



NAA Standards & Ethics

Version 2021

This document was developed by the Board of Directors, members and staff of the National Adoption Association. Particular credit is due to the chair of the Standards and Strategic Planning Committee: Lisa Funaro (Massachusetts), and the following committee members, editors, and contributors: Christine Jacobs (Pennsylvania), Ellen Kahn (District of Columbia), Ginny Kenny (New Jersey), Dr. Regina Lawson (District of Columbia), Kendra Lowden (Oklahoma), Sylvia Revangile (Florida), Heather Simmons (Vermont), Alfonso Silva (California), Dr. Michael Sinclair (Maryland), Kathryn Tourville (Michigan), and Yalanis Velez (Puerto Rico).



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Mission, Vision, Values and Motto

Mission

Leaders advancing best practices in adoption from foster care.

Vision

Build the premier network of professionals and agencies to create innovative strategies and solutions so that every child has a permanent loving family.

Values

Inclusivity: We are a welcoming and inclusive organization believing that all children and families should be valued equally regardless of race, color, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, disability, age, marital or family status, gender identity, sexual orientation, citizenship, or any additional characteristic protected by law.

Every child deserves a family: Age is not a barrier to permanency. Family is critically important to every person, at any age.

Timely permanency: When children are unable to safely return to their birth families or kin, we link arms with professionals nationwide and work toward one common goal – a family for every child.

Youth voice: Youth engagement is at the center of our work. Family-finding and adoption work is driven by youth, while maintaining their dignity, privacy and confidentiality.

Values

Kinship connections: We believe that adoption is addition not subtraction and encourage shared parenting between birth, kin and adoptive families, whenever safely possible, for the betterment of children and youth.

Diligent recruitment and support: We advance a dynamic set of unique approaches and innovative solutions to recruit, develop and support adoptive families for all children and youth in foster care.

Racial equity in adoption: We improve outcomes for children of color in foster care by reducing racial disproportionality so all children can flourish in permanent families that honor their heritage and culture.

Professional capacity building: We value national collaborations supporting professionals as they operationalize best practices, grow their professional network, achieve better outcomes for the children and families served and ensure effective solutions are widely available.

Professional growth and education: We are a learning organization that strives to collaborate and grow together to better serve children, families and meet our mission.

Motto

Convene, Connect, Collaborate.



Transition from AEA to NAA

The Adoption Exchange Association (AEA) began a strategic planning process in 2019 with association experts and the strategic planning firm, ReedScott. The firm developed and distributed a survey to 159 members on April 27, 2019. ReedScott also conducted 18 one-on-one stakeholder interviews with a cross-section of funders, staff and board members.

The focus of their exploratory research was to identify potential areas for growth and various courses of action to take in order to address future concerns, disruption, and possible opportunities for innovation for the organization.

Based on the discussions and data, three priority focus areas were identified:

1

**Value Proposition
and Rebranding**

2

**Long-term
Sustainability**

3

**Member Acquisition
and Retention**

A 2020 strategic action plan was created and approved by the Board of Directors in September 2019 around these focus areas. The plan was grounded in what our members value most in membership: collegiality, professional development, and organizational visibility.

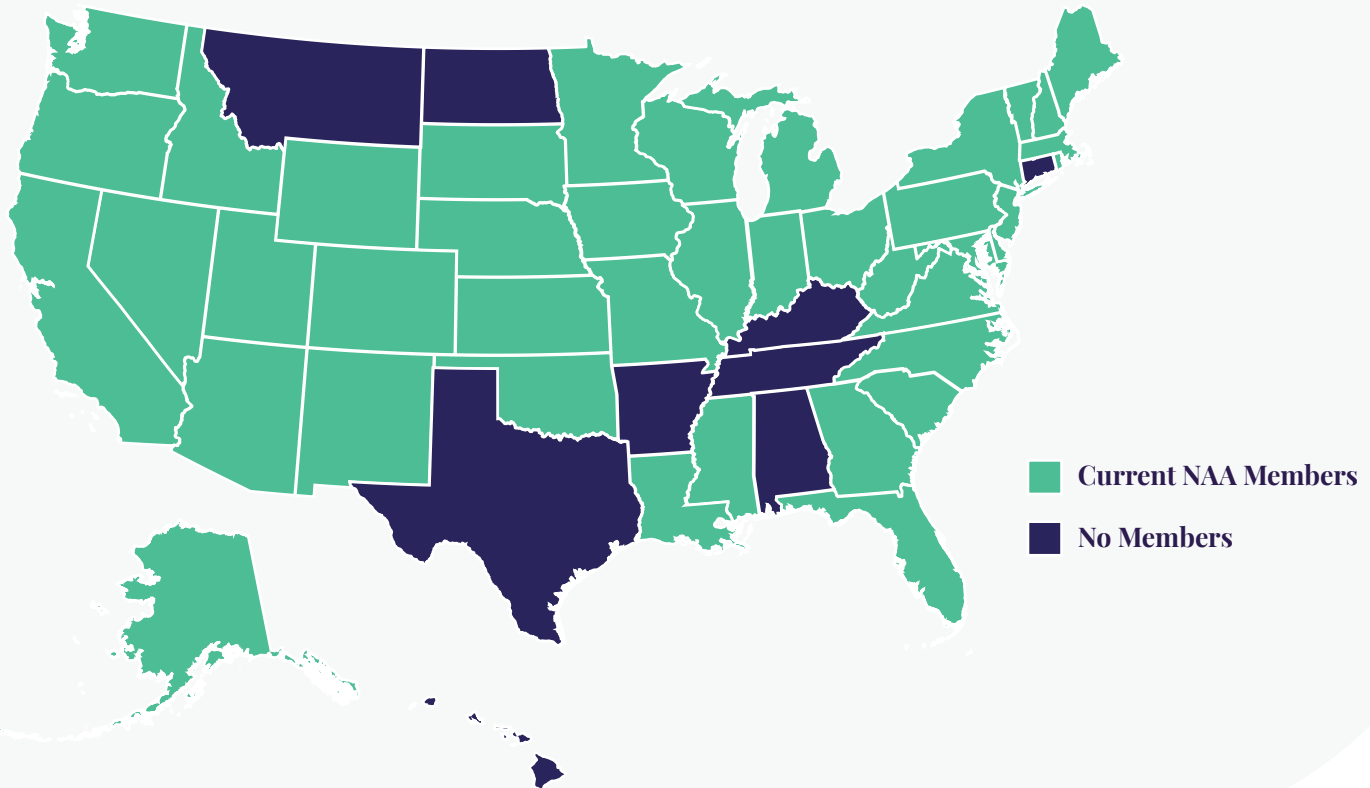
Assessing our benefits, the mission, and capabilities, identified ways for our organization to better differentiate itself as a national association. Member data pointed to the name “Adoption Exchange Association” as a barrier to our growth. Members said our name should capture the breadth of our services in adoption and our geographic reach as a national association.

