

Guide to the AdoptUSKids Support Services Assessment Tool

Instructions and Considerations

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AdoptUSKids

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Introduction

The *AdoptUSKids Support Services Assessment Tool* is designed to help you, as a child welfare system administrator, strengthen your support services for foster, adoptive, and kinship families through a process of assessing your service array for both quality and accessibility. The goal is to help you identify areas of strength, as well as gaps you may need to address.

You may wish to look over the tool first, or have the tool handy as you review these instructions and considerations. The tool is available at adoptuskids.org/for-professionals.

Why should you use this tool?

For support services to be truly valuable to families—and to provide the benefits that child welfare systems seek—they need to be both accessible and of high quality. Because accessibility and quality may vary across categories of services, it is important to assess individual services as well as consider your overall service array for patterns and gaps. And because assessments can be subjective and may not be easily seen by high-level leaders, this tool and its recommended approach for engaging a diverse group of stakeholders can help you conduct a meaningful, robust assessment of your support service array while also having informative discussions on how well it is meeting families' needs.

This tool is not intended to serve as a compliance monitoring tool, nor to replace any existing performance assessment approaches (such as Child and Family Services Reviews or contract management reviews).

What are the steps to using this tool?

Whether you want to complete a full assessment of your entire system's service array, or assess a smaller portion of your services, you will likely follow these steps:

1. Plan your approach.
2. Define your purpose and gather information.
3. Identify and engage your stakeholders.
4. Get to work!
5. Assess your results.
6. Create an action plan.

At the end of this guide, you'll also find some tips and suggestions to help you make the most of your assessment, as well as definitions of all terms used in the assessment tool. Let's get started!

Step 1: Plan your approach

We recommend using the following approaches to make this tool and process as meaningful and relevant to your system as possible:

- Approach it as a resource to help prompt and shape conversations by many stakeholders, not as something to be filled out by just one or a few people on their own. Value hearing from multiple perspectives and capturing meaningful input.
- Be open to learning about your system and to the conversations that result from the assessment process. These conversations may be difficult at times, but they are valuable and necessary for system improvement.
- Don't make assumptions about what the results of your assessment will be or what the priority action steps will be. Subsequent steps to decide what—if anything—your child welfare system wants to strengthen should be done separately, and as a result of prioritization after completing the assessment. Don't assume that because a particular service category gets a low rating that your system will automatically decide to take action on that category right away.
- Frame the use of this tool as part of your child welfare system's overall efforts to make ongoing systemic improvements and develop strategies to improve outcomes for children and families. Help participants and others see how this assessment connects to your overall priorities and other efforts, so that it isn't seen or treated as disconnected from your strategic direction.
- Consider using a less intensive approach to conducting this assessment if you aren't able to do a full assessment with significant participation. Although having a thorough assessment process is most useful, conducting some assessment is preferable to no assessment. Use that lighter version as a starting point and develop a plan for a full assessment in the future.

Step 2: Define your purpose and scope and gather information

- **Define your purpose and parameters**—What do you hope to learn from completing this assessment? Are you assessing an entire state or tribal system or one county/region? Do you want to assess the services available to a specific population, such as kinship caregivers, adoptive families, foster families, or families in rural communities? Your process for completing this assessment may be quite different depending on your goals.
- **Define any additional measures or services to add to your assessment tool**—Your assessment should be tailored to your system. Add any services to the tool that you'd like to assess, as well as any additional measures you think would make your assessment more meaningful. Perhaps you'd like to assess one specific service in more detail than the others,

or break up the accessibility measures into more components. We have designed the tool to make it flexible and adaptable; make any changes to the tool that could lead to a more robust assessment of your system.

- **Determine your methods of information gathering**—How will you gather information from your stakeholders that will provide the most helpful assessment of your system? There are many ways you can engage people in meaningful discussions, including large group meetings, focus groups, stakeholder surveys, in-person interviews, and phone interviews. Involve your stakeholders in your planning, as they likely understand the community dynamics best.
- **Gather relevant data to inform your discussion**—To ensure that conversations with your stakeholders offer the best opportunity for a comprehensive assessment, think about what information everyone will need ahead of or during those conversations. Examine the tool and review the legend at the end of this guide, and gather qualitative and quantitative data on the use and effectiveness of each of the services. This may include demographic information on the people who use the service, a map of where the service is provided, survey results from service users, and outcome data. If data is not available, that fact can also be a useful part of your assessment as you consider system improvements.
- **Share information in advance with your stakeholders**—Share your goals for conducting the assessment, the instructions, the tool, and relevant data with all participants well in advance so they have time to think deeply and ask questions to better inform their participation.
- **Define your timeline**—Regardless of your scope, it may be helpful to draft a timeline for your assessment so you stay on target.

