2003 Rural Adoption Recruitment Grantee Cluster

Synthesis of Evaluation Findings

October 2010

This synthesis report was prepared under the direction of Bethany D. Miller, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, by James Bell Associates (JBA) under Federal Contract GS10F0204K, Delivery Order 06Y010102.   JBA's Project Director for this contract is Elliott Graham, Ph.D.

This synthesis is based on final evaluation reports submitted by State and non-profit child welfare and adoption agencies that received funding through the Children's Bureau's discretionary grant programs to implement demonstration projects that expand opportunities for the adoption of special-needs children by families in rural communities. Any findings or conclusions contained in this report reflect JBA's interpretations of the grantees' findings and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the participating grantees or of the Federal Government.

In addition to reviewing and synthesizing information from grantees' evaluations of their child welfare demonstration projects, JBA provides ongoing technical assistance to discretionary grantees regarding the design and implementation of their evaluations and advises the Children's Bureau on a range of evaluation issues and topics. For further information regarding this contract, please contact the Federal Project Officer at the following address:

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Introduction

Beginning with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974, Federal legislation has authorized discretionary funds for demonstration projects to identify service models and best practices that promote the country's child welfare goals, including increased permanency for children in foster care. Permanency through adoption has been a focus of the Federal government since the promulgation of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment and Adoption Reform Act of 1978, which established the statutory authority to fund adoption demonstration projects. In its 2003 Program Announcement regarding the availability of discretionary funds to support Adoption Opportunities Programs, the Children's Bureau included a priority area focused specifically on the recruitment and training of families in rural communities to become adoptive families for children in out-of-home placement with a permanency goal of adoption. Federal funding in this priority area (referred to in this synthesis as the Rural Adoption Recruitment or RAR grantee cluster) was ultimately awarded to 10 non-profit adoption/foster care agencies and one State child welfare agency:

- The Adoption Exchange, Aurora, CO
- Another Choice for Black Children, Charlotte, NC
- Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau, Shaker Heights, OH
- Children's Home Society of North Carolina, Inc., Greensboro, NC
- Teamwork for Children, Eugene, OR
- Lund Family Center, Burlington, VT
- Northeast Ohio Adoption Services, Trumbull, OH
- Professional Association of Treatment Homes, Inc., St. Paul, MN
- Spaulding for Children, Houston, TX
- Virginia Department of Social Services, Richmond, VA

Project Descriptions

Many RAR grantees explicitly cited the growth in the number of children with permanency goals of adoption within their service areas as a primary reason for undertaking new or expanded recruitment efforts in largely untapped rural areas. The scope of these initiatives varied from projects that covered just a few rural counties to statewide and multi-state initiatives. Most projects involved the implementation of general outreach and recruitment activities through the use of print and visual media; targeted recruitment activities using recruitment specialists, collaborations with local civic and service organizations, and special recruitment events; expanded training opportunities for adoptive families and social service agency staff; and post-adoption services such as mentoring programs and support groups for adoptive families. Although officially charged with increasing the number of adoptive families and adopted children in their targeted communities, in practice many grantees engaged in recruitment, training, and retention activities that encompassed a broader range of permanency alternatives, including legal guardianship and relative/kinship care. This was particularly true of grantees working in American Indian communities in which legal adoption is often regarded as culturally inappropriate or may be proscribed under tribal law.

Specific outreach and recruitment strategies engaged in by the RAR grantees included information dissemination activities such as information booths at public events. In addition, most projects used a range of media outlets (including radio, television, and newspapers) to promote adoption and resource family licensing, along with presentations to community organizations such as churches and other civic groups. Print media created publicity for many projects via advertisements and feature articles in local newspapers, magazines, and faith-based publications. To further enhance their efforts, most grantees established formal and informal partnerships with a range of community and civic organizations, including adoption/foster care agencies; foster care/youth advocacy organizations; local education, mental health, and health care agencies; and faith-based groups. Grantees' assessments of these efforts suggest that no one approach was uniformly effective across all projects, although several projects found print and electronic media (e.g., feature articles in local newspapers about a project or specific children awaiting adoption, reports on local TV stations) to be most effective in reaching and motivating target audiences. Other traditional marketing tools such as the direct mailing or distribution of flyers and brochures were observed to be less effective overall.

All RAR projects provided or supported formal training for prospective adoptive or foster parents using either home-grown training programs or standardized curricula such as Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) and Partnering for Safety and Permanence - Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP). Nearly every project matched waiting children with families that had completed the training and licensing process, while most projects either conducted home studies directly or supported the home study process through partnerships with other agencies. Nearly all grantees provided varying degrees of post-adoption/post-permanency supports and services to participating families in the form of service referrals, mentoring programs for new adoptive parents, family support groups, and recreational activities such as family retreats and camps. As expected, the race/ethnicity of recruited adoptive/resource parents generally mirrored the racial/ethnic makeup of the communities in which they lived.

Evaluation

All RAR grantees were required to conduct program evaluations to document project activities and assess progress towards the achievement of the objectives and goals described in their grant applications. In general, the projects adopted methodologically simple evaluation approaches that involved the descriptive analysis of major process and outcome findings at program termination. A few grantees tracked outcomes for some type of comparison group, generally a county or other local geographic unit, while others incorporated a time series component that tracked changes in outcomes against certain baseline measures. For their process evaluations, all 10 projects tracked the number and variety of outreach and recruitment activities implemented; the number and variety of services provided to targeted families; and challenges to program implementation. For their outcome evaluations, all 10 grantees tracked and reported on the number of families recruited as adoptive/resource homes, although disparate definitions of "recruitment" render direct comparisons difficult. In addition, most projects reported some data on the number of families trained, the number of home studies/licensures completed, and the number of children placed with adoptive or other resource families.

Implementation Challenges

Implementation barriers reported by the RAR grantees fell into four general categories:

- Organizational factors such as resistance to collaboration among local child welfare/adoption agencies and challenges with supervising staff officed in remote rural locations;
- Factors inherent in the design of the RAR projects, most notably the reality of being outsiders in rural communities and the ensuing difficulties in building trust with local families and service providers
- Logistical impediments such as the long travel times required to deliver and participate in project services and activities; and
- Broader systemic issues that included unfavorable attitudes about urban-based organizations expanding their work in rural areas, negative stereotypes of both prospective resource families and largely urban special-needs children, concerns about the burdens that special needs children might place on local health and social service infrastructures, and reluctance among prospective resource families to assume the financial responsibilities of raising an adopted child.

Evaluation Outcomes

The 10 RAR grantees experienced modest success overall in augmenting the supply of adoptive/resource families and increasing adoptions in rural communities. The number of inquiries regarding adoption/foster care varied from site to site depending on factors such as the specific focus of each initiative and its geographic scope; most grantees reported well under 1,000 inquiries throughout the duration of their projects, although one grantee reported more than 5,500 inquiries. Six grantees provided data on families that participated in pre-adoption/licensure training, with the number of participants ranging from 43 to well over 300 families; at least two projects offered dual certification programs that allowed trainees to become both licensed foster care and adoptive families. In general, relatively small proportions of families that inquired about being becoming resource families actually advanced as far as the training stage.

