

Step by Step: Developing a Targeted Recruitment Campaign

STEP ONE: GATHER AND REVIEW YOUR DATA

Remember that “data is your friend”! While some agencies have well organized, up to date data systems, others do not. However, accurate, useful data can be gathered through simple hand counts, spreadsheets or handwritten lists. Often, agencies depend on anecdotal information or guess at what their needs may be. It is likely to be inaccurate or misleading. This information is critical and will help determine for whom the targeted recruitment plan will be designed.

A second reason to review data is that *it is not good practice or fiscally prudent to continue to recruit for families you don't need.* For example, Agency A may have 75 foster families who want to foster/adopt children under age 1. These foster families have been empty, waiting for those children for two years while teen boys are consistently being placed in group homes. Agency A has been providing service to these foster families (i.e., home visits, recertification, training, etc.) who will go unused while at the same time placing youth in more restrictive (and very expensive) placements than is needed.

You will need to collect two sets of data: information about the children and information about the families in your system to determine your targets.

Here is a list of data that you will need about the children:

- How many children are in your care? (Total number)
- Where are the children placed?
 - in foster homes
 - in kinship care
 - in group care (shelters, group homes, residential facilities, etc.)
- Who are the children in your care?
 - by age, race, gender, special needs, sibling group size, neighborhood or community of origin (where they lived prior to placement)
- Who are the children regularly placed in shelter or congregate care?
 - by age, race, gender, special needs, sibling group size
- Who are the children legally free for adoption, for whom no family is identified?
 - by age, race, gender, special needs, sibling group size

You will also need to conduct a **utilization study** to determine how many viable families (these are families available for immediate placement) are currently available for placement and what type of placement resource the family is. This information will give you a realistic picture of your current placement resources and identify the types of

families you need to recruit to ensure a pool of qualified families exists to meet your placement needs. Collect data to answer these questions:

- Who are your foster families already providing care?
 - How many licensed foster families do you have?
 - In what neighborhood or community are they located?
 - What is their race, color or national origin?
 - What are the characteristics of the children they will accept by age, race, gender, special needs, sibling group size?
 - How many are “on hold”? For what reasons? How many will return to service in the next 30 days? How many should be closed?
(Note: It is a good idea to close homes that will not return to service. This will “clean up” the caseloads of licensing staff, making room for the new families you will recruit!)
 - What are the foster families’ capacity? (total number of beds actually available)
 - What are the foster families’ occupancy? (how many of the total number of beds have children placed in them?)
- Who are your kinship families?
 - How many are licensed vs approved?
- Who are your waiting adoptive families?
 - How many approved adoptive families do you have?
 - In what neighborhood or community are they located?
 - What is their race, color or national origin?
 - What are the characteristics of the children they will accept by age, race, gender, special needs, sibling group size?

Once both sets of data have been gathered and organized, it can be reviewed for patterns of need. Consider the following questions:

1. What categories (characteristics) of children are most in need of family placements?
2. What racial/ethnic groups of children are disproportionately represented?
3. What neighborhood/communities do children most often come from? (You can use zipcodes, school districts, etc. to define
4. What kinds of families are most needed?
5. Are there foster families that are being underutilized? Why?
6. Are there foster families that are being overloaded? Why?
7. What types of adoptive homes are available? Why are they not receiving placements?

8. What percentage of children are being placed with relatives/kin? Are relatives/kin an untapped resource?

AN EXAMPLE: We are going to track this example through the *Step by Step Guide*. Please note that this information is for demonstration purposes only and does not reflect any specific analysis or research.

Following a review of data, it was determined that our target group should be: BOYS AGES 6-12

STEP TWO: DETERMINE YOUR GOAL NUMBER

Step One assisted in identifying the types of children and families to target. But how many? Too often, recruiters say, “We need families!” But fail to set an accurate goal for the numbers of families actually needed. It is not as simple as, “We need 15 more families who will foster teens.” Are you referring to the number of calls? Or the number of families who will eventually become licensed? Because of attrition throughout the recruitment-orientation-training-homestudy process, you will need to have a much higher number of prospective applicants make an informational call than 15. Jeffrey Katz of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute found that *only 1 of 28 people* who call about adopting a child from foster care end up adopting such a child.¹ In some agencies, the number could be even lower. What’s your number???