Step 3: Identify and engage your stakeholders

Who can best answer the questions you have for your system and best knows the communities you are serving or seeking to serve? Engaging a diverse group of stakeholders who have insights into your services is critical to conducting a meaningful, comprehensive assessment of your support service array. Their perspectives—especially those who have used the services themselves—will lead to your assessment being more robust and accurate.

You will likely need groups of people who interact with your system in different ways to best capture how your services are working. Invite stakeholders such as:

- Current foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers from various geographic areas, with children of varied ages and needs, with racial and ethnic diversity, etc.
- Youth and young adults in, or formerly in foster care or kinship care, or who were adopted
- Private service providers

- Child welfare agency staff from multiple levels in the public system (central office, regional offices, local offices) as well as representing multiple roles (frontline workers, support program managers, child workers, contract managers, agency leaders)
- Professionals from other public systems (such as children’s mental health) if many of your families access services outside the child welfare system

To adequately capture the input of a diverse group of stakeholders, it’s important to create an environment in which people from varied backgrounds and experiences feel safe engaging in honest dialogue and have equal access to the conversation.

Consider the following as you engage your stakeholders and start planning your discussions:

- **Reduce participation barriers**—If caregivers and youth have to miss work or school and provide their own transportation, food, and childcare in order to participate in these discussions, you will lose the critical input of those whose personal budgets do not allow for these additional expenses. Consider offering stipends, travel reimbursement, lunch, and childcare during your meetings so they are accessible. You may also consider virtual meetings, phone calls, or individual interviews in homes to capture the input of stakeholders who cannot travel.
- **Consider the power dynamics in the room**—If you decide to have large meetings to conduct your assessment, consider stakeholders’ relationships to each other and how those relationships—as well as other community dynamics—may affect their ability to speak openly and honestly. Is a worker being asked to share her concerns in front of her direct supervisor? Is a foster parent at the same table as the worker who is providing some of these services to his family? These circumstances may prevent people from being honest about where they see challenges. For an assessment to be meaningful, you need honest input, so you need to be proactive in creating as safe a space as possible. Consider assigning someone to act as a liaison to youth and parents so those groups know whom they can contact if they have questions or concerns. You may also try to prevent conflicts of interest by creating breakout groups and ensuring that people who work at the same agency or in the same county or region of your jurisdiction are in separate groups.
- **Accommodate all communication styles**—While some people tend to dominate group discussions, others are not comfortable talking in group settings. Provide slips of paper and a container at the back of the room so people who don’t want to speak can still participate and ask questions anonymously by writing them down. You can also provide a method that allows for input after the meeting is over to allow people time to think. Also, if the conversation relies on language that is full of agency jargon and acronyms, those who do not understand those terms may fall silent during discussion. Be mindful of the language you use and encourage other staff to do the same. Having facilitators for these discussions can be helpful to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

- **Think carefully about where you are holding your meeting**—If you’re holding an in-person meeting to complete your assessment, think about how the location you choose may affect your stakeholders. If it’s at the public agency office or near the court building, for example, resource parents and youth and young adults who experienced foster care may have negative reactions to being at or near these places. In addition, consider the travel time to your meeting location from different parts of your jurisdiction. It may be necessary to hold several regional meetings so that you don’t lose the input of those staff and families who can’t devote multiple days to traveling long distances.
- **Ensure surveys are accessible**—If you plan to use a survey to gather information from your stakeholders, make sure that your survey is culturally appropriate, relevant, and free of jargon and acronyms that may make it difficult to understand. Check the level of reading comprehension and skill necessary to complete your survey; a good rule of thumb is to not exceed a fifth grade reading level to keep your survey widely accessible. Also think about the tools that are necessary to complete the survey. For example, if the survey is only available online, you may not get feedback from stakeholders who do not have internet access in their homes.