Recruitment penetration rates (i.e., the estimated proportion of the adult population in each grantee's targeted geographic area(s) that made an inquiry about foster care or adoption) fell well below one percent in all cases; however, some projects appeared to have more success in relative terms that was independent of the size or population density of these communities. As such, the projects' success in recruiting potential resource families may be tied more to the design, diversity, or intensity of their outreach and marketing activities than to the size or density of their target markets. Because children who were eventually placed and/or adopted in the RAR projects' targeted rural communities often did not come from these communities originally, a similar analysis that estimates the proportion of the target communities' foster care populations that were placed and/or adopted is not feasible.

The number of approved licenses/home studies varied widely across grantees from as few as 16 to as many as 176; as with other outcome measures the same funneling effect was evident in

which the number of approved families was generally much smaller than the number of families that participated in training. Almost all grantees reported findings on adoptive and other permanent placements that occurred directly or in part as a result of project activities, with the number of such placements varying widely from as few as 8 to as many as 269. Because relative/kin placements often occur on an emergency or tentative basis before licensure or home study approval, the "funneling" effect observed with some other variables is not as evident; in fact, in some cases the number of placements exceeded or was very similar to the number of home study/licensure approvals.

Despite the original intent of the RAR grants, relatively few adoptions actually occurred as a direct result of project activities. Among grantees reporting data on adoption finalizations, fewer than 10 adoptions were documented in most cases (between 3 percent and 50 percent of all documented placements), with the exception of SFC and PATH, which reported 44 and 56 finalized adoptions (72 and 55 percent of all placements, respectively). The fact that most RAR grantees reported no adoption data or only modest adoption outcomes must be considered in light of the fact that most projects embraced a wider definition of permanency that included other permanency outcomes such as legal guardianship and placements with relatives or kin. Post-adoption services provided by grantees included trainings on topics such as attachment issues, fetal alcohol syndrome, and marriage and relationship enrichment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation findings described in this synthesis have both policy and practice implications for State child welfare agencies and non-profit adoption/foster care organizations seeking to undertake similar initiatives in rural communities, particularly those involving permanency for older youth and other special-needs children:

- Rely on local agencies to spearhead adoption efforts.

- Leverage technology to overcome logistical barriers.

- Adapt the definition of "rural" to fit the geographic and regional characteristics of target communities.

- Formally expand outreach and recruitment efforts to include other permanency options.

- Ensure that adequate community resources are in place to support adoptions in rural communities.

- Expand and enhance adoption recruitment and training programs in urban communities.

Introduction

Legislative History and Background

Beginning with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974, Federal legislation has authorized discretionary funds for demonstration projects to identify service models and best practices that promote the country's child welfare goals, including increased permanency for children in foster care. Demonstration grants are awarded by the Children's Bureau (CB), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through a competitive process open to State and local government entities; federally recognized Indian Tribes and tribal organizations; faith-based and community-based organizations with experience in the adoption field; colleges and universities; public or private non-profit licensed child welfare or adoption agencies; and State or regional adoption exchanges. Specific statutory authority to fund adoption demonstration projects was established by the Adoption Opportunities Program promulgated under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment and Adoption Reform Act of 1978.

In 2003 the CB awarded approximately $7 million for Adoption Opportunities Demonstration Activities in four priority areas: 1) Adoptive Placements for Children in Foster Care; 2) Projects to Improve Recruitment of Adoptive Parents in Rural Communities; 3) Developing a National Network of Adoption Advocacy Programs; and 4) Administration of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance. Applicants in the second priority area—*Projects to Improve Recruitment of Adoptive Parents in Rural Communities*—received five-year grants to implement projects to assist grantees in addressing their respective States' goals of increasing adoptions of children in foster care as stipulated in their Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR), with a special focus on increasing adoptions in rural communities. Specifically, grantees used project funds to recruit and train a pool of adoptive families in rural communities, and then match these families with children in foster care with a permanency goal of adoption. Continuation of funding beyond each 12-month budget period was subject to the availability of funds, satisfactory progress on the part of each grantee, and a determination that continued funding was in the best interests of the Federal government. The maximum Federal share of funding for each successful applicant was $400,000 per budget period, with each grantee required to fund at least 10 percent of the total approved cost of its project. For example, a grantee requesting $400,000 per annual budget period had to provide a match of at least $44,444 per budget period in cash or in-kind contributions (HHS, 2003).

Federal funding was awarded to 10 grantees (referred to throughout this report as the Rural Adoption Recruitment or RAR grantees) located in eight different States across the country with the South, Midwest, New England, Rocky Mountain, and Pacific Coast regions all represented:

- The Adoption Exchange, Aurora, CO
- Another Choice for Black Children, Charlotte, NC
- Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau, Shaker Heights, OH
- Children's Home Society of North Carolina, Inc., Greensboro, NC

- Teamwork for Children, Eugene, OR[1]
- Lund Family Center, Burlington, VT
- Northeast Ohio Adoption Services, Trumbull, OH
- Professional Association of Treatment Homes, Inc., St. Paul, MN
- Spaulding for Children, Houston, TX
- Virginia Department of Social Services, Richmond, VA

Although projects funded under the RAR priority area were originally scheduled to end on September 30, 2008, five projects continued to operate under no-cost extensions for periods ranging from 3 to 12 months. The last two active projects—operated by Another Choice for Black Children and Northeast Ohio Adoption Services—were completed in September 2009.

Purpose of this Synthesis

This report synthesizes information contained in the final evaluation reports that the 10 RAR grantees submitted to the CB following the completion of their projects; these final evaluation reports serve as the primary data source for this synthesis paper. The reports were reviewed and analyzed for common themes in key programmatic areas, including:

- The overall design/service models of the projects;
- Outreach and recruitment activities;
- Specific types of support the projects provided to families during the adoption approval process;
- Post-adoption services and supports;
- Introduction of innovative recruitment and casework practices; and the
- Projects' contributions to the knowledge base in the foster care/adoption field.

In addition, the final reports were examined for key information regarding each grantee's evaluation of its RAR project in the following categories:

- Research/evaluation designs implemented;
- Data collection methods employed (e.g., surveys, interviews, standardized assessment instruments); and
- Major process and outcome findings.

Overview of Funded Projects

According to the Children's Bureau's estimates, 520,000 children were in foster care nationwide on September 30, 2003 (the start date of the RAR grants); although 120,000 of these children (23 percent) were waiting to be adopted, only 17 percent were living in pre-adoptive homes and only

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[1]This grant was originally held by the Independent Adoption Center in Contra Costa, California. The grant was transferred to Teamwork for Children in Year 4 at the request of the Independent Adoption Center.

18 percent of the 282,000 children who exited foster care in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2003 (i.e., between October 1, 2002 and September 30, 2003) did so via adoption (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2006). Additional data reveal the special plight of non-white and older youth waiting for adoption. For example, although African American children comprised 40 percent of all children waiting to be adopted on September 30, 2003, they accounted for only 33 percent of adoptions that occurred in FFY 2003. In addition, whereas children aged 12 and older comprised 31 percent of the adoptable population, this age group represented only 14 percent of adoptions in FY 2003. As a group, children awaiting adoption as of September 2003 had been in continuous foster care for an average of 44.5 months, with 25 percent in continuous care for 60 or more months (HHS, 2006).