A committee comprised of directors from the Board, members, staff and a branding expert collectively completed naming convention exercises, reviewed moodboards, presented creative briefs to the Board who voted to transition from the Adoption Exchange Association to the National Adoption Association officially on June 15, 2021.





Members of the National Adoption Association



A member organization of the National Adoption Association (NAA) is an agency, college or university. NAA's individual members are: retired adoption or child welfare professionals, educators, and students.

Our members perform four core services while adhering to NAA standards and ethics.

The four core services are:

- Adoption and foster care awareness;
- Adoption Matching;
- Adoption and foster care advocacy;
- Capacity Building and Education

NAA's member organizations operate at the county, state, tribal, regional, or national level. The organizational members may be non-profit, public, for-profit, private agencies and academic institutions. NAA members may receive public funding or contracts to perform key functions and may charge reasonable and appropriate fees to individuals for their services. Academic institutions that are members of NAA operate schools of social work to prepare future leaders for careers in the child welfare and adoption field.¹

Leaders advancing best practices in adoption from foster care is our powerful mission. As leaders in the adoption of waiting children, NAA members work with waiting children, birth parents, kin, foster parents and resource and adoptive parents. Our vision is to build the premier network of professionals and agencies to create innovative strategies and solutions so that every child has a permanent loving family.



What are Standards and Ethics?

A Standard is a basis of comparison, a criterion, a measure or benchmark. NAA's Standards provide guidelines for services. They are written for an optimal level of service delivery and intended to be goals for continuous improvement. Our Standards represent what we consider to be the most desirable service delivery to children, families, and agencies.

Goals of NAA's Standards:

Provide Guidance for the Field. Standards will develop common language and expectations for our members' work with children, youth, families, and agency workers. They are utilized by members but also provide insight and goals that can be useful for a broader audience — everyone concerned with finding families for waiting children.

Improve Practice. Standards offer a basis for examining and questioning practice and the premises from which policies are developed. Standards provide a way to evaluate performance and the adequacy of existing services.

Develop and Train Current and Future Workers. Standards provide content for training current staff, onboarding new staff and orienting social work students on best practices in the field today.

Demonstrate the Value of Specialized Adoption Services. Standards help to explain and justify expenditures, budget requests, and appropriations for adoption work which is often done via public-private partnerships.

This version builds upon the original 1983 Standards for Adoption Exchanges created by our founding Board of Directors². The 2021 Standards include enhanced and updated information, and their formulation has evolved from contributions by NAA members and extensive discussion of principles and issues by the NAA Board of Directors and the NAA Standards Committee. Development of the Standards provided an opportunity for Exchanges and other agencies doing similar work to examine practice, define objectives, clarify concepts, and affirm convictions about achieving permanence for children.

It is important to note that these Standards differ from previous versions in three very substantial ways:

1

By designing them as “Member Standards” rather than as “Standards for Adoption Exchanges,” the 2021 Standards recognize the variety and evolving nature of organizations and practice in the adoption field. NAA continues to welcome as members those organizations that recruit adoptive families for waiting children—both traditional public or private Adoption Exchanges and others with common goals, values, and methods.

2

By titling this document “NAA Standards and Ethics,” and by discussing both standards and ethics together and separately throughout the document, NAA has tried to create a best practice guide with a conscience. Described in these pages are what NAA believes to be, at the present time, the most efficient, effective, and ethical ways to help children in foster care find permanency.

3

NAA is not a credentialing organization. While we neither support nor endorse activities of member agencies, violation of these Standards and Ethics could result in a decision to revoke the NAA Membership of the violating member.

Additional Resources

During the past twenty years, NAA and its collaborating partners has published many new tools and guidance documents about adoption from foster care through its cooperative agreement with the Children’s Bureau to operate AdoptUSKids. A current list of publications is available at www.adoptuskids.org.



Member Standards and Ethics

NAA's Standards guide professionals to commit ourselves, our staff, and our organizations to the highest level of practice. The standards we strive to achieve assume high ethical values as well as fundamental operating principles and practices within our organization and in the ways we communicate with each other and the children and families we serve.

All children and youth need permanency.

Permanency can come in the form of reunification, legal guardianship, adoption and relational permanency. Federal and state legislation and regulations give timeframes and other requirements for doing this work³. While being cognizant of required timeframes, NAA members move with even greater purpose to create and facilitate safe, loving, relationships with adoptive families while also sustaining kin and birth family connections, whenever possible. No child should wait a day longer in foster care because a NAA member did not do what was needed to find legal permanency. No child should have to experience the loss of connections (siblings, relatives, and fictive kin). Members should advocate for youth to sustain relationships post-adoption that are healthy and important to them.

