



How have some states developed and funded **kinship navigator programs**?

In 2004, Casey Family Programs implemented a kinship navigator project in collaboration with the State of Washington.¹ Funding for this pilot was provided to the Department of Social and Health Services Aging and Disability Services Administration through Casey Family Programs and the Washington State Legislature. According to Generations United, other kinship navigator programs launched around the same time, including those in Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, New Jersey, and New York.²

The first federal funding for kinship navigator programs arrived via Children's Bureau Family Connection discretionary grants, provided as part of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008.³ Thirteen programs were funded in the first round of Family Connection grants (2009) and a second round was available from July 2012 through February 2015.⁴ When the federal grant cycle ended, several of the funded programs developed summary reports that included recommendations on how to sustain their efforts in the future. These reports suggested that jurisdictions continue or create kinship navigator programs using a blend of public and private funding sources.

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 now provides a dedicated funding stream for kinship navigator programs, with jurisdictions able to receive ongoing federal reimbursement for up to 50 percent of their expenditures to provide kinship navigator programs. A companion to our "What are kinship navigator



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programs?” report, this strategy brief highlights some of the existing mechanisms for funding kinship navigator programs, as well as program development recommendations shared by the states of Georgia and New York.

Local approaches to funding and operations

The kinship navigator program in the state of **Washington**, although started as a Casey-funded pilot, is now financed through the state budget, with the Legislature supporting two separate ongoing funding streams of \$1 million each to meet the needs of children both inside and outside the formal child welfare system. **New York**’s statewide kinship navigator program was first funded in 2005, along with nine county programs; the statewide program also received a 2012 Family Connection grant and is currently funded at \$320,000 with an additional \$2.2 million for the local programs. The statewide program in **Georgia** was initially funded through a Family Connection grant, but now is sustained through state resources as well. New York’s state program is operated by a nonprofit agency (Catholic Family Center), while Georgia’s program is run directly by the state’s Division of Family and Children Services. In **Connecticut**, the kinship navigator program is housed within a larger general navigator service via United Way and funded in part by the state.

In **Tampa, Fla.**, the Children’s Home Network secured matching funds for the first three years of its Family Connection grant from local county child welfare agencies and United Way. As part of its sustainability plan at the termination of the grant, Children’s Home Network explored both public and private funding, and connected with Area Agencies on Aging that offer funding opportunities through the National Family Caregiver Support Program, which allows state Area Agencies on Aging to use up to 10 percent of their funding to support grandparents and other relatives age 55 and older who are raising children.⁵

New sources of federal support

In May 2018, the Administration for Children and Families released [Program Instruction ACYF-CB-PI-18-05](#), which

A NATURAL PARTNERSHIP: PEER-TO-PEER KINSHIP NAVIGATORS

An evaluation of the Children’s Home Network’s peer-to-peer kinship navigator program found that, at the end of the 12-month follow-up period, kinship caregivers enrolled in the program scored higher in family functioning, social supports, concrete supports, child development, and nurturing and attachment than kinship caregivers receiving traditional child welfare services.

[https://nfpaonline.org/resources/Documents/2018/Conf2018/Handouts/G1%20\(1\)%20-%20Kinship%20Navigation.pdf](https://nfpaonline.org/resources/Documents/2018/Conf2018/Handouts/G1%20(1)%20-%20Kinship%20Navigation.pdf)

provided guidance to state, tribal, and territorial agencies on the actions required to apply for one-time funding to support the development, enhancement, or evaluation of a kinship navigator program. This non-competitive funding request did not require matching funds.

States, territories, and tribes directly operating a Title IV-E program were invited to apply for these FY 2018 funds to develop, enhance, or evaluate kinship navigator programs. This funding was designed to help states develop a program that will meet the federal definition and the evidence standard for kinship navigator programs, in order to take advantage of ongoing federal funding for kinship navigator programs made available as of October 2018 through the Family First Prevention Services Act.⁶

Under FFPSA, jurisdictions are able to receive ongoing federal reimbursement for up to 50 percent of their expenditures to provide kinship navigator programs that meet certain evidence-based requirements of promising, supported, or well-supported practices. This federal support is available regardless of whether the children for whom the services are being accessed meet income eligibility requirements for Title IV-E.

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Jurisdictional efforts to support program development and sustainability

In order to better understand the steps states have taken to initiate kinship navigator programs and obtain necessary funding, Casey Family Programs interviewed leaders in Georgia⁷ and New York.⁸ These jurisdictions shared several steps to developing their kinship navigator programs and securing and maintaining funding for them over time:

Assessing need and engaging constituents

Agencies shared that their first step in developing kinship navigator programs was the **collection of data** regarding the number of kinship families to be served and the variety of services and supports they would need help navigating. Agencies underscored that **input and feedback from kinship caregivers** are key elements in assessing needs and developing the program. For example, Georgia engaged caregivers through local symposia as well as community engagement cafés. The state initially partnered with Morehouse School of Medicine on a Parenting Project for Kin that allowed them to better explore and engage the kinship care community and laid the groundwork for the current navigator program. These **community engagement events** not only provided a service to the caregivers, but also allowed the agency to collect input on caregiver needs, and identify those who were willing to serve on agency kinship care task forces or planning committees.

To show the anticipated impact of the kinship navigator program, agencies also explored data related to the program's anticipated **returns on investment**. The agencies balanced the costs of the kinship navigator program with the financial and community benefits of keeping children out of foster care, as well as improved placement stability and well-being outcomes (educational, mental health, in particular) associated with placing children with kin. Additional savings may also be reflected in data related to the economic impact of diverting families from the judicial system, and data on how reducing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) positively impacts the well-being of individuals and communities.