Step 4: Get to work!

Now that you’ve planned your conversations and gathered information that may be helpful, it’s time to use the tool. During your assessment you will answer the following about your system’s support services:

- **Is the service provided?**—Start by going through the list of services and first answer if the service is provided within your system. Note whether the service is provided with “yes” or “no.” Only move on to assessing those services that are provided.

Note: A service doesn’t have to be provided by the child welfare system as long as the service is available to adoptive, foster, or kinship families. Its quality and accessibility may, however, be affected by being an external service.

- **How does the service rate?**—For each provided service, rate that service on the given metric on the following scale:

1 = poor

2 = fair

3 = good

4 = excellent

Note: Ratings do not have to be whole numbers. For example, if you feel a service is between “fair” and “good,” you may rate it as 2.3 or 2.7. Decimal ratings can lead to a more nuanced assessment and give you a better picture of how services are truly perceived.

Remember, the discussions—and differing opinions and disagreements—that happen among stakeholders are an incredibly valuable part of your process. The goal is not necessarily to have everyone agree on a number, but to capture the discussion itself.

Some options for how to decide on a rating as a group are:

- Discuss each service as a full group and come to an agreement on a rating together.
- Divide into subgroups and complete separate assessments. Average the subgroups' rating in each category on a master list, with each group reporting about their rating. Have a full group discussion about any areas where there was great variation in scores or where you feel that averaging may have distorted the results.
- Divide into subgroups and complete separate assessments. Record the ratings that have overall agreement on a master list. Have full group discussions on the ratings for those items that have more variation among the groups. You may choose to average these different ratings, or try to have the full group come to a consensus.
- **Rate on both quality and accessibility metrics**—To get the clearest picture of how your support service array is functioning, it's important to consider both the quality and accessibility of each service. Use the first sheet to assess the quality of your service array and the second to assess its accessibility.
- **Take notes**—You may want designated notetakers to capture the details of the conversation itself, in addition to the results of the assessment ratings.
- **A lighter lift**—If you are completing a less intensive assessment and don't have the resources to assess each service, consider rating each service category. For example, instead of rating pre-service training, child-specific training, and other training individually, rate how all training performs across all quality and accessibility metrics. You can use the blank row provided in each service category to take this approach.

Step 5: Assess your results

As your assessment begins to take shape, it's important to take the time to understand your results:

- **Reviewing your results**—As you start to review services, you will see that the tool automatically color-codes the individual cell based on the rating you've given. A rating between 1.0 and 1.99 will be red, a rating between 2.0 and 2.99 will be yellow, and a rating between 3.0 and 4.0 will be green. The tool also automatically provides average ratings within service categories, as well as an average of how well a particular service performed across all quality or accessibility metrics.

After rating all provided services across both quality and accessibility, you will begin to see a picture of how well your team believes support services are currently meeting the needs of resource families in your system.