Members work on behalf of children of all ages, races, ethnicities, SOGIE.⁴

NAA members prepare families for children and youth who are most at-risk of leaving the foster care system without permanency. National data suggests teenagers, children with special medical and developmental needs, youth of color, and LGBTQ youth are at-risk of aging out of foster care. Members must diligently recruit for parents from communities from which the children came. We recruit all family composition, including: single parents, married couples, unmarried couples, grandparents, and extended relatives. Members do not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, culture, language, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. While recognizing members must comply with local and state laws, we encourage our members to align their practice with our standards. Members must commit to advocate for policy changes that promote non-discrimination in our practice with children, youth and families.

Human Rights Campaign's All Children, All Families – National

The Human Rights Campaign's All Children – All Families, a project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, promotes LGBTQ inclusive policies and affirming practices among child welfare agencies and formally recognizes those agencies that are leading the field with innovative approaches to inclusion.

Research demonstrates the crucial nature of this work. LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in foster care, many having been rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. Too often these young people then enter child welfare systems that further traumatize them due to a lack of inclusive policies and practices. At the same time, the LGBTQ community remains an untapped resource when it comes to finding families for children and youth in foster care. For these reasons, the project focuses on supporting agencies' efforts to achieve safety, permanency and well-being by improving practice with LGBTQ youth and families. Since the project began in 2007, hundreds of agencies across the country have recognized the importance of this work and utilized ACAF resources.

Participating agencies are given access to comprehensive resources, including an online self-assessment tool, expert webinars on LGBTQ topics, technical assistance and more. To learn more about the All Children, All Families program visit: <https://www.thehrcfoundation.org/professional-resources/all-children-all-families-training-program>

All prospective parents and families receive high-quality customer service and supportive retention services.

There is a growing need to recruit and retain families. The introduction of the Family First Prevention Services Act⁵ aims to reduce use of congregate care. Child welfare agencies and jurisdictions use congregate care settings due to a shortage of family foster homes. With fewer group care facilities, adoptive, foster, and resource families are needed across the country to receive children and youth. Once families inquire and become licensed to adopt, NAA members must provide those families with supportive retention services. Estimates show that between 30 and 50 percent of families quit within the first year of parenting children from foster care⁶. Supporting families by being responsive to their needs and providing educational responses throughout the process is critically important. NAA Standards challenge members to follow our high-quality customer service standards as defined below.

Defining High-Quality Customer Service:

1. Ensuring emails, phone calls, and chats are answered during the same or following business day;
2. Hiring staff who reflect the communities they serve;
3. Hiring staff who can communicate with prospective parents in their language;
4. Replying to parents and families with pertinent and helpful information, including culturally responsive educational materials; and
5. Regularly reviewing data to identify barriers to recruitment and retention and resolve those barriers.

Every person who inquires, whether for adoption, legal guardianship or reunification, is treated with respect.

Members provide a set of recruitment services that are made public, such as photolisting, social media, podcast-style videos of youth, and traditional media recruitment. It is not uncommon for birth families or extended family members to contact NAA members to request additional information about their relative, even after parental rights have been terminated. All families are treated with respect and provided with high-quality customer service and support as we all work to find permanency for children and youth in care.

For new families who inquire about adoption, it can take years for a family to make a decision to pursue adoption from foster care and they may have many questions. NAA members are sensitive to infertility, grief, loss, personal experience with foster care and adoption as a birth parent, relative, or adopted person, and other family concerns.

Staff are prepared to answer questions and offer suggestions about adoption policy, practice, agencies, and laws in their state or region, and are able to advise inquirers about ways to obtain information. Inquirers are referred to support groups for mentoring services and other assistance as they go through their decision-making process. All families deserve to be treated with respect, timely support and assistance.

Recruitment services protect the privacy, dignity and safety of children and youth involved.

Recruitment efforts create a constant balancing act: treating the child, youth and his or her birth or foster family with dignity and respect, while being open and honest with potential parents. NAA members use social media and new technology innovations to recruit, but every child and youth's safety, dignity, and privacy remains the highest priority among all else. Treating and communicating dignity and respect means protecting sensitive private information about the youth we serve and engaging youth in their own permanency plan. Medical, educational and identifying information about a child or youth should not appear in a public venue such as: public photolisting, should not be said during a television interview, video filming, nor on social media. This also applies to personal information on licensed families who are planning to adopt. When communicating about children or families—whether it is in written materials, on-line, over the telephone, or in person—NAA members communicate in a manner honoring children and families' privacy and dignity. The words and tone used should convey respect for children and families as the very foundation of our work.

Information-sharing with prospective families happens on a continuum.

Members must advocate so that licensed and trained families receive the critical background and behavioral information about a child they are interested in adopting. In-depth information sharing about a child should be done at appropriate times, such as a one-on-one disclosure meeting once a family has completed the necessary preparation process and a home study assessment by a licensed provider. Disclosure meetings help the family decide whether to continue exploring adoption of a child or youth they have inquired about. NAA members advocate for families to make informed decisions during disclosure meetings and be presented with accurate information to do so.

Dismantling systemic barriers to reduce racial disproportionality and increase equitable outcomes for all children and youth

Race and ethnicity should not determine whether a child enters foster care, is reunified, or adopted. It is clear from national data that Black/African American children, Latinx and Native American/Indigenous children have disproportionate permanency outcomes and experiences in foster care. Data released by Child Welfare Information Gateway showed that Black/African American children especially are more likely to wait to be adopted ⁷. According to a fact sheet released by the National Conference of State Legislatures, there are five recommendations systems and agency should do to reduce disproportionality and increase equitable outcomes for all children and youth ⁸.

1. Understanding and addressing the impact of individual biases in reporting, investigating, intervention and placement processes.
2. Developing culturally responsive practices.
3. Recruiting and retaining foster families of color.
4. Engaging communities of color when developing new policies.
5. Using data to identify and address disparate outcomes.

NAA members have the ability to break down systemic barriers within the systems where we work. Members must apply effective diligent recruitment techniques to recruit and retain families of color, consider what points in the decision-making process are especially susceptible to bias – including permanency placement decisions, and examine and install programs or processes to remove bias.

