Fit and Readiness Assessment

Thank you for your interest in the North Carolina Child Welfare Family Leadership Model (the Model). The Model is designed to improve child and family outcomes by engaging and empowering families as leaders, strengthening family-agency collaboration, and ensuring family and youth voice inform all aspects of child welfare services.

According to the Model's Theory of Change:

> When families and agencies collaborate in **structured opportunities**, the child welfare system designs more effective family-centered programs. **Effective programs** lead to **better engagement** in services. When families genuinely engage in services, agencies see an increase in **positive outcomes** for children and families. When these positive outcomes are achieved, **healthy families and strong communities** emerge, leading to less child maltreatment.

The Model is flexible with multiple ways to engage families and can be adopted in its entirety or in part depending on your agency's readiness. This Fit and Readiness Assessment will help you determine if the Model is a good fit for your agency and will help guide initial implementation considerations.

The Fit and Readiness Assessment was informed by two tools – one from implementation science and another from parent partner programming:

> The Hexagon: An Exploration Tool: The National Implementation Research Network Hexagon helps organizations explore new and existing programs and practices to determine agency fit and address feasibility factors.
>
> Parent Partner Program Navigator Readiness Assessment: The Capacity Building Center for States' Parent Partner Program Readiness Assessment reviews existing capacities and capacity building needs specifically for the implementation of Parent Partner programming.

Five broad categories are assessed using this tool, including need, fit, capacity to implement, supports, and implementation challenges. A summary of these categories is provided below.

Confirm the Model Meets Agency Need

Agencies confirm they need improved family engagement by consulting data from the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes, CFSR Systemic Factors, Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI), and quality assurance tools such as consumer surveys.

Model Fit with Current Initiatives

Agencies determine if the Model is a good fit and activities are aligned with existing agency culture and mission and if their organizational structure can support Model activities. Agencies consider how the Model's activities will be impacted or enhanced by other initiatives. Agencies ensure they have staff who are open to engaging families from a learning culture perspective.

Capacity to Implement

Agencies assess their capacity to implement across three foci – leadership, staff, and agency.

LEADERSHIP FOCI: Leadership and communication are foundational to an agency's ability to implement the Model. Leaders must believe in and prioritize family leadership activities; identify the necessary financial and staffing resources; and be committed to addressing challenges.

STAFF FOCI: Staff collaborating with Family Partners must believe the Model's activities are an effective approach and be open to working collaboratively. Staff should have clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations as they work together to plan and implement the Model.

PROGRAM FOCI: Agencies should have a comprehensive plan to enable implementation. Agencies must develop a plan to recruit and engage Family Partners. If engaging in Tier Two: Family Leadership Development or Tier Three: Family Leadership Council, agencies must also develop a plan to train, supervise, and coach Family Partners. Agencies must have a plan to incorporate feedback received by Family Partners and to sustain and evaluate the Model's activities.

Supports

Agencies assess their ability to install a Steering Committee and an Implementation Team and empower project leads with the authority and time to implement the Model. Agencies will collaborate with Family Partners, experts, and community stakeholders to implement and evaluate the Model. Agencies will ensure all staffing levels receive adequate support, training, and coaching for Model activities.

Implementation Challenges

Agencies assess common implementation challenges and their ability to proactively address them, such as staff turnover, competing priorities, and time needed to dedicate to the Model's activities.

For more information about the Model and/or to request technical assistance, please contact NC State University's Center for Family and Community Engagement at familyleadership@ncsu.edu.

Funded by the North Carolina Division of Social Services.

Assessment Process

The Fit and Readiness Assessment should be completed before beginning the Model's activities, during periods of implementation difficulties, and every two years thereafter.

Before the Assessment Meeting

- Identify a team to complete the Fit and Readiness Assessment and participate in readiness discussions. This team should include agency leaders, community partners, families, and staff who may be involved in implementation.
- Provide the team access to relevant family engagement data (i.e., OSRI data, child and family outcomes).
- Members of the team individually score each item.