The 10 RAR projects sought to improve these sobering statistics in their own States and communities by addressing one of the root contributors to the large number of children languishing in foster care, namely, the insufficient number of prospective adoptive families. What distinguished the RAR projects from other adoption recruitment and training programs was their explicit focus on identifying and cultivating adoptive resources in rural communities. In their original grant applications, many RAR grantees cited the growth in the number of children with a permanency plan of adoption in their respective States or service areas, an increase that occurred in part due to the heightened focus on adoption, expedited permanency planning, and termination of parental rights (TPRs) in the wake of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997. However, many RAR grantees noted that urban communities—the traditional target of adoption recruitment and training efforts—were not adequate to meet the growing need for adoptive homes, particularly for children with "special needs." Special needs children include those with one or more physical, cognitive, or mental health challenges; older youth (particularly those aged 14 and older); non-white children; and members of sibling groups. Thus, the project sought to cultivate the still largely untapped potential of families in rural communities to provide permanent homes for children awaiting adoption.

Exhibit A on the following page summarizes the major features of each of the RAR projects, including their target populations, geographic scope, and core program features. For the sake of brevity, specific grantees are referenced throughout this synthesis by the acronyms provided in Exhibit A.

Target Populations

As noted above, most of the RAR grantees focused their efforts on finding adoptive families for special needs children, particularly older youth and ethnic minorities. For example, three projects (AE, TFC, PATH) focused most of their activities on the recruitment of American Indian (AI) families, citing as background the historically high placement rates of AI children with non-Native families, combined with high TPR rates among the biological parents of AI children. These three projects aimed to keep AI children in their tribal communities via family and kinship placements while honoring tribal customs and values regarding the placement and care of their children. Two additional grantees—ACBC and SFC—targeted their efforts on finding adoptive homes for African American and Hispanic/Latino children, respectively. Other grantees' efforts were targeted at broader target populations, but most served urban or rural areas with historically large numbers of African American children in out-of-home placement (BJCB, CHS, NOAS, VDSS).

Exhibit A – 2003 RAR Grantees: Key Program Features

Grantee Agency and Acronym	Project Name	Geographic Scope	Definition of Rural	Target Populations	Core Program Features
The Adoption Exchange (AE)	Rural Adoption Cooperative (RAC)	10 rural communities in Colorado, Utah, South Dakota	Counties and reservations with a population density of less than 1,000 per sq. mile	Families at any stage of the adoption process	- Needs assessment of adoption resources and gaps - Recruitment kiosks in highly visible, frequented locations - Direct recruitment through adoption events and one-on-one outreach - Media outreach through radio, newspaper, direct mailings, magazines - Culturally sensitive adoption training & home studies - Greater use of electronic resources (e.g., AdoptUsKids) - Post-adoption support services and referrals
Another Choice for Black Children (ACBC)	Real Families for Real Children	6 rural counties in North Carolina	Counties with a total population of less than 100,000	Prospective adoptive parents in the targeted counties; African American children waiting to be adopted	- Adoption and Foster Care Resource Center to provide outreach, educational services - Community Councils to conduct outreach and increase awareness re: adoption - Media campaign involving radio and print media - Training for adoptive families using MAPP curriculum - Post-adoption services & supports (mentors, support groups)

Grantee Agency and Acronym	Project Name	Geographic Scope	Definition of Rural	Target Populations	Core Program Features
Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau (BJCB)	Adoption in Ohio's Heartland	Two clusters of counties in the State of Ohio	Any town or unincorporated area with fewer than 10,000 people	Prospective adoptive parents in rural areas; children (mostly minority) in public foster care throughout Ohio, mostly from larger urban centers	▪ Community asset mapping to identify adoption resources ▪ Media campaign involving brochures, posters, newsletters, radio, print ads ▪ Enhanced "dual certification" (foster and adoptive home) training and "strength-based" home studies ▪ Enhanced child family matching activities, including matching parties & expanded use of Internet resources ▪ Post-adoption services, including parent mentors, marriage ed., family camps
Children's Home Society of North Carolina, Inc. (CHS)	Building Bridges	43 counties in eastern and southeastern North Carolina	Official U.S. Census Bureau definition	Potential adoptive parents in rural communities	▪ General recruitment through informational meetings & presentations ▪ Recruitment specialists to engage in targeted recruitment & interview prospective adoptive families ▪ Media outreach through promotional billboards; cinema, newspaper, radio ads; direct mailings ▪ Enhanced training for prospective adoptive families using MAPP curriculum and "Urban-to-Rural" course ▪ Post-adoption services (e.g., support groups)

Grantee Agency and Acronym	Project Name	Geographic Scope	Definition of Rural	Target Populations	Core Program Features
Teamwork for Children (TFC)	Recruiting Rural Parents for Indian Children (RRPIC)	Seven counties in California (6 rural counties in the north and rural areas in one southern county)	Any town or unincorporated area with fewer than 10,000 people	AI households that could serve as prospective resource families for AI children	- Recruitment specialists to do targeted recruitment - Advisory Councils to increase collaboration w/ tribal communities - Media outreach through brochures, newsletters - Enhanced recruitment resources (e.g., Adoption Resource Directory & Contact Database) - Culturally appropriate foster care and adoption training using adapted version of PRIDE curriculum - Post-adoption services (e.g., support groups)
Lund Family Center (LFC)	Vermont Rural Recruitment and Retention Project	Vermont: statewide	Any town or unincorporated area with fewer than 10,000 people	Prospective adoptive parents throughout the state	- Comprehensive market research campaign to identify prospective adoptive families - Adoption recruitment specialists - Media outreach through newspaper, radio, TV, Web - Bi-annual recruitment events - Enhanced adoption training for State and LFC staff
Northeast Ohio Adoption Services (NOAS)	Rural Targeted Community Outreach	Four predominantly rural counties in Ohio	Official U.S. Census Bureau definition	Families that resemble successful adoptive and foster families in lifestyle and demographic characteristics	- Media outreach through direct mailings, newspapers, billboards, TV, and radio - Partnerships w/ faith-based, business, community orgs.

Grantee Agency and Acronym	Project Name	Geographic Scope	Definition of Rural	Target Populations	Core Program Features
Professional Association of Treatment Homes, Inc. (PATH)	Rural Expansion of Adoptive Communities and Homes (REACH)	Rural communities in North Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, particularly AI communities	Counties with a population density of less than 500 people per sq. mile	Potential adoptive families in rural areas; children with special needs waiting for adoption	▪ Targeted communication and recruitment campaign w/ info. packets, posters, flyers, newsletters, open houses ▪ Improved training and licensing referral systems for potential adoptive families ▪ Enhanced, culturally appropriate adoption training
Spaulding for Children (SFC)	The Rural Adoption Partnership	23 counties in Texas near Mexico border (covering three Catholic dioceses)	Counties with a total population of less than 100,000	Hispanic families interested in adoption; special needs children waiting to be adopted	▪ Partnership w/ Catholic dioceses to recruit families through info. meetings, church bulletins, etc. ▪ Use of "Opinion Leader Model," to increase adoption awareness & interest ▪ Training for adoptive parents using PRIDE curriculum ▪ Post-adoption services (e.g., mentors)
Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS)	Virginia Rural Adoptive Family Initiative (RAFI)	Virginia: statewide, in a total of 28 localities	Any town or unincorporated area with fewer than 10,000 people	Potential adoptive families in targeted rural communities	▪ Targeted recruitment strategies, including "match retreats" & videoconferences ▪ Enhanced resource/adoptive parent training ▪ Education re: adoption for mental health workers & school personnel ▪ Financial assistance to facilitate adoptions ▪ Post-adoption services (e.g., mentors & family retreats)

In targeting certain ethnic/minority populations for outreach and recruitment, the RAR grantees had to ensure compliance with the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, which prohibits States or other entities that receive Federal funding from delaying or denying the placement of a child for adoption or into foster care on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive or foster parent or of the child in question.

