Family Engagement Initiative

Family Finding Policy (Planning Template)

*(Note: One initial consideration – does your county wish to combine your Family Finding with your Crisis/Rapid Response Family Meeting policy or keep them as separate documents?)*

**Resources upon which to build local policy:**

* Pennsylvania Law (Act 118 of 2022)
* Pennsylvania Rules of Juvenile Court
* Pennsylvania Dependency Bench Book
* Pennsylvania Dependency System Guiding Principles
* FEI Family Finding - Revised

**Purpose of Family Finding:**

* + Build a sustainable network of support for children and parents
  + Include kin in service planning and delivery to the extent possible
  + Safely maintain children at home or with kin (if a placement is needed)
  + Reduce system-induced trauma

**Overall Considerations:**

* 1. Does our policy insure that FF begins at the point of “accept for service” or earlier? If so, what does this look like? If not, how can it be incorporated into current practice?
  2. Is FF a consideration at every step of a referral and/or case?
  3. Does our policy clearly distinguish an Accurint Search and Fostering Connections notification from Family Finding (the former being a possible tool in FF but not in and of itself FF)?
  4. Is FF integrated into daily casework practice?
  5. Do our caseworkers, supervisors, managers, juvenile justice, mental health, drug & alcohol, other providers, children and families, resource parents, attorneys, judges, and hearing officers understand the words “network”, “lifelong connections”, “ACEs”, “resilience”, “well-being”, “healing”, “case-mining”? Are they a part of our normal vocabulary?
  6. Do caseworkers and supervisors know how to calculate an ACE score?
  7. Does everyone fully understand the impact of ACEs and can they explain such to children, youth, and parents?
  8. Are multiple opportunities above and beyond “placement” available for network members?
  9. Does our policy/practice shift the caseworker from “doing everything” to “facilitating of a supportive network, with that network doing many things previously done by the caseworker”?
  10. Does our policy/practice contain a shared responsibility for FF with family members and all those serving the child and family?
  11. Does our policy/practice include meaningful family meetings?
  12. Does our policy articulate with whom the family meeting(s) results will be shared and how that will occur?
  13. Does our policy/practice identify who will complete which portions of the FF Report to the Court and by when?
  14. Does our policy include specific steps for initial and ongoing training/support for all that need it (caseworkers, attorneys, providers, mental health, drug & alcohol, juvenile justice, resource parents, etc…?)
  15. Does our policy include a process for monitoring and continuous quality improvement?
  16. Does our policy articulate who is responsible for specific FF activities and by when each activity must be completed?

Family Finding Policy

***DRAFT***

**Statement of Purpose:** In May 2013, family finding became Pennsylvania law moving from a “best practice” to a legal requirement for all child welfare cases “accepted for services” by the child welfare agency. In \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, XXX County was officially selected to participate in the Pennsylvania State Roundtable’s Family Engagement Initiative (FEI) as a Phase \_\_\_\_\_\_County. This policy articulates how the family finding law and FEI practice is being operationalized in XXX County.

**Training/education/support:**  *what will the county do to ensure all new staff are adequately trained? How will new attorneys, resource parents, providers, and others receive the training? What ongoing support will be needed?*

Examples:

Some counties have a special Family Engagement Unit or Family Finding Caseworker who might be able to train new staff before more comprehensive CWRC training is available. In some counties, this might include shadowing the FF caseworker, training from the supervisor, and court observation/debriefing with the solicitor.

Some counties might want to have new staff watch various videos on their own and then discuss with their supervisor.

Some counties might want to develop super FF workers or supervisors who take on this role specifically to FF.

**Screening Considerations:** *What steps can a screener take to begin FF?*

Example: When taking a referral, the call screener might ask specific questions which begin the FF process such as:

* Are you aware of any people upon which the child or family relies?
* Are you aware of the mother or father’s family/kin who might be positive supports/resources?
* Is the child/youth particularly close to anyone…coach, teacher, neighbor, family friend, pastor?

**What additional resources will be needed to do this? (None)**

**Can any work be eliminated with this step? (No)**

**Who is responsible for this? (Screener)**

**What is the CQI process for this? (Supervisor review??? Case record review???)**

**Intake/Investigations Considerations:** *What can be done by the investigating caseworker almost immediately?*

Example:

1. When responding to an investigation (CPS or GPS), the caseworker should first assure everyone is okay (put out any fires) and then begin building/identifying the network\*. Ascertain the names of people upon which the child and/or parent relies for support.
2. Supervisor review of the investigation will include a review of the network identified by the caseworker. If no one or insufficient members are noted, the supervisor will instruct and/or demonstrate the process to get a larger network.
3. Caseworker will immediately refer any child/family for which there is a child welfare concern to a family meeting.