During the Assessment Meeting

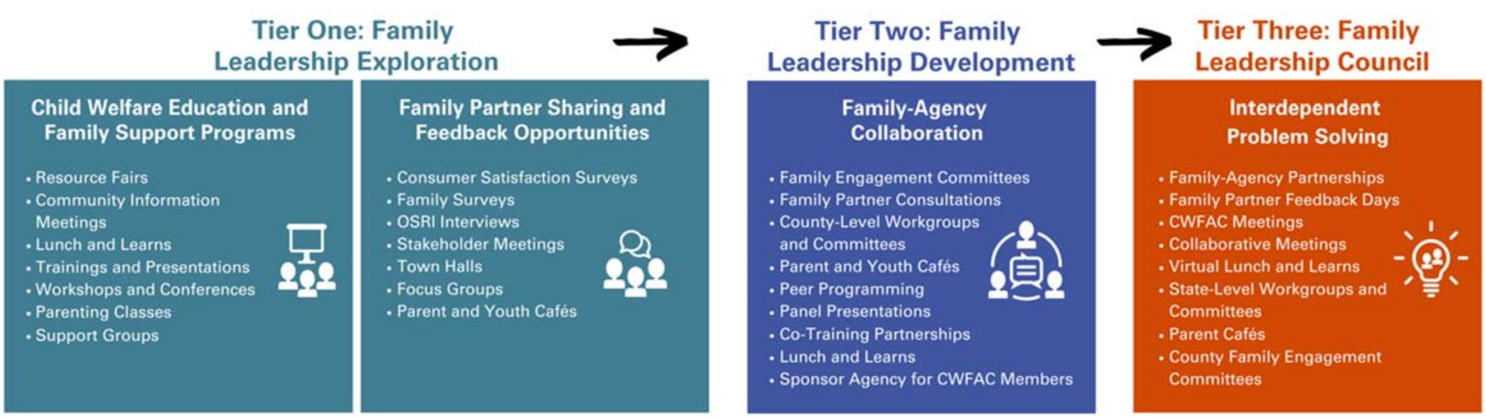
The team:

- Discusses the questions and individual scores.
- Arrives at a consensus on scoring for each item.
- Documents questions and unique or relevant considerations to be addressed.
- Prioritizes areas for deeper exploration or investment.

Agencies **do not** need to have every item in each category "in place" before engaging in Model activities. Information from the Fit and Readiness Assessment is only used to inform implementation plans and prioritize areas needing attention.

After the Assessment Meeting

- Establish an overarching family engagement goal based on the agency's needs.
- Select a tier to begin implementation.
- Determine a general timeline for the next steps.



SCALE: 0=Not True 1=Partially True 2=True

Confirm the Model Meets Agency Need	Rating 0-2
1. Child welfare leaders[1] and Family Partners have reviewed agency data[2] on family engagement.	
2. Child welfare leaders and Family Partners confirms family engagement is an area needing improvement.	
3. Child welfare leaders believe the Model's Theory of Change can address agency need(s).	
4. Child welfare leaders believe the Model is an effective family engagement and empowerment strategy.	
5. Family Partners were included in developing the vision and goals for implementing the Model (i.e., involved in developing an implementation plan).	
6. Current or potential Family Partners see the Model as an effective response to the need for family engagement programming.	
Additional Questions/Notes	

SCALE: 0=Not True 1=Partially True 2=True

Model Fit with Current Initiatives	Rating 0-2
1. The Model is congruent with the existing state and county child welfare culture (main values, beliefs, and attitudes).	
2. The vision and goals for the Model are aligned with the child welfare agency's mission, beliefs, values, and guiding principles.	
3. The child welfare agency has sufficient staffing to support the Model.	
4. Agency culture and climate at the child welfare agency support the inclusion of parents as partners.	
5. The agency has assessed how other initiatives may impact/intersect with the implementation of the Model.	
6. Child welfare workforce is open to learning and helping others learn the values and skills necessary to implement and sustain the Model.	
Additional Questions/Notes	

[1] Child welfare leaders are defined as any senior leader that influences decisions about family engagement efforts.
[2] Examples include CFSR measures, OSRI results, court performance data, consumer surveys, program/policy monitoring, etc.