It may be advantageous to determine your agency’s rate of applicants who successfully become foster or adoptive parents. Track a cohort group of applicants from the 1st phone call to licensure to certification/approval. You could identify applicants from 12 months period in the past year that called during a certain month and track their progress through the orientation, training and homestudy for 12 months. How many (or what percentage) are licensed/approved today? How many have placements? At what point did you lose them along the way?

Next, the Foster Home Calculator designed by Dr. Judy Wildfire from the University of North Carolina is a great tool to ascertain the number of families that need to be licensed/approved in general or for a specific group of children. (See FH Calculator in the Appendix) Data about children in care will be needed to fill in the calculator: number of total children in care, percentage of children in relative care and group care, length of stay, number of foster care beds in your system, etc. You will also need to estimate the number of children entering placement. Once you enter the data, you will be able to estimate the number of families you will need to license/approve to serve a specific population of children. Now you must consider your attrition rate and you will identify the number of prospective families who must make the first call in order to have an adequate number of new foster/adoptive families.

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GOAL NUMBER FOR NEW HOMES FOR BOYS, AGES 6-12: 20

FAMILIES YOU ARE TARGETING

You may determine that you need 30 new families but not just ANY family. One agency set a goal of 20 new families for teens but because they continued to use general recruitment strategies, they did license 20 new families---all who wanted to foster to adopt children under 2! This is why it is so critical to set accurate goals and use customized recruitment strategies for your targeted groups.

We know that not everyone is cut out to foster teens or adopt a sibling group of six...but who is? There are a few steps to take to gain insight into the characteristics of prospective families for your targeted children/youth.

First, review your list of families who care for specific types of children. What is their profile? For example, if your agency has 17 families who care for African American girls, ages 12-18, what are the families' characteristics? Are they single women? Or older, empty nester couples? Do they live in apartments? The suburbs? Do they have other children? Where do they work? What activities do they participate in? How were they recruited? (Flyer? Meeting? Referral from current foster parent? Radio spot? Article in local newspaper?) You should track how families heard about you or what triggered their call in order to measure the efficacy of your recruiting efforts.

The second step is to conduct a focus group of families who have cared for the group of children you are targeting. For example, bring together 6-7 families who are caring for African American teen girls. Discuss their motivations, their needs and challenges. Ask them to share what the steps were in their journey to be a foster/adoptive parent. What messages caught their attention? What triggered them to make the call? What encouraged them to follow through? If a focus group is not possible, you can conduct individual interviews with specific foster/adoptive parents, gathering the same information on the phone or home visit. Record what you learn so you and others in your agency can use the information to enhance future recruiting efforts. In addition, you can compare information from year to year to track trends and make the best decisions for your recruitment plan

Gaining an accurate picture of the families will ensure you are seeking the right families for the children who most need homes!

FP Focus Group Results:

- have parented boys, like boys
- involved in scouting, camping, outdoors
- involved in sports, like sports
- busy, active families-on the go

Data review told us: single men/women, married ages 29-67, at least 1 child HS diploma, working class

STEP FOUR: DETERMINE WHERE YOU CAN LOCATE FAMILIES WITH THE DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

They say that “birds of a feather, flock together”! Do the families you desire eat out? Bowl? Participate in the neighborhood watch? Do they frequent specific retailers? Go to church? Read the newspaper? Listen to specific radio stations? Professionals in market research know that people with similar interests, lifestyles and habits are likely to participate in common activities. In one site, it was discovered that in several foster families of teens, the foster fathers all worked as bus drivers or as mechanics in bus garages! By gathering information from current foster/adoptive parents, you can identify local organizations, businesses, publications, media outlets or entities that can support the recruitment efforts and help you gain access to individuals who would be interested in being foster/adoptive parents for the very children you are targeting.