Geographic Scope and Definition of "Rural"

Collectively the RAR projects were present in almost every major geographic region of the country. Four projects covered expansive geographic areas, with two projects (LFC, VDSS) engaged in statewide efforts while another two projects (AE, PATH) were multi-state initiatives. The remaining six projects encompassed geographic areas of varying sizes, from just a few counties (ACBC, TFC) to over 40 in another state (CHS). One issue that all RAR projects struggled with from the beginning was how to define "rural" for the purposes of delimiting program activities; in other words, when was a particular geographic area identified as "rural" and how was this determination made? The RAR grantees as a group had originally planned to use the official U.S. Census Bureau geographic classification system, which defines "rural" as the strict inverse of "urban", i.e., "territory, persons, and housing units in places of 2,500 or more persons incorporated as cities, villages, boroughs, and towns…." as well as any other "Census designated places of 2,500 or more persons."[2] However, in practice many grantees found the official U.S. Census definition to be overly restrictive for the purposes of their program designs and operations. For example, although a small town of 5,000 might be considered "urban" according to the official Census definition, a RAR grantee working in an otherwise sparsely populated county would regard it as "rural" for the purposes of outreach, advertising, and recruitment activities. Ultimately the Children's Bureau loosened this project parameter and allowed the RAR grantees to adopt reasonable definitions of "rural" that better accommodated the scope and nature of their program activities. The definitions that were eventually used varied widely across projects, although the most commonly used definition was "any town or unincorporated area with fewer than 10,000 people" (see Exhibit A).

Core Project Features

As illustrated in Exhibit A, most grantees included the following general program components in their RAR projects: (1) general outreach and recruitment activities through the use of print, audio, and visual media; (2) targeted recruitment activities using recruitment specialists, collaborations with local civic and service organizations, and special recruitment events; (3) expanded and enhanced training opportunities for prospective adoptive families and social service agency staff; and (4) post-adoption services, such as mentoring programs, support groups for adoptive families, and recreational activities. Beyond these general program categories, each project tailored its initiative in response to the context, needs, culture, and special circumstances in which it operated. For example, VDSS found that most of Virginia's local foster care/adoption agencies handled from zero to two local adoptions annually, and lacked the capacity and resources to recruit additional families or to offer support services. To bolster these

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[2] Definition available online at http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urdef.txt.

local small-scale efforts, VDSS designed its project to employ a more collaborative and broader regional approach to recruitment and resource family training. Yet another grantee (SFC) specifically worked with communities that were deemed to have some existing capacity for civic engagement to mobilize rural communities in support of adoption. In this regard, SFC implemented a recruitment model centered on "opinion leadership," which is defined as the degree to which an individual is able to informally influence other individuals' attitudes, overt behavior, or opinions about programmatic, cultural, and technological innovations (Rogers, 1983; Kelly, 1994).

Although the RAR grantees were officially charged with increasing the number of adoptive families, and subsequently the number of adopted children in their targeted communities, in practice many engaged in recruitment, training, and retention activities that encompassed a broader range of permanency alternatives. This was particularly true of grantees working in AI communities (TFC, AE, PATH), in which legal adoption is often regarded as culturally inappropriate or may be proscribed under tribal law. In these cases, program activities included efforts to recruit and train families to serve as more culturally appropriate permanency resources, for example, as legal guardians, long-term licensed foster care providers, and unlicensed kin/relative care providers. As such, many RAR grantees referred more generally to their efforts to find and retain "resource families," a term that includes adoptive parents as well as foster parents and relative/kinship caregivers.

Several projects used or adapted one of the following two standardized curricula to assist in the training and vetting of prospective adoptive/resource families:

- *Partnering for Safety and Permanence - Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting (PS-MAPP):* Used by ACBC and CHS, PS-MAPP is a resource family training and selection program that incorporates several family and individual assessment and developmental tools. Key components of PS-MAPP include a series of group meetings designed to develop critical communication skills and assess families' commitment to the foster care/adoption process; private consultations between a MAPP trainer and the prospective resource family to discuss the family's strengths, progress, and needs; and creation of a professional development plan to guide a family's growth and direction as a resource family. Families are also given a series of assignments that include development of a Family Profile that assesses the family's strengths and needs in its own words; an "Eco Map" that depicts relationships among family members and its broader social network; and a "Family Map" that assesses the family's boundary, power, and authority systems (CEBC, 2009).

- *Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE)*: Used by TFC and SFC[3], the PRIDE program is designed to strengthen the quality of family foster care and adoption services by providing a standardized framework for the recruitment, preparation, and selection of foster and adoptive parents, as well as for foster parent in-service training and ongoing professional development. Developed by the Child Welfare League of America in collaboration with several State child welfare agencies, PRIDE has three major training

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[3] SFC used only the PRIDE Core module, which is described briefly on the following page.

components: (1) a pre-service program for recruiting, preparing, assessing, and selecting prospective foster and adoptive parents; (2) PRIDE Core, an in-service training program for new and experienced foster parents; and (3) PRIDE Specialized and Advanced Training, which offers comprehensive education on specific topics, e.g., working with teens and anger management (CWLA, 2010).

Evaluation Methodologies

All RAR grantees were required to conduct program evaluations to document project activities and assess progress towards the achievement of the objectives and goals described in their grant applications. Exhibit B on the following page summarizes the key components of the RAR grantees' evaluations. In general, the projects used methodologically simple evaluation approaches, with no grantees using experimental (random assignment) research designs and only three grantees (BJCB, TFC, SFC) identifying and tracking outcomes for some type of comparison groups (generally a county or other local geographic unit). The evaluations of three grantees (TFC, NOAS, PATH) included a pre- and post-test component with "before and after" assessments of knowledge or skills. The CHS' evaluation incorporated a time series component that systematically collected data on key process/outcome measures (e.g. the number of adoption inquiries) at regular intervals. The remaining four evaluations (AE, ACBC, LFC, VDSS) were purely descriptive analyses of major process and outcome findings at project conclusion. In addition to a comparison group component that assessed differences in the adoption resources and infrastructures of targeted counties, TFC's evaluation included a trend analysis to discern changes in information requests from prospective resource families and a pre-and post-test to measure the effectiveness of training provided to families.

RAR grantees identified and tracked a wide range of process and outcome evaluation measures; for their process evaluations, all 10 projects tracked the number and variety of outreach and recruitment activities implemented; the number and variety of services provided to targeted families; and challenges or barriers to program implementation. In addition, about half of the grantees reported data on the demographic characteristics of participating families and children and/or on the satisfaction of participants or other project stakeholders with program activities and services.

The tracking of outcome measures tended to be somewhat more uneven across grantees, with the number of families recruited as resource homes representing the only indicator tracked across all 10 grantees. However, the definition of "recruitment" varied considerably across projects. Most grantees considered families that had merely inquired about adoption as having been "recruited", while others used a more stringent definition that was limited to families that had both inquired about adoption and had completed an initial application and/or attended an orientation session. In addition, most grantees reported some data on the number of families trained and the number of home studies/licensures completed, and nearly all provided some data on the number of children placed with adoptive or other resource families. Six grantees provided a separate breakout of the number of finalized adoptions achieved. Lastly, three grantees (AE, NOAS, SFC) reported some findings regarding changes in awareness and knowledge of adoption issues and resources.

