

Continuing to Move Forward: Preparing for the Work and Steps One through Six

The key to successfully completing the steps in the Family Finding model is proper preparation. After proper preparation, continually moving forward from step to step is crucial to assuring timely child/youth safety, permanency and well-being. To that end, on the pages that follow, you will find two checklists to support adequate preparation for the Family Finding model and forward progress through the six steps of the model.

System/Community Collaboration and Preparation

Ensuring that professionals/community partners involved in the case are on the same page before moving forward with Family Finding efforts is crucial to the child/youth and family's success. As such, try to ensure the following are in place before moving forward with Family Finding. Remember though that not having all the components below in place should not stop Family Finding efforts from occurring. Ultimately, in meeting the guidelines established in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the child's/youth's safety, permanency and well-being must be assured in a timely manner.

<p>1. A collaborative Family Finding team was created consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Case Managers; Court Appointed Special Advocates; Guardians ad Litem; Mental Health Professionals; Juvenile Probation Officers; Attorney(s)/Education Professionals; and other professionals from whose input the system/community team would benefit andb. Community members important to the child/youth and involved parent(s)/family members.
<p>2. Family Finding processes/goals were clearly explained to all professional/community team members at the team meeting.</p>
<p>3. Conversations were held during the team meeting regarding the safety of the child/youth with regard to moving forward with Family Finding efforts during which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Team members offered their concerns for the child/youth related to moving forward with Family Finding efforts;b. The team reached consensus regarding the role the child/youth will play as a partner in his/her own connectedness process – specifically considering what the level of child/youth participation should likely be and, if it is limited, why; andc. A safety plan was created and reviewed that emphasized preventative strategies to ensure the child's/youth's safety related to moving forward with Family Finding efforts (e.g., meeting with the caregiver who offended (when appropriate) other caregivers and family, etc.).
<p>4. A child/youth formulation exercise was completed by the Family Finding team that involved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. A completed and reviewed Connectedness Map andb. A Big Unmet Need statement written on big paper by the Family Finding team collaborative.

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| 5. The Family Finding team discussed the child's/youth's current setting (out-of-home or otherwise) with a focus on: <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. The safety of the child/youth in his/her current setting andb. A timeframe being established by which to complete Discovery in order to begin the Engagement Step to move quickly and prudently toward alleviating safety concerns while ensuring well-being and permanency. |
| 6. The Family Finding team created action steps, through consensus, regarding activities for Discovery (e.g., face-to-face discussions, social media, letters, phone calls, Accurant searches and, if the following is deemed a safe activity for the child/youth, interviewing the child/youth and conducting a Connectedness Mapping or Historical Mobility Mapping session with him/her). |
| 7. The Family Finding team discussed whether a Family Finding Chronicle was appropriate for the child/youth; and, if so, the child/youth had a chronicle created featuring that child/youth. |
| 8. The Family Finding team discussed and created a preliminary list of participants (to be amended by the family during the Engagement step) who they believe should attend a Blended Perspectives Meeting. |

A Checklist to Consider Where You Are In the Family Finding Model

Please remember, one's readiness to progress to the next step is determined by whether the goals in the current and previous steps are completed. It is important to remember that, while the goal is to move to the next step, times may arise when it will be appropriate and necessary to return to a previous step to successfully accomplish the goals of that step. For example, you might move into Engagement (step two); however, despite finding 40+ connections, out of the initial 40+, only five are willing to take part in a Blended Perspectives Meeting (step three) – when you need 12 to 15. Therefore, you will need to move back to Discovery and Engagement.

Discovery: (Should take 2 weeks – or less in most cases)



It is important to remember that confidentiality is critical in your Family Finding efforts. In talking to other individuals, you must offer the minimum of information necessary to engage and involve family and kin.



- Have you identified *at least* 40 family members for the child or young person?
 - If you found at least 40 connections, and those individuals are meaningful connections, you are ready to move to Engagement; however, consider the following:
 - Of the people of whom you are aware, who would be the easiest to contact today, as quickly as possible – meaning that you know their phone number, email address, and/or can visit them? Is this person someone who knows the rest of the family (e.g., matriarch/patriarch of the family)? Is this contact someone who can contact others in the family who could become strong supports for the child/youth and/or the caregiver?
 - Are there current service providers (resource parents), schools, etc., who can offer information and can be contacted?

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- To complete Discovery, you must work with the individuals already identified to find other family members. If, for example, you found only one individual – and that person does not know others in the family – an Internet/Accurint search can be performed. However, signed consents or court orders will be necessary to perform searches on other family members. When engagement efforts are used, subsequent internet searches are usually not necessary. If you have not found anyone, consider the following:
 - What have you done, to-date, to locate family and kin – especially non-custodial parents (e.g., non-resident fathers)?
 - Have you truly used the methods of Discovery to their fullest potential? Methods include, but are by no means limited to engagement efforts such as talking with the child, youth, caregiver, and their family, friends, and kin, Data Mining, Mobility Mapping, Connectedness Mapping, Ecomaps, Genograms, Accurint/Internet searches, *etc.*
- For instances where there simply are no connections (e.g., babies left at hospitals under Safe Haven for whom no other information was left at the time they were taken into care), then child welfare and related professionals and anyone involved in the case will have to look toward engaging adoptive family members.