In addition, systems and agencies must recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflect the communities it serves, including at executive levels, and strive to create anti-racist inclusive organizations and agencies. However, hiring leaders of color is not enough. Systems and agencies must make every effort to train staff on the importance of racial equity so the leaders and staff members are welcomed into inclusive organizations.

Racial Equity in Adoption Program – National

NAA's Racial Equity In Adoption trainings and technical assistance services strengthen members' capacity to improve permanency outcomes for all children, youth and families in care. NAA's program helps members examine how racism shows up in the work they do and provides strategies to mitigate bias in decision-making.

NAA held a series of sessions with leaders in public and private agencies partnering with NAA lead consultant, Toni Oliver, Past National President of the National Association of Black Social Workers and Founder/Executive Director of Roots, an African American adoption agency in Atlanta, GA. The training series is recorded and available for free for members. It also features experts from the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI), The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) and others. These resources and tailored technical assistance are available to assist agencies as we all work to end institutional, structural, systemic racism in child welfare.

For more resources visit: www.adoptnaa.org

Accurate and timely data collection give members an essential tool for improving operations and results.

Computers and other devices have made data collection less laborious and more robust. The convenience of portable data storage systems should not eclipse our responsibility to protect the confidential information that is shared and elicit data in an appropriate manner. Each NAA member needs to give careful consideration to the way it collects, stores, and uses data to improve practice. The data collected should be compatible with State and Federal systems.

Members are committed to innovation.

The NAA network is a collaboration of strong, vibrant cutting-edge organizations who replicate and adopt emerging best practices. Members conduct their business in adherence with the laws of their state, push to advance practice, and promote creative solutions for the children, youth and families we serve. Social media, private investigators, cultural brokers, youth-led videos and podcasts are some of the powerful innovations our members use in the search of families for waiting children. As tools become available, NAA members utilize them— while also exercising caution as needed for the protection of our children and families—to find families quickly.

Services are offered free of charge wherever possible.

If fees for services are charged by an NAA member, they are reasonable and appropriate.





Four Service Areas

1

Adoption and Foster Care Awareness

NAA members heighten the public's awareness of waiting children through activities described here as adoption and foster care awareness. Awareness starts with believing and promoting the belief that families can be found for waiting children/youth and that safety, well-being, and permanency are paramount.

Engaging the community at large— families, corporations, government entities, legislative bodies, service groups, tribal nations and the faith community—will lead to shared responsibility for permanency for waiting children. Awareness builds visibility which helps the community to understand that an investment in families results in greater success for children and youth in their communities. Conversely, it is important that communities understand the impact of children leaving foster care without legal permanency, and that they are at great risk for homelessness, poverty, and incarceration.

As we conduct adoption awareness, NAA members must also recognize that broader societal problems affect all families, including birth, foster and adoptive families. Our work to strive for the best outcomes for all children, youth and families must include ongoing family support, family connections and community building to create stronger safety nets for all families.

The Benefits of Building Adoption and Foster Care Awareness:

- Awareness helps professionals to publicize their need for families and achieve permanency, safety, and well-being for children.
- Awareness activities can lead birth families and relatives to resources in their community.
- Awareness moves families considering adoption to take a first step.⁹

Many foster families (more than 50% according to recent national data) adopt the children they foster so adoption awareness helps to recruit new foster families too leading to permanency. Of special importance in all outreach by NAA members is the Federal mandate to diligently recruit families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in foster care. NAA members are bound by the enormous responsibility of compliance with applicable laws, such as: The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

While MEPA “prohibits any person or government that is involved in adoption or foster care placements from delaying or denying the placement of a child on the basis of the race, color or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent or the child.”^{10,11} The second clause in the public law, “requires that state plans provide for the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.” An adequate number of diverse foster and adoptive homes is also critical to a states’ ability to comply with the placement preferences in the ICWA.

NAA members use a wide variety of outreach and recruitment tools to build general community awareness. Media campaigns, such as the AdoptUSKids national adoption campaign, have impacted consideration to adopt. Local campaigns can also help generate interest and further shift prospective parents from consideration to adopt to the next phase on their journey to adopt.

Throughout the last decade, the use of social media by adoption workers has increased. NAA members utilize many social media platforms to recruit and retain families, and some members feature waiting child profiles on social media. Members engaged in social media recruitment are committed to ensuring HIPPA compliant, strength-based presentation of waiting children and youth when using social media.

Response System

Awareness efforts are only as effective as the agencies’ capacity to respond. NAA members collaborate with state and local agencies to ensure rapid follow-up with families to retain them through the process. Therefore, when planning any awareness effort, whether local, state or regional campaign using traditional or social media, the first step is preparation of a response system.

Prior to a campaign launch, response systems should have a plan detailing:

1. Who will respond to inquiries and who will provide linguistic support for non-English speakers who inquire?
2. What information will be given out to inquirers and how (email, phone and/or chat)?
3. What information will be sent to inquirers, how will it be sent (email, text, mail, etc.) and how often?
4. How inquiring families will be connected to agencies to begin the adoption or foster care process (warm hand-off)?
5. What data will be gathered from the campaign, who will have access to the data, and how will it be stored?
6. What monitoring and follow-up will be done with the inquiring families, and how often?

Members track the number and type of inquiries that each specific awareness effort elicits. Data collected and used wisely can inform members about the effectiveness of each awareness campaign.

10. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/federal/search/?CWIGFunctionsaction=federallegislation:main.getFedLdgDetail&id=173>

11. *The Multiethnic Placement Act 25 Years Later: Trends in Adoption and Transracial Adoption*: <https://www.mathematica.org/our-publications-and-findings/publications/the-multiethnic-placement-act-25-years-later-trends-in-adoption-and-transracial-adoption>

Activating Individuals with Lived Experience to Support Recruitment Efforts

One successful strategy used by members for awareness activities is to train adoptive and foster families, older adoptees and youth who have aged out of foster care, to be recruiters. NAA members play a pivotal role in preparing families and youth for publicity and in generating media interest.