Exhibit B – Evaluation Designs and Measures Used by RAR Grantees

	Grantee									
	AE	**ACBC**	**BJCB**	**CHS**	**TFC**	**LFC**	**NOAS**	**PATH**	**SFC**	**VDSS**
Evaluation designs										
Evaluation measures	Descriptive analysis only	Descriptive analysis only	Descriptive analysis w/ comparison group component	Descriptive study w/ time series component	Mixed methodology involving descriptive, comparison group, and pre-post test components	Descriptive analysis only	Descriptive analysis w/ pre-post test component	Descriptive analysis w/ pre-post test component	Descriptive analysis w/ comparison group component	Descriptive analysis only
Process Evaluation Measures										
Outreach/recruiting activities	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Implementation challenges/barriers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Services provided to families	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Characteristics of involved families			x		x		x	x	x	
Participant/stakeholder satisfaction		x			x	x		x	x	
Outcome Evaluation Measures										
Family inquiries/ families recruited	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Families trained	x	x	x			x		x	x	
Home studies/licenses completed	x		x		x		x	x		x
Children placed		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Finalized adoptions		x	x	x	x			x	x	
Changes in adoption awareness/knowledge	x						x		x	

With the guidance and support of the Children's Bureau, five RAR grantees (SFC, BJCB, ACBC, CHS, NOAS) voluntarily agreed to collect data on a common set of process and outcome measures using standardized definitions for each selected indicator. Beginning with the start of project activities in October 2003, these grantees reported data on the selected variables on a semi-annual basis throughout the duration of the grants (see Appendix A for a complete list of the selected cross-site indicators). However, variations in the completeness and consistency of data collection across the grantees rendered cross-site aggregation and comparison difficult. Moreover, because some grantees incorporated foster care recruitment and licensing into their core project activities and included these activities in their semi-annual data submissions, it became difficult to compare data from these sites with data from sites focusing exclusively on adoption recruitment and placement. Due to these issues with data quality and comparability, findings from the voluntary cross-site data collection initiative are used only on a limited basis to supplement outcomes findings from grantees' final evaluation reports where appropriate.

Data Collection Methods

Exhibit C summarizes the methods that grantees commonly used to collect and analyze evaluation data. There was significant variation in the types and complexity of information tracking systems used across the sites. Phone logs, intake forms, sign-in sheets, staff logs, contact sheets, and consent forms were among the myriad of tracking forms that all projects used to document recruitment and service delivery activities. Most projects developed their own tracking forms or adapted forms already in use by the grant's lead agency.

Exhibit C – RAR Evaluation Data Sources and Data Collection Tools

Data Source	AE	ACBC	BJCB	CHS	TFC	LFC	NOAS	PATH	*SFC*	VDSS	Total No. of Grantees
Assorted tracking forms	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
Surveys/questionnaires		x				x	x*	x*	x*	x	6
Interviews		x	x		x	x		x	x		6
Staff reports	x	x					x		x	x	5
Meeting minutes					x		x			x	3
Evaluator observations of project activities		x	x								2
Focus groups			x			x					2
Case studies			x								1

*Surveys also used to collect pre-post data.

In addition to tracking forms, over half of the RAR grantees implemented one or more surveys/questionnaires to collect evaluation data, including three grantees (NOAS, PATH, SFC)

that used survey instruments to collect pre-post test data on program participants. In most cases these instruments were "home grown" tools developed specifically for a grantee's evaluation, or that were already in use by the grantee agency for other assessment and evaluation activities. Just one grantee (SFC) reported using a standardized survey instrument—the Special Needs Adoption Parent Support Questionnaire or SNAPS (Kramer and Houston, 1998). Interviews with key project stakeholders and internal agency reports (for example, monthly staff reports and progress reports) represented other common evaluation data sources. Less common sources included meeting minutes, focus groups, observations of program activities, and one case study implemented by BJCB.

Process Evaluation: Summary of Key Findings

While the depth and detail of findings varied among the sites, each of the RAR grantees conducted the basic elements of a process evaluation. Specifically, every project tracked its outreach and recruitment activities, while information on program services, participant satisfaction, and implementation challenges were among other process findings tracked and reported by many grantees. Several projects also sought to track data on participants' case and demographic characteristics, which proved more difficult than anticipated due to challenges such as collecting and aggregating data across multiple child welfare and adoption agencies without standardized inter-agency data reporting procedures. The following section highlights major process findings reported by the RAR grantees in these and other categories.

Outreach and Recruitment

Although the strategies the projects employed to increase adoption approvals and placements varied from site to site, most were built on a range of marketing, outreach, and recruitment activities combined with efforts to build community awareness and collaborative endeavors with other child welfare and adoption agencies. Exhibit D on the following page summarizes the various outreach and recruitment activities undertaken by the RAR grantees. Every project engaged in a range of outreach efforts, with information dissemination activities such as information booths at public events serving as the most common recruitment modality. In addition, most projects used a variety of media outlets (including radio, television, and newspapers) to promote adoption and resource family licensing, along with presentations to community organizations such as churches and other civic groups. Print media created publicity for many projects via advertisements and feature articles in local newspapers, magazines, and faith-based publications. In several communities, PSAs and feature stories run on local radio and television stations created further awareness and interest in project activities. For instance, one project played a 15-second PSA on a local PBS station that had high viewership among residents of two American Indian reservations in the project's service area. In an effort to disseminate information in targeted Hispanic communities along the Mexican border, SFC utilized Spanish language television stations to run weekly advertisements featuring specific children in need of adoptive homes, as well as to host adoption telethons during which project staff were available to answer questions from community residents and potential adoptive parents.

Exhibit D – RAR Outreach and Recruitment Activities

Activity	AE	ACBC	BJCB	CHS	TFC	LFC	NOAS	PATH	SFC	VDSS	Total no. of Grantees
Adoption awareness events, fairs, information tables and booths	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	9
PSAs or appearances on radio or television	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	8
Presentations to community groups		x	x	x	x		x	x	x		7
Information and stories in newspapers and other print media	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	7
Trained recruiters (community liaisons and adoption "coaches") to engage in general and targeted recruitment	x	x		x	x	x		x			6
Recruitment partnerships with local businesses, churches, agencies		x	x		x	x	x		x		6
Direct mailings	x		x	x				x	x		5
Roadside billboards	x		x	x					x		4
Adoption website	x		x				x	x	x		5
Child-specific recruitment (e.g., portraying specific child(ren) on television, brochures, flyers)	x			x			x		x		4
Distribution of flyers and brochures in public places	x		x			x			x		4

More than half the projects described their use of print-based marketing materials, such as brochures, posters, business cards, and newsletters, in their final reports. For example, one project developed a "business card" that featured a photo of a waiting child, common myths and facts about adoption, and the project's contact information. Printed materials were often mailed directly to households in grantees' target communities or were distributed at recruitment events and through community outlets such as bulletin boards in area shopping malls. Several projects also used billboards erected along roadsides in the targeted rural communities.