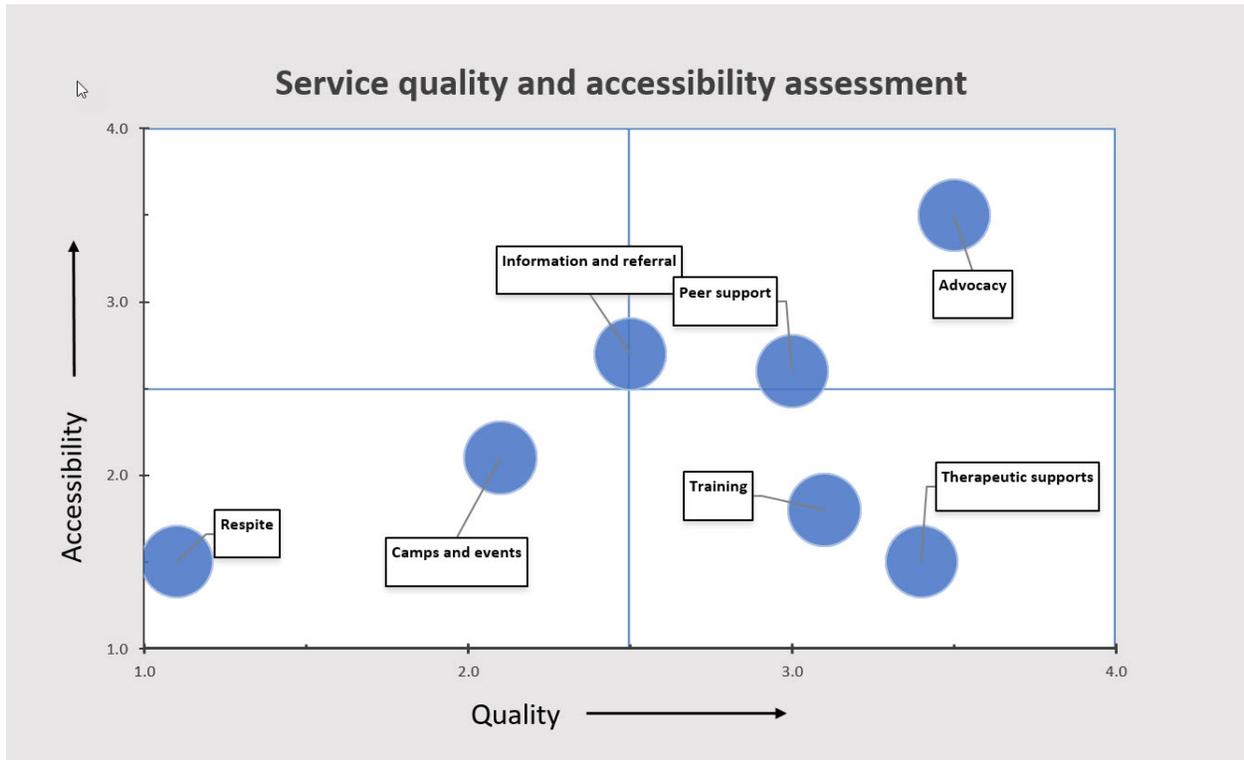
Service	Provided (yes/no)	Adoption/ permanency-competent	Trauma-informed	Designed with family and youth input and feedback	Family-focused (e.g., engages the whole family appropriately)	Outcome-evaluated/ evidence-based (with positive results)	[Other items identified by the child welfare system]	Average
Scale: 1=Poor; 2=Fair; 3=Good; 4=Excellent								
Information and referral								
Information (newsletters, websites, etc.)	yes	4.0	3.0	1.0	2.0	2.0		2.4
Navigation and referral	yes	3.0	4.0	2.0	1.0	3.0		2.6
Warmline for prospective foster/adoptive parents	no							0.0
								0.0
Average information and referral		3.5	3.5	1.5	1.5	2.5	0.0	2.5

Service	Provided (yes/no)	Broad eligibility	Financially accessible	Geographically accessible	Well known/publicized	Timely service provision	Reliable service availability/sustainability	Culturally relevant and accessible	[Other items identified by the child welfare system]	Average
Scale: 1=Poor; 2=Fair; 3=Good; 4=Excellent										
Information and referral										
Information (newsletters, websites, etc.)	yes	4.0	4.0	4.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	2.0		3.1
Navigation and referral	yes	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	1.0		1.4
Warmline for prospective foster/adoptive parents	no									0.0
										0.0
Average information and referral		3.0	3.0	2.5	1.5	2.0	2.5	1.5	0.0	2.3
Training										
Pre-service training	yes	2.5	3.0	1.0	3.0	1.5	2.0	2.5		2.2
Child-specific training	yes	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	3.0	1.0	2.0		1.7
Other training	no									0.0
										0.0
Average training		2.3	2.5	1.0	2.0	2.3	1.5	2.3	0.0	2.0

Note: Avoid judging your results as the assessment is taking shape. If you see a row or column full of red cells, it may be tempting to decide right then that you need to devote attention to a particular service or metric. Remember that the discussion that is informing your ratings is just as valuable—if not more valuable—than the numeric results of the assessment. Wait until your full assessment is complete, and take additional steps to understand your results, before making an action plan.

- **Understanding your results**—While the tool’s visual is helpful, plotting or graphing your assessment data is likely to give you a clearer understanding of what your stakeholders have said and what to do next.

The tool will automatically generate a four-quadrant matrix model to plot how each service or service category is doing across both quality and accessibility metrics.



The chart allows you to more easily identify strengths and needs and can help you decide on priorities for system improvement.