SCALE: **0=Not True** **1=Partially True** **2=True**

Capacity to Implement – Leadership Foci	Rating 0-2
1. Child welfare leaders believe the Model has value.	
2. Child welfare leaders consider the Model a priority.	
3. Child welfare leaders have identified funding resources to support Model activities and reimburse Family Partners.	
4. Child welfare leaders have aligned staffing to support implementation.	
5. Child welfare leaders have identified their overarching family engagement goal for their agency.	
6. Child welfare leaders have the adaptive leadership skills to negotiate the challenges associated with the implementation of the Model.	
7. Child welfare leaders have a **communication plan** to share with staff information about the Model, goals, outcomes, and changes over time.	
Additional Questions/Notes	

SCALE: **0=Not True** **1=Partially True** **2=True**

Capacity to Implement – Staff Foci	Rating 0-2
1. Staff collaborating with Family Partners see the Model as an effective family engagement strategy.	
2. Staff collaborating with Family Partners see the Model as an effective family leadership strategy.	
3. Staff collaborating with Family Partners are open to engaging Family Partners in child welfare programming.	
4. Staff collaborating with Family Partners are open engaging in co-development activities with Family Partners.	
5. Both Family Partners and staff collaborating with them have clearly described roles, responsibilities, and expectations for family leadership activities.	
6. Staff collaborating with Family Partners see them as partners in implementing the Model.	
Additional Questions/Notes	

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SCALE: **0=Not True** **1=Partially True** **2=True**

Capacity to Implement – Program Foci	Rating 0-2
1. The child welfare agency has a **recruitment plan** for Family Partner participation in the Model that draws upon a network of family and community partners.	
2. The child welfare agency has developed an **engagement plan** to consistently and regularly engage Family Partners.	
3. The child welfare agency has a **training plan** to provide foundational and ongoing training for Family Partners.	
4. The child welfare agency has created a **coaching and oversight plan** to provide guidance and support to Family Partners.	
5. The child welfare agency has a **feedback action plan** that is responsive to the feedback received by Family Partners, including how the results will be communicated to stakeholders.	
6. The child welfare agency has an **evaluation plan** to assess the Model's impact, including how the results will be communicated to stakeholders.	
7. The child welfare agency has developed a **sustainability plan** that incorporates leadership development across all tiers.	
Additional Questions/Notes	

SCALE: **0=Not True** **1=Partially True** **2=True**

Supports	Rating 0-2
1. The child welfare agency has built a diverse Steering Committee that includes Family Partners to provide oversight of the Model activities.	
2. Child welfare leaders provide project leads and staff with the authority and time needed to implement the Model.	
3. A team has been charged with implementing the Model.	
4. The Implementation Team has the capacity to work with Family Partners to plan and implement the Model.	
5. Systems are in place to support the training of Family Partners in child welfare programming.	
6. Systems are in place to support the training of agency staff regarding family engagement and family leadership.	
7. The child welfare agency has the ability to partner with an external provider to build capacity, support implementation, and/or evaluate the Model if necessary.	
Additional Questions/Notes	

Implementation Challenges

Listed below are common factors that, when present, may hinder implementation efforts. Assessment Teams should note which factors are present or anticipated and identify strategies to mitigate the challenge.

Challenges	Present Y/N (or unsure)
1. Child Welfare Agency Leadership Change/Turnover	
2. Project Staff[3] Change/Turnover	
3. Lack of Family Engagement Champions on Staff	
4. Resistance from Child Welfare Staff	
5. Resistance from Key Stakeholders	
6. Financial Constraints	
7. Agency Policies	
8. Lack of Clear Plans	
9. Lack of Sufficient Time for Project Staff	
10. Conflicting Expectations	
11. Conflicting Priorities	
12. Scheduling Conflicts	
13. High Case Loads/Understaffed	
14. Unexpected Event/Crisis	
15. Other Challenge(s) Present:	
Mitigation Strategies/Notes	

[3] Project staff is defined as any person tasked with supporting the implementation of the Model.

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Family Partner Recruitment Considerations

This document summarizes key areas and questions agencies should consider as they plan family engagement or family leadership activities. These considerations were developed with Family Partners.

Be Specific About What You Are Asking.

- How much time are you asking the Family Partner to commit to the event or activity?
- Is this an ongoing or a one-time commitment?
- When are you asking the Family Partner to participate (i.e., day, evening, weekend)?
- What is the role of the Family Partner (e.g., What would the agency like the Family Partner to contribute during the event? What do you expect from their participation?)
- What does the agency want the Family Partner to know or do with the information they learn from the event?
- Are there any expectations of the Family Partner after the event?