Two grantees (NOAS and PATH) used the services of marketing professionals to assist in developing their outreach and recruitment strategies. For example, NOAS hired a market segmentation company to develop a "template" of the lifestyle and demographic characteristics of successful adoptive families, and subsequently used this template to target the project's marketing efforts at geographic communities and families with similar characteristics. PATH used a marketing firm to develop its project's recruitment materials and to perform most marketing and outreach functions, such as publicizing events, creating public service

announcements, and publishing adoption feature articles in local newspapers. Over half the grantees reported using specially trained community recruiters or liaisons to engage in outreach as well as in general, targeted, and child-specific recruitment activities. These recruiters were often residents of the targeted rural communities and foster/adoptive parents themselves, experiences that enhanced their understanding of the needs and challenges faced by rural resource families.

To augment the work of adoption recruiters, most grantees established formal and informal partnerships with a range of community and civic organizations, including adoption/foster care agencies; foster care/youth advocacy organizations; local education, mental health, and health care agencies; and faith-based groups. For example, one project's outreach to faith-based communities included meeting and working with pastors and other church officials, as well as making presentations at adult Sunday school classes and church picnics. At least two grantees partnered with local television stations to coordinate the weekly or monthly airing of segments that featured children available for adoption. Other grantees organized project advisory groups/work groups that represented various community interest groups. For example, AE formed community work groups to help implement project activities such as trainings and special events, whereas ACBC created community councils to serve as a link between the target communities and the agency. Yet another grantee (TFC) organized project advisory councils to oversee the project's recruitment practices and to align recruitment efforts with the needs of the agencies and targeted AI communities.

Most RAR projects measured the effectiveness of their marketing and recruitment strategies in terms of their ability to increase inquiries from families interested in adoption. Grantees' assessments of these efforts suggest that no one approach was uniformly effective across all projects, with most grantees reporting one or two strategies that were noticeably more effective than others (see Exhibit E on the following page). Specifically, a number of projects perceived print and electronic media (e.g., feature articles in local newspapers about the project or specific children awaiting adoption, special reports on a local TV station) to be most effective in reaching and motivating target audiences. Other traditional marketing tools such as the direct mailing or distribution of flyers and brochures were reported as less effective overall.

As they identified outreach and recruitment activities that were more or less effective, many projects refined the mix of approaches they used. For example, when one grantee's brochures were not resulting in increased inquiries from prospective adoptive families, it shifted much of its marketing resources to advertising in the local print media. In at least one case, referrals from collaborating Tribes or Indian child welfare organizations were the most effective means of engaging AI parents in the process of becoming permanent family resources for AI children.

Exhibit E – Most Effective RAR Outreach and Recruitment Methods[4]

Type of Activity	No. of Projects Reporting	Examples of Activities from Grantees' Reports
Print media (e.g., newspapers)	4	Inquiries from interested families increased considerably in response to newspaper advertising.
Radio and television	3	Inquiries from interested families increased considerably in response to local radio advertising.
Recruitment partnerships	2	The success of recruitment activities increased when done in partnership with local churches and public libraries.
Brochures and flyers	1	Most responses from interested families occurred as the result of marketing materials placed in public places (e.g., grocery stores, post offices) that were frequently visited by community residents.
Child-specific recruitment	1	Introducing specific waiting children to public audiences proved successful in attracting families that were motivated to adopt a specific child.
Community liaisons	1	Trained local liaisons who were also community "insiders" effectively disseminated the project message and information.
Marketing professionals	1	The products and services of a marketing firm reached wider audiences and generated far more publicity for the project than other marketing approaches.

Training, Licensing, and Support Services

As illustrated in Exhibit F, all 10 RAR grantees developed and implemented some type of initial intake process for prospective adoptive parents, for instance, by having interested parties complete written applications and/or attend adoption/resource family orientation sessions. In addition, all projects provided or supported formal training for parents interested in adopting or fostering children using either home-grown training programs or standardized curricula such as PRIDE and PS-MAPP. Nearly every project matched waiting children with families who had completed the training and licensing process, while most projects reported that they either conducted home studies directly or supported the home study/licensure process through partnering agencies that actually completed the studies. Moreover, nearly all grantees provided varying degrees of post-adoption/post-permanency supports and services to participating families in the form of service referrals, mentoring programs for new adoptive parents, adoptive family support groups, and recreational activities for adopted children and their families (e.g., family retreats, camps, picnics).

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[4] A total of nine grantees are represented in this Exhibit; one grantee did not report findings on the effectiveness of the marketing strategies it employed. The total number of projects reporting exceeds the number of grantees represented since several projects identified more than one particularly effective outreach/recruitment strategy.

Exhibit F – Training, Licensing, and Support Services

Type of activity	AE	ACBC	BJCB	CHS	TFC	LFC	NOAS	PATH	SFC	VDSS	Total No. of Grantees
Initial intake/orientation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
Provided or supported pre-adoption training	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
Matched families with waiting children		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
Provided or supported home studies/licensure approvals	x		x		x		x	x	x	x	7
Provided post-adoption support	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	9

Family Characteristics

Four RAR grantees included data on the demographic characteristics of prospective adoptive/resource families in their final evaluation reports; the results varied widely in terms of the subjects of data collection, the types of variables tracked, and their consistency and completeness. The most commonly tracked variable was the race/ethnicity of recruited families, which is summarized in Exhibit G. As expected, the race/ethnicity of recruited adoptive/resource parents generally mirrored the racial/ethnic makeup of the communities in which they lived and that the RAR grantees targeted for outreach and recruitment.

Exhibit G – Race/Ethnicity of Recruited Parents/Families

Grantee	Subject Type	Total No.	White	African American	Hispanic	American Indian	Other or Unknown
BJCB	Females who inquired Males who inquired	245 200	87% 90%	11% 8%		1% 1%	1% 1%
TFC	Adults who inquired Adults who began licensing process	202 67				87% 85%	13% 15%
PATH[5]	Resource families	330	92%	3%	1%	8%	
SFC	Females who applied Males who applied	82 87			83% 87%		17% 13%

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[5]Totals exceed 100% because families recruited through PATH's project could indicate more than one race.

While few meaningful cross-site comparisons regarding the demographic characteristics of participating families can be made, a few site-specific findings are worth mentioning that reflect the diversity of involved families and the unique characteristics of individual projects. For example, the typical profile of a prospective resource parent in one project was of a male or female Caucasian between 30 and 39 years of age who had at least a high school education. In contrast, another project focusing on AI communities found that a large proportion of recruited women and men were 50 years of age or older (40 percent and 43 percent, respectively), with two-parent families representing 56 percent of recruited households and the remaining families consisting of single-adult households. These examples are just two among many that illustrate the wide variation demographic profiles among families served by the RAR grantees.

Participant and Stakeholder Satisfaction

Five grantees collected and reported some program satisfaction findings in their final evaluation reports; two of these projects surveyed project stakeholders more generally (e.g., program staff and residents of targeted communities), while three collected satisfaction data specifically from recruited adoptive/resource families. Results from these surveys indicate overall satisfaction with the services and activities implemented by the RAR projects. For example, TFC conducted in-depth telephone interviews with 13 parents who had completed the licensing process and had children placed in their homes. Findings from the interviews suggest that most parents were very satisfied with the services they received and felt that they met their needs adequately. Typical comments made by parents include "She helped us out a great deal" and "They understood and appreciated the challenges we faced – especially at home." A few parents were not entirely satisfied with the services they received pre- and post-permanency; one parent described a change in workers from one who was prompt, knowledgeable, and responsive to her needs to one who was not nearly as informed or responsive. Another parent would have preferred a more experienced caseworker who could have provided more useful and informed guidance to the family. Parents had several suggestions for improving their adoption experience; one suggested that adoption professionals to do more to raise adoption awareness in small communities, both among human service providers as well as within the community more generally.