To find your four-quadrant matrix model in the tool, navigate to the tab labeled “my results charted.” The tool automatically uses the average ratings of each service category and plots them. You can adjust the tool and charts in whatever way is necessary to better understand your data set.

In the example above, this jurisdiction’s advocacy and peer support services are both high quality and accessible. The training and therapeutic services they offer are of high quality, but have lower accessibility, whereas their respite services and camps and events are of lower quality and lower accessibility. Administrators in this system may decide that they want to focus heavily on improving their respite services as their greatest area of need, or they may decide that they need to prioritize making their higher quality services more accessible.

Another option is to plot the services on a map of your state, tribe, or region, color-coding the dots to represent high quality and high accessibility. It may also be helpful to compare the differences in responses between different groups of stakeholders. For example, you could compare the responses from agency staff with the responses from resource parents to view the different perceptions of your service array between these two groups. These comparisons may help you better understand the service silos and communication barriers across your system so you can take some preliminary steps toward addressing these issues.

As you look at your results, ask your team:

- What themes are emerging?
 - What surprises you about your results?
 - What do you want to communicate to your leaders, funders, and other partners about what this exercise revealed about your system?
 - Are there conclusions from the discussion that are not well-represented by the results?
- **Reporting on your results**—After you’ve analyzed your data, it will be important to report your results to your agency leadership, to funders, to those who participated in the assessment, and to your broader community. Here are some tips to complete a compelling report:
 - Keep it short and focused on the main conclusions you want readers to draw from the report. You can include more detailed information, including the raw data, in an appendix.
 - Include a brief explanation of your assessment process so those who were not involved can understand how you gathered the information. The themes and takeaways in your report will be easier to understand and trust if it’s clear that you engaged in a collaborative process to get these results.
 - Include visuals, such as charts, maps, plots, and graphs, that helped you to understand your results. Be clear and concise in your explanation of what those visuals are showing and what they mean.
 - Discuss areas of strength along with areas of need. Take the opportunity to highlight what your system is doing well.
 - Avoid speculating or drawing conclusions that are not supported by your data. This assessment will certainly leave you with unanswered questions. Focus on what you learned as you analyzed your results.¹

¹ For information on other methods to use in evaluating services, read our tip sheet, *Evaluating Family Support Programs*, available at adoptuskids.org/for-professionals.

Step 6: Create an action plan

Now that you understand the results of your assessment, it's time to take action to improve your system. Your unique results should guide your next steps. Here are some suggestions:

- **Identify a limited number of goals**—This assessment may have identified many areas where your system could be improved. Focus on a handful of top goals, rather than on every area of need. If you're not sure which areas to focus on, survey your group of stakeholders to identify priorities. Make sure your goals are SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.
- **Convene workgroups to address your goals**—Each goal could have a workgroup assigned to it, helping drive the work forward to achieving the goal. Just like the stakeholders who were critical to your service assessment, the workgroups should also include those who use the services you are seeking to improve.
- **Make funding decisions based on your results**—Now that you know what areas of your support-service array need improvement, you can focus on some of these needs when you next publish a request for proposals (RFP) for services. For example, if your assessment showed that respite services for adoptive families are not reliably available or of high quality, you could specifically focus on the provision of respite and the training of respite providers in the proposals from agencies seeking funding to provide post-adoption services. (Be careful, though, not to take money away from what you're doing well or fairly well or you may just shift the problem from one area to another.)
- **Make the case for additional resources**—Coming to the table with reliable data is the best way to make the case to your leadership that you need additional resources. Perhaps your assessment showed that you have high-quality counseling for youth, but this service is not accessible to all eligible families. You could demonstrate to funders that you could address this issue if this program had more staff or a higher transportation budget that allowed for staff to provide counseling in families' homes.
- **Improve your service evaluation processes**—It may be that your assessment revealed that you don't know a lot about the quality of the services provided in your jurisdiction because you didn't have evaluation data to inform your assessment of those services. This may be the most important area of need in your system. A portion or all of your action plan could revolve around evaluating your services so that you can conduct a more informed assessment in the future. Look to family outcomes—like family preservation or placement stability over time—as well as satisfaction surveys to inform you more deeply on the quality of your services. Consider partnering with a university to help you improve your evaluation processes, or contract with them to conduct the evaluation.
- **Act on areas of strength, not only areas of need**—The fact that a service is not provided or has a low rating does not necessarily mean that it should be one of your priorities. As you

decide what actions to take, look for areas of strength too. You can take information about what's working well for families and propose expanding those programs or services, or replicate the circumstances that led to success in other areas of your system.