Engagement: (Should take no more than 2 to 3 weeks)

- Out of the 40 or more connections that you identified in the Discovery stage, have you identified 12 or more family/kin, willing to take part in a Blended Perspectives Meeting, who will serve as a member of the child's Network for Life?
 - If you have not yet moved from Engagement with the 2-to-3-week-recommended maximum timeframe, then consider the following concepts that will assist you in moving from Engagement to Planning.
 - Consider whom you contacted and, out of those individuals, who is appropriate to serve as a member of the child/youth's Network for Life.



The Network for Life consists of 12 or more family/kin that will offer concrete supports to the child, recognize that the child needs and deserves unconditional love, is willing and able to offer that unconditional love, and will commit to be a lifelong connection. This network is crucial to the success of the child/youth and/or his family. The chances of success increase when the network has more dedicated members.



- If you cannot identify 12 or more family/kin to serve as a member of the child's Network for Life, you must go back to Discovery.
- If the child/youth is old enough to engage – and he/she will not be at the Blended Perspectives Meeting, at the end of the Engagement step it is critical to connect with the child/youth, and when applicable the caregiver, to discover the Big Unmet Need, strengths possessed, *etc.* This contact is very helpful when the child/youth cannot be at the Blended Perspectives Meeting. In addition, a child/youth Family Finding chronicle will also prove useful when engaging others to become a part of the

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Network for Life. If a chronicle was not created, now would be a suitable time to create one to send to identified family and kin.

- If the child/youth is able to attend the meeting and is open to offering his/her input (e.g., a Big Unmet Need), as part of engagement efforts you would let the child/youth guide how that information is offered (e.g., the young person offers the Big Unmet Need, a spokesperson/support for the young person offers it, etc.)
- Reinforce that the overall goal of Engagement is to find the team members and gather as much information as possible that will help the child/youth and the team during the Blended Perspectives Meeting. It is important to discover during these conversations the family's/kin's functional strengths and talents. If finding team members and gathering information has been achieved, you are ready to move into Planning. If not, then you must ensure that you use the Engagement tools and strategies at your disposal (e.g., face-to-face contacts, sending letters/Emails, making phone calls, and so on) to engage family/kin.
- It is crucial to move quickly, but sensibly, toward contacting the individuals you identified during Discovery (to move past Engagement) and to set up possible meeting dates and times to move past Planning and into Decision Making. When applicable, tie meeting dates and times to special events: holidays, birthdays, family reunions.

Planning: (Should take no more than 2 to 3 weeks)

- Have you held a Blended Perspectives Meeting that:
 - Was in a family-friendly and safe location;
 - Ensured introductions and connections were identified by each team member;
 - Had a clear agenda, with goals and reasons for the meeting offered to the family and kin;
 - Allowed the family/kin to see how isolated the child/youth/caregiver is;
 - Identified strengths and needs of the child/youth/caregiver;
 - Identified the child/youth/caregiver's Big Unmet Need; and,
 - Created a Network for Life for the child/youth/caregiver?
- If you have not, then consider who you contacted; and, out of those individuals, who is appropriate to serve as a member of the child/youth's Network for Life. Since the meeting is crucial to moving forward, go back to the Engagement step and use the strategies to help family see the urgency in taking part in a Blended Perspectives Meeting. In preparing for the meeting, make sure that you:
 - Offer enough meeting date options – at least three should be offered to families and kin (based on dates and times most convenient to them)
 - Develop a chart with strengths/needs for use of meeting
 - Develop a social environment; however, aim for meeting to be no longer than 2 hours
 - Offer food/drinks, encouraging the family to bring their own food and drink and/or support them in getting the food/drink whenever possible
 - Offer a clear purpose for the meeting with a vision for how long it should take (i.e., no more than two hours)

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Decision Making: (Should ideally occur within 2 weeks of Blended Perspectives Meeting, but no more than 30 days).

