

**The GPL supports governments in building
just and effective service systems that deliver better
outcomes for the people they serve.**

We do this by working closely with state and local governments to develop and test promising practices. We then spread these practices to communities across the country. By investing in public servants, we create long-lasting capacity to sustain change.

Why we support agencies to implement kin-first strategies

Placement with kin is associated with:



Reduced trauma & improved child well-being



Better behavioral and mental health outcomes



Higher placement stability & improved permanency



Preservation of family, culture, and community

Even if not a placement option, kin support children and families in many ways during and beyond the life of a case:



- ✓ Help with respite, childcare, or transportation
- ✓ Support for safe visitation and reunification
- ✓ Emotional safety and belonging
- ✓ Future placement or permanency options
- ✓ Support network for child and family during and after case closure

What staff have shared with us:

“Kinship care preserves lifelong connections. This is important because **we know that our kids go back to look for family**, even when they are with great foster parents.”

—Case supervisor in Broward County, FL

Six management strategies for building kin-first cultures & systems that lead to increased kin placements

1

Measuring and communicating the benefits of kinship care to strengthen kin-first culture

2

Strengthening tools and accountability mechanisms for conducting high-quality kin searches up front

3

Breaking down barriers to help make placement with kin the norm for children entering care

4

Elevating youth and family voice in the placement process

5

Setting kin placements up for success by offering tailored resources and services in the right moments

6

Building and maintaining momentum for continued kin search when initial placement is not with kin

Strategy #1: Measuring and communicating the benefits of kinship care to strengthen kin-first culture

Why this matters:

Building a kin-first culture is a journey that takes time.

Creating regular opportunities to measure kin placement trends and share stories about the benefits of kin-first approaches is critical for raising awareness and cultivating buy-in among frontline staff and supervisors — especially for staff who may have doubts or preconceptions about placing children with kin.

"What does it mean to have a kin-first culture? **It doesn't feel like a separate initiative, it is part of what you do, it is your DNA. It is part of our conversations now.** It is so embedded in processes, frameworks, ways of thinking, approaches."

*—Mariah Williams, Kinship & Community Engagement Support Program Coordinator
San Diego County Child & Family Wellbeing*

Communicating multiple times, in multiple ways


Strategies to test:

- ☐ **Review and discuss kin placement data regularly** across a variety of settings. Track and celebrate progress!
- ☐ **Intentional asks from leadership:** Regularly discuss kin placement data and kinship updates in standing meetings
- ☐ Managers **use existing meetings and checkpoints** to keep asking staff about kin placements, help break down kin placement barriers, and reinforce kin-first priorities (e.g., manager & staff supervision, family team meeting planning, CQI efforts).
- ☐ **Adapt to your audience:** Meet others where they are in their kin-first journey, which may vary across audience (e.g., new staff, long-time managers, community partners)
- ☐ **Use storytelling, make it personal:** Create spaces where kin caregivers and/or staff get to share stories about the important role kin play.
- ☐ **Start early:** Are kin-first principles embedded throughout new staff onboarding materials?
- ☐ Offer **ongoing training and staff roundtable discussions** to continually emphasize the benefits of kinship care and address preconceptions about placing children with kin.

In the chat: **Where do you already use or see new opportunities to spotlight kin-first principles and practices within your agency?**

Crafting a kin-first communications strategy

GPL Tool

**HARVARD Kennedy School**
Government Performance Lab

Building a Kin-First Communication Strategy

The journey of building a strong, kin-first culture within an agency can take time. Alongside other practice changes, it is critical to raise awareness and cultivate trust. This process involves not only sharing information but also addressing any doubts or preconceptions they may have, creating regular opportunities to share and discuss their experiences.

This worksheet is designed to help you become a champion for kin-first practices by communicating the benefits of a kin-first approach to specific stakeholder groups. Follow the prompt in the box below to begin.

Personal

Why do you believe in kinship care? Write down thoughts from personal experience and professional practice.

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? (Think about caseworkers, managers, service providers, families, legal professionals, elected officials, etc.)
WHAT	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? (You might consider the experiences of children, families, and staff; personal stories; or connections to your agency's strategic goals.)
WHAT	How can you use stories, data, or research on kinship care to strengthen your message?