Conversations with community leaders, agency directors, faith community leaders, principals, etc. can also provide insight into locating prospective families. It is helpful to schedule an appointment at their office and have your questions prepared in advance. Keep it “short and sweet” and follow up with a handwritten thank-you note for their time.

The Community and Foster/Adoptive Parents told us:

•Little League, martial arts classes, youth ministers like Rev. Robert Hudson at the 1st Community Church, Big Brothers, John Smith-regional Boy Scout director, Boy’s Club, YMCA, ABC Swim Club (they have swim teams and classes), Sports Card Shop on Broad Street, Pop Warner football league, summer camps, Central Library reading program, elementary/middle schools

STEP FIVE: CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE

Instead of using the general recruitment materials to attract specific families for specific children, create specialized materials reflecting the children and families you are targeting. In addition, your recruitment message is the prospective family’s first information and education about being a foster/adoptive parent. It sets into motion their expectations about the experience, the child and themselves as foster/adoptive parents.

When targeting for children of color, recruiters must consider what the values and principles of the target audience are in relation to foster care or adoption. Will the target audience see foster care or adoption as a responsibility? Cultural tradition? Or will continuing the group’s customs and heritage be meaningful? Likewise, communities or neighborhoods have values about their children and families. Do they care about children’s safety? Education? It is important to tap into the values of your targeted

audience--this will motivate them to take the first step in becoming foster or adoptive parents.

Some of the children and youth for whom we are recruiting have challenging situations, needs and issues. The message should be reflective of the children yet create an accurate picture of the roles/responsibilities of parenting. The overall message is more than a tagline, and should be consistent throughout all of the materials you use to attract the target audience...from the initial poster or flyer announcing a meeting to a separate handout of key steps in the process required to become a foster parent.

Once you determine what you want your overall message to be for a specific target foster/adoptive parenting group, it is helpful to develop a tagline to focus your efforts and the audience's attention. The recruitment slogan or tagline should be short and to the point. Most importantly, it should reflect the specific challenges and rewards associated with fostering and adopting children with special situations and needs.

For example, Agencies often use the tag line, "Do you have a little extra love to share?" Or "Open your heart to a child". We know that it takes much more than love to parent a child or teen that has experienced abuse, neglect, sexual victimization or multiple separations.

So, more effective messages that share the challenges and rewards of foster and adoptive parenting could include these examples:

- "Wanted: Someone to Hug and Bug"
- "Help Kids Heal: Become a Foster Parent"
- "Lend a Helping Hand to Children and their Families"
- "Foster Parents: Helping Boys grow into Men"

TAGLINE FOR CAMPAIGN FOR BOYS AGES 6-12:

"Help our Boys Reach for the Stars! Become a Foster Parent"

Whatever tagline you choose should be included in every piece of communication to that target audience. The more times people see or hear it, the clearer and more recognizable your message will become over time.

STEP SIX: DESIGN YOUR LOGO

A logo is a design or emblem, which will signify your recruitment campaign. Again, like the tagline, the logo should match the overall message you create and appear on every piece of communication to your target audience...from printed materials to websites.

The logo must capture the children/youth for whom the recruitment materials are being designed. It can be clipart, photos or a symbol that is specially created.

One agency developed a recruitment campaign for specific neighborhoods in their jurisdiction. Their goal was to recruit families who would be motivated to work with the birth family. Their slogan was, “Lend a Helping Hand to Children and their Families”. Their logo was a hand with a family standing on the upturned palm. It captured the concept that foster parenting was not only about caring for children but extending support to the birth family.

Once you have a few initial logo designs it is very helpful to informally show them to some members of your target audience for feedback. Sometimes, what *you* think is incredibly clever and clear means something totally different to the people who will see the logo. Better to learn of any issues early on and correct them before the potentially damaging logo appears on all your communication materials!