- **Learn from other jurisdictions²**—Research what other systems are doing to support resource families. How have they addressed challenges similar to the ones you found through your assessment? You could try those same approaches. Build relationships with public agency administrators in other states, tribes, and territories to engage in peer learning and foster opportunities for collaboration.
- **Plan for your next assessment**—Systems and their services change over time. Your results will become less meaningful over time, so it's important to have a plan for updating the assessment. Also, making service array assessment a routine part of the management of your child welfare system will greatly improve service provision over time and will help to foster trust with your community. Consider conducting smaller annual assessments with just public agency staff, and plan for another robust assessment process during the next three to five years.

Making the most of your results

Though your action plan is your core takeaway for overall improvements to your system, there are other ways to use the results of your assessment to benefit resource families outside of your action plan. Here are some suggestions for ways to use your assessment results that will positively impact families with minimal resource allocation:

- **Create an ongoing workgroup from your identified stakeholders**—The planning process you conducted to assess your support service array has likely already improved your system. Bringing stakeholders together on equal footing for collaborative discussion improves system-wide communication, breaks down barriers, and promotes collective buy-in for system improvement. One simple next step to take after your assessment is complete is to continue to convene this group of stakeholders regularly for more discussion and to hold each other accountable for commitments made as a result of the assessment.
- **Share the assessment results with resource families throughout your service area**—Through this assessment, you identified all of the reliable, high-quality services available to resource families in your area. While you work to improve your service array as a whole, take the opportunity to make sure that all resource families know about the services that already exist. You could publish the results on your agency website, send newsletters to everyone

² You can find a wide range of program profiles in the AdoptUSKids resource guide, *Support Matters: Lessons from the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families*, available at adoptuskids.org/for-professionals.

receiving maintenance payments, or partner with parent groups or associations to disseminate the information.

- **Develop resources for families to help them access existing services**—Use what you learned from your assessment to help families access the services they need. You could create a FAQ sheet about services available to families that address themes or common questions that emerged during the assessment, like eligibility or cost. This may be especially valuable for families to learn about the services outside of the formal child welfare system, like independent parent groups. Helping improve accessibility may be an easier fix than creating something new. It also shows stakeholders the immediate value of engaging in service assessments and may help them to buy in to the more difficult system changes that are in your action plan.
- **Train staff on available support services**—If workers are knowledgeable about the available support services in the community they serve, families are more likely to know about and use those services. The information gleaned from this assessment can be used to develop training materials or curricula for child welfare staff who work with families throughout your jurisdiction.

Suggestions for different system structures

Child welfare systems are complex and service provision will vary according to your unique system structure. You will need to find the assessment method that works best for you. People who use your services are uniquely qualified to tell you which approach will give you the most accurate assessment and the most useful results. Seek input from these key stakeholders—current and former resource parents and young people who experienced care—in the planning and assessment process. If many families access support services through agencies external to your child welfare system, you will likely benefit from engaging those agencies in your discussion, as well.

County and regionally administered systems

To get a meaningful assessment in a county or regionally administered system, it may help to first assess the smaller systems before assessing the state as a whole.

First, identify which services are provided by county, which are provided regionally, and which are administered at the state level. You can assess the county and regionally administered services separately from the statewide services and then bring county/regional leadership together to discuss the results of your system as a whole and decide how best to take action.

To better understand your results in this system structure, you may choose to plot how one service performs across all counties or regions. It may also help to use a color-coded map to show service quality and accessibility across your state. Consider developing profiles of the counties or regions that are strong to help replicate their practice in other areas of your state.

Note: Ensure that county or regional staff understand the purpose of the assessment and are actively involved in the planning process.

Highly privatized systems

In systems where support services are largely provided by private agencies, it will be especially important to create an environment for discussion that promotes shared ownership and communal success. Be sure participants understand that this assessment does not put providers in competition with each other and that you are relying on them collectively to help you improve the overall system.