PATH conducted a one-time satisfaction survey of resource parents who had received adoption information or services from its project. Of the 90 parents who responded, over half were satisfied or very satisfied, about 40 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and only a few reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. PATH staff subsequently used these survey findings to more accurately assess families' needs for service and supports.

SFC directed its annual satisfaction survey at all adoptive parents who had finalized their adoptions during a particular year; the survey included items regarding respondents' overall satisfaction as well as regarding specific phases of the adoption process. With each annual administration of the survey, adoptive parents expressed satisfaction with the project from the orientation phase through adoption finalization. Families also gave consistently high marks to the services and supports they received during the family-child matching phase. SFC staff also learned that specific aspects of the project had been particularly meaningful to parents, such as the support provided by the project's adoption coordinator, the long-term contacts between parents and project staff, and the opportunities to interact with other adoptive parents.

Implementation and Evaluation Challenges

As illustrated in Exhibit H on the following page, implementation challenges reported in the grantees' final reports fell roughly into four categories: 1) organizational issues, 2) problems with project design, 3) logistical difficulties, and 4) systemic/contextual factors. In addition, grantees reported a variety of impediments to project evaluation and data collection. The most frequently reported challenges overall related to working with partner agencies and their staff, staff turnover, and the logistical barriers of working in often remote, sparsely populated, and expansive geographic areas.

Organizational Challenges

A variety of organizational factors accounted for the broadest category of implementation barriers. Over half of the grantees reported resistance among other foster care/adoption agencies in targeted communities to collaborating on the RAR projects. Building trust with other agencies often took more time than expected, and some grantees found that their initiatives were not viewed as enhancements to the array of existing adoption services but rather as competition for limited funding and revenue sources. Similarly, at least six grantees reported significant issues with staff turnover, which contributed to problems with the quality and continuity of project services. With each episode of staff turnover, substantial time and effort had to be expended to identify and train replacement staff; furthermore, relationships with key community stakeholders sometimes had to be rebuilt after each staff transition. Further complicating the issue of staff turnover, at least two grantees reported difficulties identifying and recruiting front-line staff with the appropriate educational background and experience.

Challenges with staff supervision most often involved communicating, working with, and overseeing workers stationed in remote geographic locations who were often far removed from a project's headquarters. For example, NOAS operated a satellite office located approximately 200 miles from its main office, a distance that made it difficult to both staff the satellite office as well as to supervise out-stationed staff. Located in the metropolitan Denver area, AE oversaw staff that worked and hailed from a number of rural home communities; these geographically diffuse arrangements created obstacles to supervising and communicating with out-stationed staff, whose loyalties at times appeared to lie more with their local communities than with the urban grantee agencies.

Project Design

Some implementation challenges appeared to reflect the inherent limitations of the projects' program designs. Most notably, at least half of the RAR grantees—almost all of which are headquartered in urban areas—encountered the barrier of being perceived as outsiders in their targeted rural communities. As one project employee succinctly noted, "It is difficult for an outside organization to have credibility in rural communities. Saying, 'I'm from the big city and I'm here to help' just doesn't cut it." Given their status as outsiders, project staff found that establishing trust and building relationships required more effort and time than originally envisioned. Compounding the unanticipated work needed to gain credibility in rural communities, some grantees found in hindsight that the timeframes they had set to design and implement their projects had simply been too ambitious, and that a number of program activities

(such as hiring and training qualified staff) required much more time than anticipated. ACBC in North Carolina encountered a unique design challenge that involved the selection of rural counties in which to focus project operations. After identifying appropriate target counties during the initial project design phase, ACBC later learned that another agency with a similar

Exhibit H – Implementation and Evaluation Challenges

Challenges and Barriers	AE	ACBC	BJCB	CHS	TFC	LFC	NOAS	PATH	SFC	VDSS	No. of Grantees
Organizational											
Poor communication, resistance from partner agencies		x	x			x	x	x	x		6
Front-line staff turnover	x	x	x	x			x	x			6
Recruitment of qualified front-line staff	x		x								2
Project director/manager turnover	x						x				2
Problems with staff supervision	x						x				2
Project Design											
"Outsider" status in targeted communities	x		x				x	x	x		5
Underestimated time required to see results	x			x							2
Unanticipated delays establishing target regions		x									1
Logistical											
Geographic dispersion/isolation	x				x		x	x	x	x	6
Transportation and access difficulties	x		x		x			x	x	x	6
Systemic/Contextual											
Reluctance to working w/ outsiders			x				x		x	x	4
Low interest or resistance to adoption of special needs or "difficult-to-place" children			x			x	x				3
Economic barriers (e.g., low subsidy amounts, recession, high unemployment)				x	x	x					3
Evaluation											
Limited capacity of databases/info. mgt. systems	x			x			x	x		x	5
Staff resistance to evaluation	x						x	x			3
Lost or uncollected data	x		x						x		3
Evaluator turnover	x					x					2
Lack of or limited baseline data	x							x			2

goal of placing children with families in rural communities had already begun operations in these selected counties. Consequently, project implementation was significantly delayed as ACBC spent considerable time and resources identifying new target counties that did not overlap with the other project's service area, fit ACBC's definition of "rural," and which did not present inordinate logistical barriers to the conduct of program operations.

<u>Logistical Issues</u>

The logistical challenges of operating a project in often remote and expansive geographic areas were described by over half of the RAR grantees. In particular, large distances complicated efforts to deliver comprehensive services and supports to targeted communities, a problem that was exacerbated by limited public transportation options. Project staff often had to drive long distances to participate in marketing and recruitment activities, while prospective or approved resource families had to travel far to access routine services and supports. AE, which originally implemented project activities in three large Western states (Utah, Colorado, South Dakota), had to scale back or discontinue activities in Utah in part due to the difficulties of operating a program in such a large State with many isolated geographic areas.

<u>Systemic/Contextual Barriers</u>

In addition to challenges that arose from the design, planning, and organization of the RAR projects, many grantees addressed broader systemic barriers that arose in part from the unique culture and circumstances of rural communities. Resistance to working with outside urban-based organizations appeared to be not only an organizational barrier (as noted earlier), but reflective of a general mistrust and suspicion of people and organizations from larger urban communities. A total of four grantees encountered resistance from local child welfare and foster/adoption agencies to collaborating on the RAR projects due to unfavorable attitudes about urban agencies seeking to expand their work in rural areas. For example, BJCB documented a certain degree of territoriality on the part of local agencies that were suspicious of an urban-based organization coming into their communities to recruit "their" adoptive families. Resistance to working with the RAR grantees was sometimes intertwined with negative stereotypes about the families that were the target of the projects' outreach and recruitment efforts. For example, although SFC's project focused specifically on the recruitment of Spanish-speaking rural families, local adoption workers who were responsible for matching children with families were sometimes reluctant to agree to matches with these families. In other cases local workers' hesitance arose more from logistical considerations; VDSS, for instance, found that local adoption workers were reluctant to work with families recruited by the RAR project that lived outside of the workers' own counties or service areas.