\*Note: if a county has a specific person or entity that does their FF, how does that affect this step in the process (remember goals of FF include reducing trauma and keeping youth with kin if a placement is needed…so you don’t want FF beginning after a placement has already occurred)

**What additional resources will be needed to do this? (list of questions??? More training???)**

**Can any work be eliminated with this step? (yes, if activities are needed this could identify helpers so that the caseworker is not providing all the resources and/or supports…this could free up some time for other caseworker activity)**

**Who is responsible for this? (investigating caseworker or FF worker???)**

**What is the CQI process for this? (Supervisory review and training if needed)**

**Court Involved Cases**

**(Note: there may be two considerations in your policy: what evidence should be presented as to courts FF finding of agency reasonable efforts and then what others in court can do to assist in FF…)**

**Emergency Shelter Request:** *What can be done in an emergency situation to demonstrate reasonable FF efforts by the agency?*

Examples:

1. See Intake/Investigations above
2. Caseworker could verbally communicate FF efforts made during the investigation to the solicitor and judge.
3. If the case had previously been accepted for service by the agency, the caseworker could include all FF efforts since the case was accepted in addition to efforts associated with the current investigation.
4. Caseworker could effectuate an Emergency Caretaker placement if kin is found or take steps to minimize trauma (might want to provide some examples like establish visitation schedule immediately, arrange for the child to remain in home school, keep whatever connections are possible intact. ??) if the child must be placed outside of the kin home.
5. Should Crisis/Rapid Response family meetings be included in this policy or contained in a separate policy?

**Filing Petition in Juvenile Court:** *What can be done to ensure adequate evidence as to the agency’s reasonable efforts for family finding are presented to the court?*

Example:

1. Caseworker completes and provides FF Report to the Court for filing with the petition.
2. Caseworker provides Crisis/Rapid Response Family Meeting plan to court (whether this stays in this policy or is in a separate CRRFM policy is county choice).
3. Caseworker provides an update on kin placement or possible kin placement
4. CW supervisor reviews documents before submission
5. Solicitor reviews documented efforts and prepares the case

**Shelter Hearing:**  *What can be done to ensure adequate evidence family finding is completed?*

**What can the Caseworker do? (submit FF Report to the Court, submit CRRFM plan to the court,…)**

**What can the Guardian ad Litem do? (talk to the children about “safe, supportive” people in their lives; with whom they would like to visit or stay in touch?)**

**What can the Parent Attorney do? (talk to the parents about “safe, supportive” people in their lives; who might help their children even if they wouldn’t help the parent?)**

**What can the judge do?** **(talk to the children and the parents about “safe, supportive” people in their lives; ensure that everyone is focusing on connections in addition to placement if needed; ensure/require submission of FF Report to the Court)**

**Adjudication Hearing:** *What can be done to ensure adequate evidence as to the agency’s reasonable efforts for family finding are presented to the court?*

While the primary focus of an adjudication hearing is the clear and convincing evidence for dependency, FF and the supports that it could potentially bring may likely be a factor.

**What can the Caseworker do?**

**What can the Guardian ad Litem do?**

**What can the Parent Attorney do?**

**What can the judge do?**

**Disposition Hearing:** *What can be done to ensure adequate evidence of family finding?*

**What can the Caseworker do? (Ensure FGDM meeting has occurred and submits the plan to the court)**

**What can the Guardian ad Litem do?**

**What can the Parent Attorney do?**

**What can the judge do?**

**Permanency Review Hearing*:*** *What can be done to ensure adequate evidence of family finding?*

It is important to remember that review hearing evidence needs to be updated. For each review hearing, an updated Family finding Report to the Court must be filed. Over time these reports will demonstrate the level of progress being made to strengthen supportive networks and meaningful connections for each child.

**What can the Caseworker do? (Ensure FGDM meeting has occurred and submits the plan to the court; submit updated Family Finding Report to the Court)**

**What can the Guardian ad Litem do?**

**What can the Parent Attorney do?**

**What can the judge do?**