Facilitate Family Partner Participation.

- Where is the event located? How easy is the event location to access?
- Is childcare available? If so, will it be onsite? Is it being offered free of charge? Who is the childcare provider?
- Will food/snacks be served during the event?
- Is there any form of reimbursement for the Family Partner's time and participation?
- Will the event include peer support to encourage the Family Partner's participation?
- How will the agency support the Family Partner's psychological safety (e.g., feeling safe)?

Share Information To Help the Family Partner Make An Informed Decision About Participation.

- The name of the event facilitator.
- Information about who else will be at the event.
- The meeting agenda (or questions being asked if the event is a focus group or Parent Café).
- Any resources or materials to help the Family Partner prepare for the event (including the estimated time to review the resources or materials).
- Information about how other Family Partners are currently involved at the agency (to demonstrate the agency is genuinely interested and committed to involving families in systemic improvements).
- Information about how the information gathered at the event will be used by the agency.
- Information about how the Family Partner will be informed and included in any next steps that result from their participation and feedback.

Key Components for Successful Family Partner Recruitment and Retention

- Designate a point person to help families make a decision about participation and answer questions. This person will also follow-up with families after the event.
- Develop a family-friendly brochure to generate interest in the event. This brochure should have the contact information for the designated point person and use family-friendly language and pictures.
- Include current Family Partners early in the process to offer peer support to families as they consider participation.
- Be clear on why the agency is including Family Partners in the event (e.g., educational, informational, feedback, recruiting for other activities, etc.).
- Make adjustments to the agency staff attendance based on which families RSVP to the event (e.g., a family's caseworker may not wish to attend an event where families are asked to give feedback on their child welfare experience).
- Express appreciation for attendance (thank you note, attendance certificates, etc.).

Tips for Engaging Family Partners in Meetings

Meetings that bring Family Partners and agency staff together are opportunities for a mutual exchange of information and learning between and among families and agencies. Special care should be given to ensuring these opportunities are family-centered and intentionally address the inherent power differences that exist between families and agencies.

Best Practices <u>Before</u> the Meeting

- Institute a predictable, regular schedule for meetings if possible (e.g., first Friday of every month).
- Provide Family Partner with an agenda at least 3 days in advance.
- Let Family Partner know who will be in the room, their affiliations, and roles.
- Advise Family Partner of meeting logistics (i.e., location–including address, start and end time, parking, dress code, etc.) and anticipated atmosphere (i.e., casual, formal business, etc.).
- Share with Family Partner as much as you can about the specific goals of the meeting and what is expected from their participation during the meeting.

Best Practices <u>During</u> the Meeting

- Identify someone who has met the Family Partner prior to the meeting to greet and welcome them upon arrival.
- Share housekeeping information (i.e., rest rooms, smoking area, building protocols) to help the Family Partner familiarize themselves with the meeting space.
- Include introductions on each agenda and ensure participants share their agency affiliations and roles.
- Remind all participants that the Family Partner, with their personal lived experience, is in the meeting as a full partner.
- Identify someone the Family Partner can discuss meeting content with and/or ask questions. The Family Partner could sit next to them during the meeting or connect during breaks or after the meeting.
- Minimize use of acronyms during the meeting. Make note of any used during the meeting and what they stand for via a whiteboard or flipchart paper.
- When asking for the group's input, ask the Family Partner if they want to share the family perspective/experience before asking others to speak.
- Before moving forward on the next agenda item, check in to see if the Family Partner has additional perspective to add to the discussion.
- Ask clarifying questions before making assumptions about what a Family Partner means (e.g., Can you tell me more about that? What would that look like? What was helpful during that time?)

Best Practices <u>After</u> the Meeting

- Identify someone familiar with the meeting to debrief the Family Partner.
- Debrief any terms or topics the Family Partner may want to learn more about.
- Clarify any follow-up activities needed (homework, assignments, etc.).
- Discuss what would have better prepared Family Partner for participation.
- If reimbursement is provided, ensure communication is sufficient to process payment.

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