Be aware that different providers may well be competitive with each other and may not want to disclose challenges publicly. These providers are likely critical to your system's success, and bringing them to the table for honest, collaborative discussion has the potential to greatly improve how your system functions. You may wish to plot the results across service categories, rather than individual services, to avoid publicly singling out providers whose services were rated lower.

Tribal child welfare systems

For tribal child welfare systems, support services may be provided by the tribe, a state or county partner, a private agency—or a combination of all of these. Tribes are frequently adept at helping their families navigate complex and overlapping systems, and tribal staff are likely to be connected to the community they are serving. You may want to determine which services are administered by the tribe and assess these services first. If most families access support services administered by entities outside your child welfare system, consider engaging people from those external agencies to contribute to your assessment. Tribes may also benefit from using circle quadrants to plot their services' performance in the context of a relational worldview.³

3 Read more about the relational worldview model at <http://nayapdx.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Relational-Worldview-Model.docx>

We can help!

AdoptUSKids offers free capacity-building services to states, tribes, and territories that want to improve their system's approach to the recruitment, engagement, development, and support of resource families. We may be able to help you use this tool to assess your support service array. Contact us at consultation@adoptuskids.org to see how we can help you improve your system.

For more resources on engaging, developing, and supporting foster, adoptive, and kinship care families, including tip sheets, guides, tools, and recorded webinars, please visit adoptuskids.org/for-professionals.

Appendix: Legend

To conduct your assessment, it's important to make sure that every participant is clear on the definitions of each term within the *AdoptUSKids Support Services Assessment Tool*. Each service and metric found within the tool is defined below. We recommend reviewing this alongside the tool as you begin to plan your assessment process. Ensure that all stakeholders have these definitions so your assessment is consistent and there are limited miscommunications. We also encourage you to add any additional services or metrics to the tool that are relevant to your system.

Services

Information and referral

- **Information**—websites, fact sheets, articles, newsletters, and other sources of information on key issues in adoption, foster care, and kinship care, including special needs and disabilities of children and their families.
- **Navigation and referral**—staff or volunteers help families to access the information and services they need.
- **Warmline for prospective foster/adoptive parents**—knowledgeable staff or volunteers answer inquiries from prospective parents and assist with next steps.

Training

- **Pre-service training**—training that resource parents are required to receive prior to the placement of a child.
- **Child-specific training**—training that resource parents receive related to the specific needs of the child(ren) in their care. This may include training on managing specific conditions or diagnoses, navigating certain behavioral challenges, or more specific trauma training based on the child's experiences.
- **Other training**—ongoing training on topics such as child welfare issues, challenging behaviors, specific diagnoses or conditions, sibling issues, trauma, accessing services, and any other training relevant to this population.

Peer support and mentoring

- **For parents and caregivers**—parents receive support from current or former resource parents through in-person or online support groups, liaisons, buddy programs, and social activities.

- **For children and teens**—youth receive support from other youth or young adults who have experienced foster care through in-person or online support groups, buddy programs, or social activities.
- **Mentoring for parents**—resource parents are connected with experienced parents and caregivers who can provide tips and insights, help them develop their skills, and provide support.
- **Mentoring for children and teens**—youth are connected with young adults—often those who have experienced foster care themselves—for connection, guidance, social activities, and support.

Advocacy

- **Advocacy for children’s or parents’ needs**—staff or volunteers help families to advocate for needed services or benefits, such as medical or mental health care or access to material support.
- **Educational support and advocacy**—staff or volunteers help families to advocate for needed educational services and provide additional educational services to the child, such as tutoring, individualized education, specialized or alternative schooling, etc.

Respite

- **Planned respite**—short-term childcare planned in advance to give caregivers and children a break from each other.
- **Emergency respite**—short-term childcare made available when families are in crisis and in immediate need of a break.

Camps and events

- **For children and teens**—planned events outside the home where they connect with peers, engage in therapeutic or educational activities, and have fun. These could be day camps or sleep-away camps.
- **For caregivers**—planned events outside the home where they engage in peer support, therapeutic or educational activities, and fun.
- **Family camps**—planned events outside the home where both caregivers and children/teens engage in peer support, therapeutic or educational activities and family connection, and have fun. Family camps usually include components that have the children and caregivers engaged in separate events for a period of time, allowing for respite.