Here's an example for our campaign for boys 6-12:



HELP OUR BOYS REACH FOR THE STARS!

STEP SEVEN: IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES YOU WILL USE TO CONNECT WITH PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES

There are many techniques that can be used to make people aware of the need for foster/adoptive parents. Recruiters must determine which method will be most effective when in attracting specific families for the targeted children. Traditional methods such as booths at fairs, tables at the mall or newspaper ads tend to be unsuccessful in targeted recruitment. These methods require prospective families to come to you. *However, effective targeted recruitment requires you to go to search out good prospective families and take the message to them!*

By using information gathered from existing foster/adoptive parents and community leaders, you can identify WHERE to target your recruitment. Now you must determine HOW to take your message to the community.

Common Mistakes made by Recruiters in Targeted Recruitment:

1. *Some recruiters attempt to do targeted recruitment by simply changing clipart on general targeted materials but not revising their message or strategy.* This will be ineffective. For example, replacing the picture of a Caucasian child with an African American child but continuing to use the same slogan or going to the same neighborhoods or locations is not likely to attract additional families.

2. *Some recruiters want to stay behind their desk to do targeted recruitment.* Again, this is ineffective. Targeted recruitment requires that recruiters get out from behind their desk and pound the pavement. Face to face meetings, canvassing neighborhoods, organizing community members, youth and foster/adoptive parents to assist in spreading the message requires recruiters to be active and involved. A good recruiter doing targeting recruitment should have dust on their desk and cobwebs on their chair! It will require working evenings and weekends!

Remember.... *"If you always do what you always did, you are going to get what you always got!"* You **must change** what you have been doing!! General recruitment may feel comfortable, you may actually enjoy it. It is easier to put ads in local newspapers but it will be unproductive for the targeted children...so change it! Connecting with local community leaders, walking the neighborhood hanging door hangers or going to a church on Sunday is more labor intensive but it is what targeted recruitment is all about....*but it will bring in the very families you most need!*

3. *Some recruiters think that using paid media is the answer to targeted recruitment.* Great targeted recruitment can be done without spending *any money* on paid media. Free media can be obtained through the development of human interest stories, posting orientation dates on community calendars, media presence at recruitment events and through free public service announcements. Recruiters must become familiar with what the guidelines are for submission of materials to the media. One agency emails the dates, times and locations of all orientations to 60 newspapers, TV and radio stations in their jurisdiction.

In addition, recruiter must learn how to become friends with the media as child welfare agencies tend to shy away from media due to high profile negative cases and stories. Invite the media to adoption day, the foster parent appreciation event or your preservice training. Offer a foster family or foster care alumni for an interview. Be patient and persistent! Build a relationship over time and it will greatly benefit your recruitment program.



STEP EIGHT: DEVELOP YOUR PLAN

Some people see developing a plan as being unnecessary or a waste of time. **NEVER!** A well-developed plan will ensure that recruitment efforts are well organized, thoughtful and build upon each other.

Being *well-organized* allows a recruiter to plan ahead, have ample supplies and adequate help for an event or activity. No recruiter wants to be caught at the last minute with too few brochures and not enough time to reorder before a big event. Know what you need and how much time it will take and cost can ensure success! In addition, there are often timelines or deadlines that must be met well in advance. A haphazard approach to recruiting will leave you out of great opportunities to spread your message.

A *thoughtful* plan takes time and effort. It is important to know the community and research potential outlets for your message. Many recruiters depend on the “same old” contacts and fail to expand their pool of partners. Being thoughtful also requires knowing to whom and how to take the message to the community. Recruiters must consider the cultural implications of taking recruitment activities and messages to communities of color, specific neighborhoods or targeted audiences.