- Did you hold a Family Group Decision Making meeting:
 - That was family-led and involved the people from the Blended Perspectives Meeting whom family and kin thought should be at the meeting and likely in the Network for Life;
 - For which the family chose the time, date and location;
 - That offered a supportive/safe environment;
 - That included a strengths/needs inventory of child/ youth and team;
 - In which the purpose of the Network for Life was explained once more and in which you got commitment from individuals at the meeting to remain/serve on the Network;
 - In which safety issues were reviewed;
 - That offered a time during which everyone considered, if the team needed to reconvene, whether they would be able to and who (in the family) is responsible for reconvening the team;
 - That offered a calendaring/action-planning piece to recruit more members for the Network; and
 - During which, a date was set for the next meeting (no longer than 6 weeks following the most recent meeting)?
- Stemming from the meeting, do you have at least three planning options that are well-defined, realistic, and achievable?
 - In considering whether the plans are well-defined, realistic, and achievable, did you and the family honestly discuss (for all plans):
 - What the plans look like in concrete behavioral terms that everyone understands;
 - Whether the plans are the best for the individual for/with whom the meeting is held;
 - Safety issues and how to alleviate them in conjunction with agency/family Bottom Line Concerns;
 - Whether the plans can truly be achieved given case situations, related timeframes, and the need for safety, permanency, and well-being being achieved in a timely manner;
 - Whether the plan(s) facilitate achieving timely permanency;
 - Where will the child/youth live;
 - Who the responsible parties are; and
 - All of the essential needs of the child/youth/caregiver to ensure success?
 - If you have not yet moved from Planning with the 2-to-4-week-recommended-maximum timeframe to a Decision Making meeting, then engage the Network for Life to determine what needs to occur for the Decision Making meeting to happen. You might consider reconvening a Blended Perspective Meeting to address obstacles, re-focus the group, and get to a Decision Making meeting.

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Evaluation: (Done within 1 week of the Decision Making meeting. This needs to continue throughout the case process).



It is critical to keep in mind that Kevin Campbell's original Family Finding model focused heavily on the most needy children. The questions that Mr. Campbell originally created – seen below – reflect this. Pennsylvania expanded the model to apply to all children, youth, and families who would benefit from Family Finding efforts, at all points of the case process.



- Once the team developed at least three plans and made decisions for how to ensure success for all three, or more, plans, it is important for the worker performing Family Finding efforts, the agency/providers, and the team to determine and answer several concepts/questions. These include but may not be limited to the following:
 - If this iteration of our plan fails, will the child/youth remain in or return to the foster care system?
 - Have we identified and engaged an adequate level of enduring support for the child/youth and her/his caregivers?
 - Has the team created a plan that includes family members and other adults willing to offer their support if the plan “A” option is unsuccessful?
 - Are there at least three options?
 - Is there a plan and commitment that the team will reconvene if challenges arise that threaten the child's/youth's safety and stability?
 - Although time-sensitive, this is not a time-limited situation. Being a member of the Network for Life comes with the expectation that family will be involved the rest of their lives.
 - Has a member of the team (who will keep in constant contact with the child/youth and caregiver to ensure the plan is still working) been elected to organize/facilitate future meetings?
- It is important to note that the questions above can be asked at the end of the Decision Making meeting and should take no more than 15 minutes to answer. Whenever possible, ask a family member to take the lead on asking these questions. The plan is theirs and they must feel ownership in successes achieved when able to answer the questions in the affirmative. Moreover, ownership proves equally important when changes are necessary.
- If you successfully addressed the above questions and concepts, you are then able to move on to the next step, Follow up on Supports.
- If you have not successfully addressed the questions and concepts (*i.e.*, the answers to any of the previous evaluation questions is “no,”) you will need to help the family see the value in reconvening another Decision Making meeting, or perhaps another Blended Perspectives Meeting. You may also need to return to Discovery and/or Engagement, depending on what still needs to be addressed.


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Follow up on Supports:

- Once you can answer the following questions with a “yes,” Follow up on Supports is complete. In addition, if the answer to all the questions is “yes,” you completed the Family Finding process as a whole. In finishing the Follow up on Supports stage, make sure the following hold true.
 - The current plan (A, B, or C) is functioning well. The Big Unmet Need has been met. The agency, court and case team are satisfied with the child's and family's current state as well as the family's ability to maintain the current state. All safety, permanency and well-being needs of the child have been met.
 - The team gave a lifelong commitment to reconvene if the child's safety, permanency or well-being is threatened and they selected a person responsible to bring the team together.
 - The team members understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining the success of the plans beyond agency involvement.
 - A written plan was created regarding which individual on the team will provide which support to the child/youth. Each member of the team (including the child/youth) was provided a copy of the plan.
 - The team scheduled a future meeting with a specific date/place. The Case Manager attends for a time to ensure continuity.
 - The team knows what services and resources are available to maintain the plan's success, as well as how to access them.
 - The team knows how to access those services, resources, and others, both now and in the future, in the event that future needs arise when the agency is not involved. Contact sheets containing information to facilitate access to services, resources, and each other should be created and disseminated.

Lessons Learned:

As you perform the steps associated with the Family Finding model, you will learn lessons concerning what worked well for you and families as well as what might not have worked so well – keeping in mind that different families respond differently to approaches. Based on your efforts, write your lessons learned in the spaces below for use in the future.



Source: Adapted from Campbell, Kevin. (2011). *Family Finding Quality/Fidelity Index*. Unpublished document presented at A Family Finding Super User Session, Harrisburg, PA. Used with permission.