In any publicity effort, NAA members determine the appropriateness of the media request and the reporter's sensitivity to adoption and child welfare issues before contacting families and youth. Members also assist the media with understanding and using positive adoption and foster care language.

NAA members can also guide families in their decisions about what information to share with the media and the best ways to respond to questions they choose not to answer. Members help families prepare sample questions and answers for the media. Staff from member organizations may accompany families and youth to interviews or tapings to provide support.

AdoptUSKids National Speakers Bureau – National

The AdoptUSKids speakers bureau is a group of more than 100 spokespeople who help raise public awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families and inspire others by sharing their personal experiences, expertise, and advice with foster care and adoption.

Speakers bureaus promote positive stories and information from those with lived experience of adoption from foster care and increase awareness and interest from a variety of audiences—including members of the media, potential foster and adoptive families, and waiting youth.

To learn more visit www.adoptuskids.org

Recruitment of Families for Individual Waiting Children

While awareness activities and general campaigns may and often do result in increased inquiries from prospective adoptive and foster parents, NAA member organizations also provide intensive child-specific recruitment of adoptive families for individual children and youth. Recruitment efforts may be broad or may be targeted toward identified populations to elicit the most appropriate adoptive resources for waiting children. Targeting of recruitment efforts is determined by the characteristics of the waiting children.

NAA members continually look for new and creative ways to let the public know about specific waiting children in a strength-based manner while protecting their privacy, dignity, and confidentiality. Some current child-specific recruitment techniques include: photolistings, youth-led videos, adoption match events (held virtually or in-person), Heart Galleries, “waiting child” series on radio, television, and newspapers, social media announcements and family finding or file mining. Members should ensure that all materials created for child-specific recruitment activities are linguistically and culturally-appropriate.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids® - National

Through its signature program, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption supports the hiring of adoption professionals, known as recruiters, who are dedicated to finding permanent families for children in foster care who are most often overlooked. That includes teenagers, children with special needs and siblings.

Of children served by the program:

- 90% are older than age 8
- 36% have had six or more placements
- 22% have been in foster care for more than four years
- 80+% had minimal or no adoption recruitment efforts on their behalf before being referred to Wendy's Wonderful Kids

Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters use an evidence-based, child-focused recruitment model to find the right family for every child. Working with smaller caseloads of children, these recruiters begin their search within a child's familiar circles of family, friends and neighbors and then reach out to the communities in which they live. A rigorous, five-year national evaluation revealed that a child referred to Wendy's Wonderful Kids is up to 3x more likely to be adopted. To find a Wendy's Wonderful Kids partner agency in your area and learn more, [visit www.davethomasfoundation.org/wwk](http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/wwk).

Partnering with Families

All prospective families are partners and colleagues to NAA member agencies. A high level of customer service is one of the hallmarks of NAA members. Though our members specialize in permanency, we work to serve all families we engage with throughout the permanency process.

There are several options for working with families:

- Provide orientation materials in person, in writing, or through referral to the member's website.
- Link families with placement agencies appropriate to their needs and interests when the family is not inquiring about a specific child.
- Provide families with the information they need to complete their home studies in instances where policy allows only homestudied families to be registered. The NAA member then maintains contact, if possible, as families move through the process.
- Encourage families registering on local or state Exchanges to also register on regional and national Exchanges.
- Refer families to www.adoptuskids.org for state-specific requirements and next steps.

Registering Children with Adoption Exchanges

Any waiting child in an NAA member's service area for whom an agency does not have an appropriate available family should be accepted for registration either by the NAA member, if that member is an Exchange, or by another Exchange in the State or region. If the member is an Exchange, it is the member's responsibility to encourage agencies to register all waiting children who do not have permanency resources on all appropriate Exchanges and AdoptUSKids.

Depending on applicable state laws, children not legally free might also be appropriate for registration if: 1) they were abandoned by their parents and no relatives are able to assume parenting responsibility at the present time; or 2) termination of parental rights is being sought; or 3) the court or birth family will not free the child until an adoptive family has been identified.

If a child is not registered with an Exchange because the worker knows of an appropriate resource, but placement does not occur quickly, the NAA member organization can request that the child be registered. When a foster parent plans to adopt but has not taken any action to actualize the placement within a reasonable time, an NAA member can encourage an agency to register the waiting child. To increase permanency options for children, NAA members also encourage waiting children to be registered on regional and national exchanges and AdoptUSKids if an in-state adoptive resource is not immediately available.

Adoption Exchanges and other NAA members vary in the level of data they can access, their relationships with state child welfare agencies and, as a result, in their ability to monitor children through to adoption finalization. Greater access to data and closer working relationships with state agencies help NAA members better monitor and serve specific children. The involvement of a NAA member can be useful at various points in a child's permanency process to ensure that the child is moving toward permanency and that federal and state timeframes are met and other key goals achieved. When ongoing monitoring is possible, NAA members can work on the child's behalf until the child is adopted.

Specialized Recruiter – Massachusetts

Massachusetts pairs waiting children and youth with special medical needs with a Specialized Recruitment Coordinator. This position has a small caseload of registered waiting children who all have moderate to severe physical and/or developmental disabilities. The types of disabilities range from autism to cerebral palsy, Fragile X Syndrome and muscular dystrophy. Using child-specific recruitment activities, the Specialized Recruitment Coordinator develops an updated, strength based profile of each child, including videos if possible. The smaller caseload allows the recruiter to conduct intensive recruitment. Intensive recruitment involves an in-depth look at the former and present contacts in a child's life, case-mining files for the names, addresses, and circumstances of individuals and communities that have been connected to a child and then contacts them to see if any resources develop. For more information on this model, please visit: <https://www.mareinc.org/>

Engaging Youth in Their Recruitment Plan

All youth should have a role in approving their own recruitment materials and should be engaged throughout the process. For older youth in particular, their voice in this process provides not only input but gives the youth a level of control over their own adoption journey. One emerging best practice in youth engagement is having youth develop their own recruitment resources such as: writing their own photolisting profile, designing their own powerpoint presentation, taping their own video or audio recording. Giving youth, especially older teens, an opportunity to directly share what they would like families to know about them is not only empowering to the youth but how we define authentic youth engagement.