© Copyright 2024 Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab 2

*This tool is designed to help you and your team become **champions 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.*

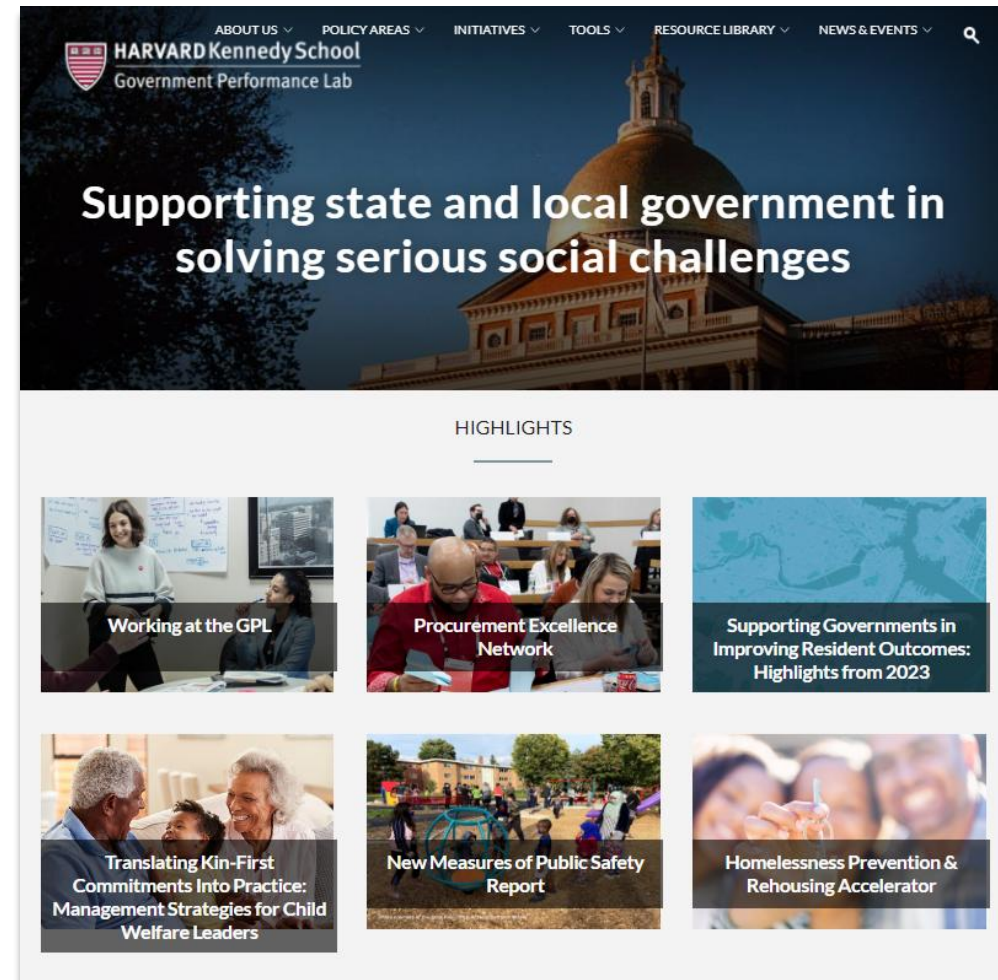
Strategy-building steps

1. **WHY** do you believe in kinship care?
2. **WHO** in your jurisdiction would you like to communicate this with?
3. **WHAT** messages do you think will resonate with them?

Thank you!

We'd love to connect! Want to talk more about any of the strategies or tools shared today? Or discuss a kinship care challenge or initiative your agency is working on?

Reach out to us at
Lynda_Blancato@hks.harvard.edu
and EmmaCregg@hks.harvard.edu



For more on about GPL's work and to sign up for our newsletter, visit our website: [Government Performance Lab \(harvard.edu\)](https://governmentperformancelab.harvard.edu)

The Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab wishes to acknowledge that these materials are made possible by a grant and support from Casey Family Programs. Additional resources and tools for child welfare leaders seeking to strengthen kin-first practices can be found on our website [here](#).