(You might consider the experiences of children, families, and staff; personal stories; or connections to your agency's strategic goals.)</i>
	How can you use stories, data, or research on kinship care to strengthen your message?

HOW	When will you share this message with this audience? Are there upcoming touch points you could use?
	Are you the best person to share this message with this audience? If not, who should?
	What materials will you/they need?

Congratulations! You have just created a kin-first communication strategy. By intentionally, frequently communicating the benefits of kin-first practices you can help others become champions for kin-first efforts.

Next Steps in Building a Kin-First Communication Strategy

- Use this worksheet multiple times to tailor your messaging as you prepare for meetings and conversations with staff, parents, caregivers, community-based providers, or other external stakeholders.
- Download the [Communicating the Benefits of Kinship Care PowerPoint](#) and adapt the content for your local context. Use the PowerPoint and your talking points to both introduce and reinforce the benefits of kinship care.
- Continue to add stories, data, and insights to your personal reflections to ensure your talking points stay fresh and relevant.

Communicating the Benefits of a Kin-First Approach (EXAMPLE)

WHO	<p>Select one stakeholder group that you want to prioritize for engaging in conversation about the benefits of kin-first approaches. What role do they each play in strengthening placements with and supports for kin caregivers? Why did you select this audience?</p> <p><i>I think we could do a better job communicating the benefits of, and our commitment to, kin-first practices with our front-end investigation team so we can make more kin placements sooner. These staff are the first to interact with our families and help determine where children will be placed initially when entering care. Recently we have seen our initial placement rates with kin decrease slightly, perhaps indicating that new staff on this team may not yet be fully comfortable asking parents about their family and support network.</i></p>
WHAT	<p>What framing will resonate most for these stakeholders? What will you emphasize?</p> <p><i>I want to keep in mind that staff on our front-end investigation team are really busy and sometimes there are additional steps involved in making a placement with kin. This team's role is core to our agency's overall efforts to increase placements with kin. I want to emphasize how critical it is to identify and document kin connections early on. Even if we are not able to place children with kin initially, having this information can make it easier to place with kin later on.</i></p>
	<p>How can you use research or data to strengthen your message?</p> <p><i>I think that pairing stories about kids in care who were able to stay connected to family and the difference it made for them with research on the benefits of kinship care will reinforce these priorities for our front-end investigation team. I think they might be interested in research showing how placement with kin is associated with improved mental health outcomes for kids. I also remember a recent case of a young person who wanted to live with his cousin, and how much happier he was and how he did better in school once we figured out how to make that placement work.</i></p>
HOW	<p>Are there existing upcoming touch points you could use?</p> <p><i>The entire investigation team meets the first Friday of each month — maybe I can ask for time on the agenda? Supervisors meet weekly, so I hope to meet with them first and get them on board. (Ask Shana about this at our Tuesday meeting.)</i></p>
	<p>Who do you think is best positioned to share these messages with this audience?</p> <p><i>Melanie and Luis are both on the front-end investigation team and seem passionate about kinship care. I will ask if they would co-lead a meeting with me where we present on kin-first approaches to the whole investigations team. (Send them an email after I meet with Shana.)</i></p>
	<p>What materials will you need?</p> <p><i>I can update the "Communicating the Benefits of Kinship Care PowerPoint" from the GPL with stories about kids in care who were able to stay connected to multiple family members and family friends. I can also ask Melanie and Luis to share an example of a successful kin placement.</i></p>



The [Government Performance Lab](#), housed at the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing hands-on technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this involvement, we gain insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. By engaging current students and recent graduates in this effort, we are also able to provide experiential learning.

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Designed by Sara Israelsen-Hartley