Creating a plan where targeted recruitment activities *build upon each other* is critical to be both effective and cost effective. In many ways, your plan should be like puzzle pieces which come together to form a great picture. When you identify ALL the potential outlets for your message consider prioritizing where to go first, second, third, etc. One event or article can set the stage for another until your have reached all of the target audience. Some recruiters simply continue to do the same thing over and over again and never grow beyond one puzzle piece. How many potential families never get the message?

Recruiters and agency administrators often seek the perfect recruitment plan template. There are many forms and designs. Here's what critical to have on your template:

Activity--what *specifically* is the activity? Too often this information is so vague that it is hard to determine what will be done.

Responsible Party--which staff members are responsible and what are they responsible for accomplishing. Listing "foster care staff" is not adequate...name, names!

Target Date--when is the activity to occur? When doing annual planning it is acceptable to identify a month during the year when you would like to complete the activity but at a later time, a specific date should be entered when arrangements have been made.

Target Audience--what prospective parents is this activity targeting? This is critical information to help keep recruiters focused and ensure your placement needs are being met.

Community Partner--what community partners have been engaged to support this effort? This may be a faith organization, library, school, police department, etc. Be sure to include the contact name and information of an individual from the organization.

TO DO steps--This information can be listed under the Activity Section. Think about what needs to be done to make the activity successful. Making calls, ordering materials, enlisting volunteers, stuffing packets all need to be done prior to activity. This information will serve to help you be organized and ready for the event!

Materials Needed--make your shopping list early as some materials or items may need to be ordered and paid for well in advance.

Budget Estimate--with budgets being tight, it will be important to justify your expenditures. Completing an annual budget estimate in advance will support your need for financial support to do targeted recruitment. It is helpful when administrators can see specifically money will be allocated for rather than a general request for recruitment.

Results--Be sure to follow up with information about the efficacy of the activity. Were the results of the activity worth the investment? This will help when planning future recruitment activities.

STEP NINE: IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN!

Once you have created your plan...put it into action! Use your document as a "TO DO" list. You may need to revise timelines and add activities or steps. Review the plan with your supervisor and others to stay on track.

Post your activities in a public place in the agency so others will know what's happening in recruitment. Share your next month's plan during a staff or unit meeting or through intra-office email. Publicizing your work will assist in gaining support from the staff, additional leads and perhaps, some volunteers!

STEP TEN: TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

Here are some strategies to help track the effectiveness of your plan:

- Record the source of each referral when they call in or attend orientation. A simple spread sheet that can be written on after each call will suffice. The data can be compiled in a monthly, typed report.*

- Review each activity or strategy after it's completion. Ask yourself the following questions:*

 - Was this recruitment activity successful?*

 - Did the activity spread the word to it's intended audience?*

 - Are there any changes or revisions that could make it more successful?*

 - Could this activity, with revisions, be used with another targeted audience?*

 - Is this a strategy that should be discontinued?*

 - Was the effort (staff time/costs) worth the outcome?*

It may be useful to do a final review of all activities prior to planning for next year as some results may come weeks or months after the activity.

- Maintain a spreadsheet to track prospective parents through the recruitment, training and homestudy process. Review to determine what the recruitment strategy was used for the families who completed the process. **A family is not really recruited until a placement is made!***

- Produce monthly/quarterly/annual reports. Critically analyze the outcomes of your recruitment efforts. At times, this may mean dropping an activity or event that the agency has done for many years as it produces no prospective parents.*

- Obtain a tracking program such as "ETO", Efforts to Outcomes, that can complete many tasks including tracking families from the 1st phone call through licensure and beyond.*

IMPORTANT NOTE:

The best developed and implemented targeted recruitment plan can fail if your agency is not ready to receive the prospective parents. Some of the common roadblocks that prospective parents face are:

- √phone calls not answered by a live knowledgeable, positive person
- √prospective parents are “screened out” on the 1st phone call
- √Too many requirements to attend orientation
- √Content of orientation is too focused on rules and regulations
- √Too much redundant paperwork required up front
- √Limited opportunities to attend pre-service training