

PRESERVING CONNECTIONS

Best strategies for **recruiting and retaining** tribal foster families for American Indian and Alaska Native children

American Indian and Alaska Native children thrive with families that reflect their culture, especially if they need to be placed in out-of-home care. To preserve these connections, the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) lays out preferred placements for out-of-home care when a child who meets the ICWA's definition of an "Indian child" is not able to be safe at home.

ICWA requirements

Any child accepted for foster care or pre-adoptive placement must be placed:



In the least restrictive setting where a child's special needs, if any, can be met



Within reasonable proximity to the child's home

These are the **preferred placement** options in order of priority:



A member of the Indian child's extended family



A foster home licensed, approved, or specified by the Indian child's tribe



An Indian foster home licensed or approved by an authorized non-Indian licensing authority; or



An institution for children approved by an Indian tribe or operated by an Indian organization which has a program suitable to meet the Indian child's needs. 25 U.S.C. 1915(b).

Note: An Indian child's tribe can establish a different order of preference by resolution. ICWA also states preferred preferences for adoptions of American Indian/Alaska Native children. See 25 U.S.C. 1915(a)

Between 2014 and 2017, Casey Family Programs collaborated with 21 teams of tribal and state representatives to work together over a one-year period to **recruit and retain more tribal homes for American Indian** children to fulfill the intention of ICWA to preserve cultural connections. Below is a detailed look at the four essential strategy areas for effective recruitment and retention of ICWA-preferred caregivers.

Infrastructure and Resources

Tribal and state agency infrastructure and resources are the foundation for successful collaborative recruitment and retention efforts.

Agency practices

Agency practices **generate ideas and strategies** and put a team's recruitment and retention efforts into action.

Policy

State and federal policy have a strong influence on agency and judicial practice in making ICWA-preferred placements for Indian children. Both agency policy and regulations can affect the ability to recruit and retain ICWA-preferred placements, and can help stakeholders understand why **ICWA is the gold standard** for social work practice. (See recent federal Bureau of Indian Affairs regulations.)

Advocacy

Advocacy is a set of actions to influence public awareness about an issue with the hopes of bringing about positive change. In this case, raising awareness about the importance of ICWA-preferred placement and strategies to achieve it can lead to better compliance with the law.

Four essential strategy areas for **effective recruitment and retention** of ICWA-preferred caregivers



Preserving connections for American Indian/Alaska Native children
Maintaining culture
Ensuring child and youth well-being
Strengthening tribal communities



- Documented policies and procedures for recruiting families
- Dedicated financial resources, materials, and staff time
- Commitment to developing trust
- Processes for ongoing relationship development
- Shared goals
- Space for difficult conversations to address institutional bias
- Data systems to identify and track children and placements



- Regular work sessions and progress check-ins
- Opportunities to learn each other's skills, motivations, and values
- Identification of policies and practices that create barriers to recruitment and retention
- Demonstrations of cooperative tribal-state working relationships
- Joint tribal-state foster parent training
- Information- and resource-sharing*
- Regular review of ICWA-preferred placement data**



- Educate policymakers, agency leaders, and social workers about importance for child well-being
- Include tribal participation in reviewing state policies for compliance
- Examine challenges to recruitment and tribal licensing of homes***
- Develop intergovernmental state-tribal agreements for placement
- Identify federal and state financial aid and other supports for kinship providers
- Revise agency policies, training, and procedures to address barriers
- Incorporate ICWA provisions in agency policy, practice, and advocacy



- Elevate constituent and American Indian voice****
- Affirm tribal sovereignty in decision-making
- Demonstrate transformative power of true partnerships
- Increase judicial engagement to increase awareness and adherence to ICWA
- Raise awareness among key stakeholders and broader public
- Acknowledge and address institutional biases
- Use data to communicate progress and needs

*Share information and resources with other human service departments about efforts to recruit tribal homes

**Include creation of monthly target recruitment numbers

***Challenges include requirements of background checks, licensing regulations, state recognition of tribal homes, and the potential of case-by-case, non-safety waivers

****Constituent voices include foster and adoptive youth, kinship caregivers and guardians, and foster/adoptive parents

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To **successfully recruit** American Indian and Alaska Native foster families, try these practices:



Marketing, publicity, and **outreach**

- Television, radio, newspaper, and PSA announcements
- Brochures and marketing materials that reflect Native culture and language
- Personalized face-to-face conversations
- Promotional giveaways and incentives
- Recruitment flyer in tribal workers' paychecks
- Facebook page
- Outreach and recruitment at powwows and community events
- Speakers for tribal community and agency meetings



Providing supports to foster care applicants

- Support to complete both state and tribal licensing applications
- Interim financial support and resources during the licensing application process
- Providing a short "getaway" for rural applicants to come to a hotel to complete state and tribal licensure requirements
- Online process for completing pre-service training



Partnering with current foster families

- Current families refer friends, family, and community members
- Foster parents bring guests to appreciation events
- Kinship families are encouraged to foster a non-relative child



Appreciation and community honoring events

- Highlight the contributions and commitment of foster families
- Invite community members and interested applicants to attend
- Provide space where foster families share their experiences



Creating a cooperative and visible tribal-state recruitment presence in communities



Targeting recruitment, especially to therapeutic foster homes

To **successfully retain** American Indian and Alaska Native foster families, try these practices:



Support families during licensing, placement, and post-placement



Increase opportunities to hear foster family feedback



Reach out to existing families with material and financial resources to meet needs during licensing, placement, and post-placement



Develop support plans and resource mapping for families



Link families to tribal and state caseworkers



Workers available to assist with scheduling appointments and making phone calls



Facilitate peer support group for families