Defining program parameters and exploring funding options

Agencies needed to **make decisions regarding which kinship families to serve** (for example, all kinship families or only those that are not part of the formal foster care system) and **how to best structure and operationalize the program** (for example, whether the program is better situated inside the state agency or administered by a community partner). On the one hand, programs run by community agencies might feel more welcoming and approachable for families, can have more flexibility in how they engage with other stakeholders, and will have access to funding streams that the state agency may not be able to access. On the other hand, the state agency can troubleshoot and navigate challenges within the child protection agency as well as with other state agencies, while private providers may not be afforded the same level of access or influence. In Georgia, for example, a "Kinship Enforcer" at the state agency is responsible for helping to bridge communication across the various state agencies that support kinship caregivers.

Other programmatic considerations included: identifying agencies to partner with for implementation (for example, incorporating legal support into the program through a partnership with a legal aid service agency); understanding and attending to professional development needs of existing and newly recruited staff; establishing communication protocols with other provider agencies; devising information strategies with other agencies to improve system services; and determining how the program will connect with caregivers (such as through the telephone or online); and what the overall referral process would entail.

Although New York and Georgia were able to secure funding through state dollars, both also explored and/or accessed funds from other sources in the past. Georgia and New York also explored whether federal funding sources could be used to supplement state funding (for example, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]⁹ or Promoting Safe and Stable Families block grants¹⁰).

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Finding champions and building new partnerships

In Georgia and New York, strong relationships between the governor's office, community partners, the state agency, and legislative bodies were key to securing and sustaining funding. **Enlisting the support of at least one champion** proved vital to this success. For New York, the first champions of kinship programs were in the state child protection agency and at the state Legislature. Georgia's program started because the governor and other members of state leadership wanted to be supportive of caregivers and decided to identify kinship as a priority. The Georgia program has continued because of leadership and support within the state child welfare agency and the state Division of Aging, as well as the backing from one state representative who has championed legislation on kinship over the last few years. New York's combined statewide and local kinship navigator system is sustained by a concerted action plan, implemented by navigator program leadership, that has engaged a series of legislative champions, the past three governors, and state child protection agency commissioners.

Additionally, **enlisting support from advocacy groups** has been a key component to program launch and

continuation. These networks have helped craft strong public messaging on the issue and leverage ongoing relationships with the executive and legislative branches to move these initiatives forward. Examples of partners from New York include: Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, the Empire Justice Center, Prevent Child Abuse NY, and AARP. These allies write letters, make phone calls, and show up at meetings to voice and secure support of program funding.

Messaging through multiple platforms

Ongoing outreach and engagement of kinship families has also been important to maintaining momentum and generating interest in navigator services. Agencies noted that it was not enough to simply put up a billboard with a phone number or website address and expect that kinship families would find their way to a kinship navigator program. To that end, New York implemented a multi-pronged communications strategy that includes collaborative agreements with local departments of social services where child welfare and public assistance staff are trained on identifying kinship families and agree to complete a simple referral form that swiftly connects a family to a navigator.



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Maintaining visibility and celebrating successes

Securing and maintaining state funding has required **constant attention and program visibility**. Both jurisdictions noted that it was not enough to approach the governor or legislator in a single meeting or phone call in preparation for budget discussions. Instead, data and dialogue about the urgent need for kinship navigators and their impact needed to be facilitated at multiple points throughout the year. For example, New York has used the celebration of Kinship Care Month to maintain the program's momentum and support. Every

September, the state hosts an **event to honor kinship care** that brings together caregivers, legislators, and state child welfare staff to celebrate family successes, program efforts, and program champions. This event is used as an opportunity to share programmatic data on the number of families served and the positive outcomes that have been achieved through the kinship navigator program. Another tool has been the release of the documentary, "The Face of Kinship Care," which has helped to educate stakeholders.

To learn more, see related resources at Casey.org/Develop-Fund-Kinship-Navigator

- 1 TriWest Group. (2005). *Casey Family Programs Kinship Caregiver Navigator Pilot: Final pilot evaluation report (July 1, 2004 to November 30, 2005)*. Retrieved from <http://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/KinshipNavigatorEvaluationReport.pdf>
- 2 See <http://www.grandfamilies.org/Topics/Kinship-Navigator-Programs/Kinship-Navigator-Programs-Summary-Analysis>
- 3 For a listing of all funded programs, visit: <http://www.grandfamilies.org/Topics/Kinship-Navigator-Programs/Kinship-Navigator-Programs-Summary-Analysis>
- 4 Information about the Family Connections Grants for Kinship Navigators is available on the Child Welfare Information Gateway: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/funding/sources/federal-funding/cb-funding/cbreports/family/>
- 5 Cooper, L. (2016). Site visit report: Kinship Interdisciplinary Navigation Technologically-Advanced Model (KIN-Tech). Retrieved from: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/flkinship.pdf>
- 6 Stoltzfus, E. (2018). *CRS Insight: Family First Prevention Services Act*. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/IN10858.pdf>
- 7 Information about Georgia's program comes from personal communication with Tacia Estem, Kinship Director; Tammy Reed, Placement & Permanency Services Director; and Colleen Mousinho, Assistant Division Director for Practice and Program Guidance, Georgia Division of Family and Children Services on March 28, 2018.
- 8 Information about New York's program comes from personal communication with Gerard Wallace, Esq., Director, NYS Kinship Navigator on March 15, 2018.
- 9 Information about the TANF block grant: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/how-states-use-funds-under-the-tanf-block-grant>
- 10 Information about Promoting Safe and Stable Families: <https://www.casey.org/media/PromotingSafeandStableFamilies.pdf>

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