In-Depth Profiles - Washington State

In-Depth Profiles are collaborative storytelling projects that empower teens to speak directly to potential adoptive families.

Originated by Northwest Adoption Exchange (NWAE), In-Depth Profiles go beyond traditional family recruitment methods and ensure older youth have the leading voice in finding an adoptive family. Through a collaborative process, youth have the opportunity to be creative and authentically share about who they are. From start to finish, they are engaged and in the driver's seat, with two questions guiding their involvement: What do you want to share with potential adoptive families? And how do you want to share it? For more information, visit www.nwae.org

Public Recruitment for Waiting Children and Youth

Using public recruitment to find homes for children requires that children be selected and prepared carefully. Agency staff and the children's current caregivers must also be prepared. While it is certainly optimal for all of the individuals involved in children's lives to be supportive and helpful throughout the recruitment process, it is not always the case. Searching for homes by using public recruitment should not be limited to children with helpful adults in their lives – particularly if a child or youth has given permission for public recruitment to take place. Adoption or Recruitment staff must have the intention to engage children and youth in their recruitment planning and support the child in assessing appropriate and safe public recruitment.

Selection of Children or Youth for Public Recruitment

A child or sibling group selected by the NAA member organization for public recruitment, i.e. photolisting, youth-led videos, social media posts, and traditional media (television, radio, print) interviews and match events, should:

- Have a permanency goal that includes adoption
- Be fully aware of and engaged in the design of the public recruitment plan
- Receive preparation and coaching from a worker or caretaker around what public recruitment entails – the benefits and risks (i.e., the child should know that adoption is a part of their permanency plan and that the public recruitment is a way to identify an adoptive family.)
- Have an assigned agency worker who is prepared to provide (directly or through contract) pre-placement, placement, and post-placement therapeutic services
- Have a permanency/adoption worker, cooperative caretaker (foster parent or residential worker) and support network of other youth who are waiting to be adopted, who is prepared to help the child handle his or her reactions following the public recruitment effort at home.

In selecting a child, one of the considerations is the child's understanding of what it means to be adopted. It will be easier to work with a child who has a positive attitude about participating in recruitment. However, children who are ambivalent about adoption. However, children who are ambivalent about adoption should not be excluded from consideration for recruitment. NAA members must have the intention to engage a child or youth who expresses ambivalence about adoption. The youth should be provided with support to explore their feelings and the benefits and risks of public recruitment.

Prior to confirming a child for any public recruitment effort, the NAA member organization secures a signature of a child's legal guardian(s) as approval. In the case of a child who is not legally free, if appropriate, the signature of birth parents or the judge with jurisdiction should be secured.

Child and Youth Preparation for Public Recruitment

Prior to featuring a child, the NAA member must ensure the child has been adequately prepared for public recruitment. In many cases, their agency worker is the primary person responsible for preparing that child for public recruitment, but the NAA member agency should offer assistance and expertise too.

In cases where the child will actively participate in public recruitment through taping a program on television or radio, role-playing the interaction between the child and the media person may be helpful in allaying his or her fears. Usually the interviewer will focus on the child's likes and dislikes, how leisure time is spent, hopes for the future and the type of family the child or youth wants. Knowing that the agency worker and/or caretaker will attend the interview may also help the child feel comfortable and empowered to express his feelings so that he/she can present the message they wish to convey.

Preparation of Agency Workers for Public Recruitment

A NAA member organization works to prepare children for publicity by providing tips and resources about:

- Returning inquiries to all interested families in a timely manner that validates their interests and the child's need for a family.
- Responding to inquiries from kin or previous caretakers.
- Appropriately handling inquiries from people from other countiesstates and countries, including addressing interjurisdictional and purchase of service issues.
- Helping children understand the purpose of publicity, explaining how they will participate, and exploring with the children their reactions to publicity.
- Engaging and involving the child's entire team—foster parents, group home staff, child workers, birth family—in the recruitment process as appropriate.
- Helping the child or youth's current caretakers to understand the recruitment process and their own role in preparing the child.

NAA members have the ability to connect specific waiting children with prospective adoptive parents. Connections between a child and family may occur through an inquiry initiated by a family or by NAA member organization staff. Effective recruitment efforts yield an ongoing stream of self-referred new families. These families see children featured on websites, photolistings, waiting child features, children/youth produced recruitment videos, adoption match events, or other activities. When a family indicates interest in a child or sibling group, the NAA member forwards the referral to the child's agency for follow-up. The referrals indicate that the child was identified by the family's inquiry.

Staff matches are initiated by the NAA member agency in consultation with the agency worker, while final placement decisions are made by the agency. There are primarily two types of staff matches: 1) matches through events (virtual or in-person); and 2) website matches.

1. Adoption events bring together waiting children, foster and adoptive families, prospective and potential families and caseworkers. These events are opportunities for families to meet each other, learn about and celebrate adoption and meet waiting children. NAA members prepare workers and families to ensure that everyone participating is sensitive and responsive to the child. There are also events that exclude the youth and families and allow the workers to interact and network about their children and/or families.
2. NAA member organizations maintain web-based database of waiting children and families who are interested in adoption. The child and family database includes thorough information to ensure good initial matches between families with children. However, certain identifying and background information in the database should have restricted access to protect confidentiality. A match is identified by comparing the characteristics of a child or sibling group with the characteristics requested by a family as well as an assessment of the family's capacity to meet the needs of the child.