- **Other social or community events**—picnics, field days, day trips, and any other planned social event for families.

Therapeutic supports

- **Counseling for children**—therapeutic counseling services for children, teens, and young adults.
- **Counseling for parents and caregivers**—therapeutic counseling services for resource parents.
- **Family counseling**—therapeutic counseling services for the entire foster, adoptive, or kinship care family.
- **Mental health helpline**—knowledgeable staff or volunteers answer questions and provide navigation and referral for mental health services.
- **In-home therapeutic services**—children, teens, young adults, and their families receive mental health treatment and services within their home.
- **Residential treatment**—children and teens receive treatment for more significant mental and behavioral health challenges while living outside the home for a limited period of time.

Other

- **Child/youth assessment**—a trauma-informed assessment identifies strengths and challenges, services their family may need, and any changes their family might make to support their ongoing development.
- **Case management**—a trained professional or team works with the family to identify strengths and challenges and helps them to implement a family-specific plan to address their needs.
- **Financial or material supports**—in addition to any foster care maintenance payments or adoption/guardianship assistance payments. These may be funds for specialized medical equipment, payments for youth activities, emergency funding for child care or living expenses, etc. Material support could include school supplies, clothing, gas or bus cards, holiday gifts.
- **Crisis intervention**—services available 24 hours a day to provide assistance to families experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis. These may include crisis hotlines, emergency respite, or in-home crisis response teams.
- **Birth family mediation**—staff provide information, advice, and counseling to assist in navigating relationships with birth family members to facilitate connections that are in the best interest of the children or youth.
- **Adoption search**—staff assist in searching for birth family.

Quality metrics

- **Adoption/permanency-competent**—providers have specialized training in the core issues in adoption, foster care, and kinship care, and the impact of these on identity, development, and relationships. Program staff also have expertise on the higher incidence of disabilities, mental health issues, prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol, and behavioral challenges in children and youth who are or who have been in foster care or who suffered early deprivation. Adoption-competent programs also examine clinical and ethical issues in preparing for and supporting permanency.
- **Trauma-informed**—treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. Trauma-informed and trauma-responsive care acknowledges the effect trauma has on individuals and their families; modifies services to respond to those effects; emphasizes skill- and strength-building rather than symptom management; and avoids further traumatization by focusing on the physical and psychological safety of the child or youth and family.
- **Designed with family and youth input and feedback**—youth and young adults who have experienced foster care and resource parents shaped the design and implementation of the service and are continually involved in service provision and improvement. There are opportunities for those served to give feedback, and that feedback has the potential to result in changes to services. Family and youth continue to be involved in the assessment and improvement of the service over time.
- **Family-focused**—the service engages the entire family appropriately. Each child is seen as a unique individual who is an integral part of a family system, understanding that the actions of each family member affects the entire family. All children and youth in the family—whether birth, adopted, step, or foster—are affected by one another, and their individual and group relationships can shape the entire household. As a result, a family-focused program provides services to the whole family, not only the child or the parents.
- **Outcome-evaluated/evidence-based (with positive results)**—through rigorous evaluation practices, the service has been found to be effective, consistently yielding positive outcomes for families. The service is continually evaluated and claims of effectiveness are supported by evidence.

Accessibility metrics

- **Broad eligibility**—the population eligible for the service is broad. An example of broad service eligibility would be post-adoption counseling services that serve all adoptive families living in the state, rather than only families who adopted from foster care.

- **Financially accessible**—the service is offered at no or little cost to the family or on a reasonable sliding-fee scale.
- **Geographically accessible**—the service is offered widely in your state, tribe, or region; families located in rural or remote areas are able to access the service.
- **Well known/publicized**—families are aware that the service is available, that they are eligible for the service, and how to access it.
- **Rapid availability**—the service is offered soon after a referral is made; there is no waitlist to receive the service.
- **Ongoing availability/sustainability**—the service is reliably funded; families can count on its availability in the future.
- **Culturally relevant and accessible**—the service is respectful of cultural traditions and values of all members of the community it serves; it is available in all appropriate languages.⁴

⁴ Cultural relevance speaks to the service’s quality, as well as the accessibility of the service. You may wish to consider including cultural relevance/competence as a quality metric in addition to an accessibility metric.



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