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:

1. A member of the Indian child’s extended family
2. A foster home licensed, approved, or specified by the Indian child’s tribe
3. An Indian foster home licensed or approved by an authorized non-Indian licensing authority; or
4. 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).

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 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.

*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(b)*

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing, publicity, and outreach</th>
<th>Providing supports to foster care applicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television, radio, newspaper, and PSA announcements</td>
<td>Support to complete both state and tribal licensing applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures and marketing materials that reflect Native culture and language</td>
<td>Interim financial support and resources during the licensing application process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized face-to-face conversations</td>
<td>Providing a short “getaway” for rural applicants to come to a hotel to complete state and tribal licensure requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional giveaways and incentives</td>
<td>Online process for completing pre-service training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment flyer in tribal workers’ paychecks</td>
<td>Facebook page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach and recruitment at powwows and community events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers for tribal community and agency meetings</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnering with current foster families</th>
<th>Appreciation and community honoring events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current families refer friends, family, and community members</td>
<td>Highlight the contributions and commitment of foster families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster parents bring guests to appreciation events</td>
<td>Invite community members and interested applicants to attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinship families are encouraged to foster a non-relative child</td>
<td>Provide space where foster families share their experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support families during licensing, placement, and post-placement</th>
<th>Increase opportunities to hear foster family feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reach out to existing families with material and financial resources to meet needs during licensing, placement, and post-placement</td>
<td>Develop support plans and resource mapping for families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link families to tribal and state caseworkers</td>
<td>Workers available to assist with scheduling appointments and making phone calls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facilitate peer support group for families