An NAA member may refer a family for consideration to the child's agency, but it is the agency's role to make placement decisions and every referral will not result in a placement. In providing its referral services, a NAA member:

- Works with agencies to identify the strengths of referred families and discourage the tendency to wait for the "perfect family" to appear.
- Encourages the child's worker to include the family in determining whether they can appropriately meet the needs of a child (i.e. one-on-one disclosure meetings).
- Encourages families to consider individual children whose characteristics vary from those characteristics they originally requested by offering additional support and education.
- Follows up with the child's agency to ensure that communication has been established between the child's worker and the family's worker, the child's family history has been shared, and a decision has been made as to whether or not to pursue the family.
- Follows up with youth and the families when a match does not move forward to identify strengths and challenges of the match in an effort to process the loss of the match and ensure that characteristics of both the child's and family's are updated and considered in future matches.

Match Event - National

Held several times a year (virtually) and in-person at the NAA Conference, professionals from across the country convene to discuss the children, youth and families they serve at the NAA National Match Event. By sharing profiles of waiting children and profiles of waiting families, professionals from across the country open up a dialogue with one another about potential adoption connections. Professionals who attend the match event are encouraged to continue to network with their peers. For more information, visit www.adoptnaa.org

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Adoption and Foster Care Advocacy

NAA members are in the unique position to monitor the entire adoption process. Members should not retreat from the advocacy role that this position offers. By listening to children, youth, and families, and tracking and analyzing data, NAA members can provide a grounded argument for real improvement in permanency planning and pre- and post-adoption services.

There are three advocacy roles for NAA members. The first is to advocate for individual children. The second is to advocate—both before and after adoption—for adoptive and foster families. Finally, NAA member organizations should advocate for institutional change to improve foster care and adoption system.

To better serve children, NAA members advocate for:

- Timely reunification services for children and their birth parents
- Every effort to place children with parents who reflect the communities from which the children came, including complying with all applicable laws around diligent recruitment such as: MEPA/ICWA.
- Every child's right to a permanent, nurturing family that is racially and culturally respectful and who will provide ongoing opportunities for the children to experience their own culture.
- Permanent families for legally-free children in foster or residential care
- Permanent families for youth who are legally free but no longer have the goal of adoption
- Children to be placed in foster care or adoption with their siblings
- Training and education to help adoptive families affirm and support LGBTQ children
- Registration of every waiting child with at least one Exchange
- Exploration of out-of-state as well as in- state placements
- A child's progress toward timely adoptive placement when that placement appears delayed or blocked
- Children to be prepared for the permanency process, including open ongoing dialogue that is age and emotionally appropriate

For families, NAA members advocate for:

- Quality services for birth parents
- Children to be placed with relatives, as defined by the child's culture
- All appropriate adults to be considered as prospective adoptive parents
- Ongoing racially, linguistically, and culturally inclusive recruitment of foster and adoptive families
- Adoptive placement of children across geographic and public/private lines, including the use of purchase of service agreements
- Prompt decision-making on referred matches
- Families to receive copies of their homestudies
- Inclusion of families in determining whether children with whom they are matched are appropriate for their family
- Access to the full history of any child they are selected to adopt during a one-on-one disclosure meeting

Throughout the system, NAA members advocate for:

- Culturally proficient services and education to families, local communities, and within the adoption and foster care system
- Tools to help families and workers make matches for waiting children
- Removing systemic and attitudinal barriers to adoption
- Legislative, systemic, and internal cultural changes that remove discriminatory barriers for adoptive and foster children and families
- The need for timely permanent placement of waiting children with appropriate family resources
- Every certified adoptive family's need for post-adoption services
- Development and delivery of services— for children and for families—to fill gaps and unmet needs

Capacity Building and Education

NAA member universities and individual faculty educate students/future adoption professionals and support them as they enter the field of child welfare. Members also provide education to families on foster care and pre- and post-adoption issues.

Members who offer training can be instrumental in the development of training materials, curriculum, and publications that improve permanency outcomes for children and support system change work. Optimally, NAA members involved in training and education would facilitate, supplement, or directly provide training on all aspects of adoption and permanency including: the importance of family preservation as the first goal in child welfare, identifying connections to kin that can be maintained even after an adoption and youth engagement in all permanency decisions made.

Members should seek to offer training broadly to those in multiple systems that touch our child welfare system including: residential care staff, judges, attorneys, CASA workers, other designated child welfare legal professionals, mental health practitioners, legislators, and tribal entities. As system change agents, NAA members must work together to see reforms happen.

Additional Services

As NAA members respond to the needs of children, youth, families, and communities, they may expand their organizations and missions to fill unmet needs. From response systems, support groups, and parent mentor/buddy systems to trainings, case management services, and mental health services, NAA members play a critical role in offering support to families and children. As with core services, additional services provided by NAA members must be responsive and of high quality.

Family & Youth Initiative – District of Columbia

Family & Youth Initiative gives teens in need of permanent adult connections lasting relationships with trusted adults. Adult/teen matches are based on relationships that start at DCFYI events and are only created when the youth and adult both agree to a match (whether for mentoring or weekend host parenting). Every month Family & Youth Initiative holds events to bring together teens and adults to share an activity, have fun, and begin to build relationships. Events are open to all, giving interested adults an opportunity to meet teens and explore or develop an interest in mentoring, host parenting, and/or adoption. Participating youth get the support of a loving community of peers and adults in addition to individual adult relationships. For more information, please visit: www.dcfyi.org.

Research

Research can direct efforts toward best practices. It can provide data needed to highlight issues and can lead to trend analysis such as changing demographics of families interested in adoption. Research can look at the efficacy of initiatives being offered by the NAA member or others involved in the foster care or adoption field. Finally, research may provide the outcome-based information required for funding, advocacy, and governance.

Direct Services

Some NAA members undertake assessments, home studies, or evaluations of prospective foster and adoptive families. These assessments detail family strengths, the need for further exploration, and recommendations for ongoing support services. Other members are directly involved in the placement of children with families. Each state has regulations and laws regarding agency requirements for these services.

Clinical Mental Health Services

Many children and their families require ongoing or periodic mental health services. NAA members need to follow all regulations and laws regarding client confidentiality, HIPPA, and other guidelines for clinical mental health services. In addition, members should require all clinicians to have a strong base of knowledge about adoption and foster care, including adoption competency training. Outcome monitoring of clients should be ensured. Referrals to other providers should be made when services are not effective for a particular child or family.

Pre- and Post-Placement Support

Staff of member organizations offering pre- and post-placement support to children and families may provide direct services or information and referral services in the following areas: public and private agency post-adoption services including respite, adoption preservation services, adoptive and foster parent support groups, other specialized support groups, education and mental health services, and adoption assistance. Families contacting an NAA member about the process and resources for adoption and foster care should be provided with accurate, up-to-date listings of available local resources. Family information from all pre- and post-placement support inquiries should be collected and follow-up made to each family as appropriate in order to retain families in the adoption from foster care process.

Raise The Future's Post-Permanency Services and Support Program using Trust-Based Relational Intervention® - Colorado

Raise the Future's Post-Permanency Services and Support Program (PPSS) uses Trust Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI) as the backbone of their services. TBRI® is an evidence-based, trauma-informed model of care for vulnerable children and youth with a theoretical foundation in attachment theory, developmental neuroscience, and developmental trauma, developed by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross at the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development at Texas Christian University. TBRI® is currently listed on the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC) registry, and is rated as being "Highly" relevant in the child welfare system based upon the program being designed to meet the needs of children, youth, and families receiving child welfare services. TBRI® was added to the Family First Preservation Services Act's Title IV-E Evidence-based Clearinghouse as a promising practice with favorable impacts in child well-being and behavioral and emotional functioning. Our PPSS Services include TBRI® Caregiver Training for families and professionals, In-home coaching, support groups, respite care, specialized training, and professional consultation. The goal of the services is to support healthy family systems and prevent permanency disruption or dissolution.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.raisethefuture.org/>



History of Adoption Exchanges and the National Adoption Association

History of Adoption Exchanges

Adoption Exchanges came into existence more than 60 years ago, created around the kitchen tables of dedicated volunteers. Exchange refers to the collaboration across public/private and geographic jurisdictions to share resources and move children more quickly into adoptive families. Adoption Exchanges have historically existed outside of the child placement system in order to help the system—and the government and non-profit contracted agencies that comprise it—to be responsive and innovative.

The primary tool created and initially employed by Adoption Exchanges was the printed photo-listing books of waiting children, modeled after the real estate multi-listings concept. Exchanges maintain lists, photographs, and profile descriptions of waiting children, but these lists have evolved over time from printed booklets to DVDs to on-line databases to video clips, podcasts and features in social media.

Throughout their history, exchanges have used state-of-the-art marketing tools to promote adoption and to recruit families for waiting children. Adoption Exchanges began small and grew—often initially covering a single metropolitan region and later recruiting families for children across a state or even region.

There are Adoption Exchanges covering every state, region, and many of the country's large cities. Over time, Exchanges have added services and have grown to meet the changing needs of the children and families served.

Today, the work of exchanges can be done by the state or a private provider. While services and coverage vary from state to state, finding families for waiting children and specifically the children who have waited the longest, remains the primary focus of organizations, states, private providers and exchanges – especially those who are members of NAA.

National Adoption Association History

It was the early 1980's. Ronald Reagan was elected President. IBM launched its first PC. And, the child welfare world ushered in two dynamic pieces of legislation: the Indian Child Welfare Act and Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980.

It was the early 1980's. The crack cocaine epidemic was beginning to take hold of families across the nation. At the same time the Aids epidemic began to impact the health of mothers and fathers.

The number of children entering foster care began to rise. Child welfare professionals were seeking innovative solutions to help children heal while supporting and advocating for their parents – seeking adoption services only when deemed necessary.

Working in the child welfare system to identify solutions were our founders: Marilyn Panichi from Illinois, Mary Bohan from California, and Phyllis Tourse from Massachusetts. These three trailblazing women exchanged information on how they were serving children and families during the crises in their home states. They experienced success by replicating the ideas they learned from one another.

Recognizing there was more to learn by expanding the peer-to-peer network, these three innovators brought forth the concept of forming an Adoption Exchange Association in 1982 at a federally funded National Exchange Conference. The conference planning committee, comprised of our founders, presented the organizational structure of a national association to attendees. The concept was unanimously accepted as a necessity for the field to continue to learn, grow, and collaborate to help children and their families.

Since that time, the Adoption Exchange Association (AEA) held its national conference every other year bringing a network of social workers together to share innovative and best practices to better serve children, youth, and families. Our strong national network made us a serious contender for federal grants to build the capacity of social workers across the county.



When the Administration for Children, Youth and Families' Children's Bureau released a funding opportunity announcement to create a national adoption information exchange system in the early 2000's, our Board of Directors authorized the organization to apply for the grant, which was named: the Collaboration to AdoptUSKids. We won the competitive grant opportunity in 2002 and we continue to operate AdoptUSKids with our collaborative partner organizations to this day!

Our most recent accomplishments include:

- the country's first national adoption match event (2017);
- the country's first national adoption workforce development program, I-CARE (2018); national research on exchanges with Morgan State University (2019);
- a national family finding replication project (2020);
- national racial equity research project with Morgan State University (2021).

In 2019 we conducted an extensive strategic planning process with our Board of Directors, members, staff, and stakeholders to identify potential areas for growth. Member data pointed to the name "Adoption Exchange Association" as a barrier to our growth. Members said our name should capture the breadth of our services in adoption and our geographic reach as a national association.

A committee comprised of directors from the Board, members, staff and a branding expert collectively completed naming convention exercises, reviewed moodboards, presented creative briefs to the Board who voted to transition from the Adoption Exchange Association (AEA) to the National Adoption Association (NAA) officially on June 15, 2021.

Upholding the fidelity of our original model as a network of leaders in adoption, the Adoption Exchange Association is now the National Adoption Association. We are the leaders advancing best practices in adoption from foster care.

Convene. Connect. Collaborate.