Three RAR grantees documented resistance to the adoption of "urban" or "difficult-to-place" children in their targeted rural communities; this resistance arose from the persistent perception on the part of both social workers and local families that special-needs children are simply not adoptable, and on a more pragmatic level, to concerns about the burdens that these children might place on their communities' limited medical, mental health, and educational resources. For at least one grantee, many prospective adoptive families' explicit preference for white infants

made it more difficult to find adoptive homes for the older and largely minority children that were the focus of the grantee's recruitment efforts.

Economic factors also created impediments to the progress of some RAR projects. Three grantees documented concerns on the part of prospective adoptive families regarding the size of monthly adoption subsidies (which are often lower than traditional foster care maintenance payments), or about the possibility of losing allowances for clothing and school supplies. Other families worried about bearing the costs of special services (such as therapy) that adopted children might require on a long-term basis. For these families the challenge lay in assessing the costs of raising an adopted child and determining whether they could access adequate subsidies and resources to offset enough of these costs to make adoption financially viable. Adoptive parents' concerns about the economic burdens of adoption were exacerbated by high unemployment and difficult economic conditions generally in many rural communities, which contributed further to the reluctance of some families to consider adoption. Special local circumstances also influenced families' decision-making regarding adoption. For example, CHS' targeted regions included several major military bases in which the continual deployment of military personnel made it more difficult for some families to make major life-changing decisions such as whether to adopt a child.

Evaluation Challenges

Difficulties with evaluation implementation accompanied many of the programmatic challenges described by the RAR grantees. Some of the projects documented problems with frequent turnover in their third-party evaluators. For one grantee the loss of an evaluator meant that no evaluation data or reports were generated for well over year, leaving the evaluator who was eventually hired toward the end of its project with limited data to produce a final evaluation report. At least half of the grantees reported that fragmented, inaccessible, or inadequate information management systems impeded efforts to collect high-quality data. Moreover, because some projects had no direct control of the adoption process, they often relied on outside adoption agencies to supply data on home studies, placements, and adoption finalizations. In some instances these agencies proved reluctant to share these data due to concerns about client confidentiality. In other cases a project's complete reliance on local program staff—many of whom were located in remote geographic locations without regular supervision—to collect and report data contributed to gaps in or the complete loss of some information.

Breakdowns in the data collection and reporting process were sometimes attributable to a lack of training for front-line staff in appropriate data collection methods, as well as to staff resistance to evaluation more generally. Two grantees reported that the lack of understanding among some staff regarding the importance of high-quality evaluation data was a significant impediment to systematic information collection during their projects' early years, which subsequently contributed to gaps in the availability of baseline data to track outcomes over time.

Outcome Evaluation: Summary of Key Findings

The primary goal of the RAR grantees was to increase the number of adoptive families in selected rural communities, and ultimately, to increase the number of adoptions or other positive

permanency outcomes (e.g., guardianship) for targeted children. The process of facilitating permanence for children in foster care involved five main components: (1) recruiting potential adoptive parents, (2) pre-adoption training, (3) completion of home studies/foster care licenses, (4) placing children with approved families, and (5) providing post-permanency services and supports. As part of their initiatives, many of the sites also aimed to create public awareness about adoption and of the needs of children in foster care. Exhibit I below summarizes outcomes reported by the 10 RAR grantees for each of these phases along the permanency continuum. One note of caution is that project activities at many sites were intertwined with other grantee initiatives that focused on creating awareness and interest in adoption; consequently in some cases it is difficult to associate observed outcomes directly with activities implemented through the RAR projects.

Exhibit I – Key RAR Outcomes

Grantee	# of Inquiries	# of Apps/ Intakes	# of Families Receiving Training	# of Home Studies Completed/ Licenses Approved	# of Children Placed (Adoptions and other Placements Combined)	# of Adoptions Finalized (Out of all Placements)	# Families Receiving Post-adopt. Services
AE	>140	-	140	176	-	-	168
ACBC	>343	-	343	-	31	5	-
BJCB	351	-	43	16	8	4	-
CHS	5,558	586	246	60	115	8	97
TFC	202	67	-	16	32	3	-
LFC	1,451	-	-	-	269	-	-
NOAS	1,833	-	-	58	55	-	-
PATH	769	166	90	28	101	56	-
SFC	1,351	120	77	55	61	44	48
VDSS	225	-	-	30	13	-	-

Recruitment

An analysis of recruitment findings from the RAR grantees is complicated by the varying definitions of "recruitment" used by the projects. As noted earlier in this synthesis, most grantees regarded a family as "recruited" if it made any inquiry about adoption or foster care. As would be expected, the number of inquiries ranged from site to site depending on factors such as the specific focus of each initiative and its geographic scope; most grantees reported well under 1,000 inquiries throughout the duration of their projects, although some reported well over 1,000 inquires and one grantee reported more than 5,500 inquiries. Two grantees (AE and ACBC) did not include the actual number of inquiries received in their final reports; therefore, the numbers

provided in Exhibit I are estimates based on the number of families that were known to have participated in adoption/resource family home training. Four grantees (CHS, TFC, PATH, SFC) used a narrower definition of recruitment that distinguished between inquiries and intake activities such as completing an application or initial intake interview. The available data from these grantees illustrate a sense of the significant "funneling" effect that occurs between an initial inquiry and the decision to begin the adoption process. For example, of the 5,558 inquiries reported by CHS, only 586 (10.5 percent) actually resulted in a completed application and initial interview. Similarly, of the 202 inquiries reported by TFC only 67 (33 percent) resulted in a completed application or other intake activity.

Although grantees varied widely in terms of the geographic size and population density of their targeted service areas, no clear correlation exists between these variables and the success of their recruitment efforts. Exhibit J provides estimates of the degree of recruitment penetration among projects that identified specific counties or other geographic entities in which they targeted their recruitment efforts, from which estimates of the size of the adult populations in their respective communities that would be most likely to foster or adopt (i.e., persons between the ages of 18 and 65) could be derived. Recruitment penetration rates fell well below one percent of the estimated adult populations of all grantees' target communities; however, some projects appeared to have more success in relative terms that was independent of the size or population density of these communities. For example, whereas LFC engaged in marketing and outreach

Exhibit J –Estimated Recruitment Penetration Rates

Grantee	# of Inquiries	Estimated Pop. of Targeted Communities[6]	% of Population Making an Inquiry
AE	>140	-	-
ACBC	>343	350,004	>.10%
BJCB	351	251,578	.13%
CHS	5,558	-	-
TFC	202	-	-
LFC	1,451	406,009	.35%
NOAS	1,833	401,182	.45%
PATH	769	-	-
SFC	1,351	1,191,960	.11%
VDSS	225	731,838	.03%

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[6] Adult population estimates are based on 2000 Census Bureau data available online at http://quickfacts.census.gov/ qfd/index.html.

in an entire state (Vermont) and received inquiries from an estimated .35 percent of the entire statewide adult population, NOAS' recruitment activities were limited to four rural counties in Ohio, through which it received inquiries from approximately .45 percent of these counties' adult populations. VDSS, in contrast, targeted 27 largely rural counties in Virginia but only received inquiries from an estimated .03 percent of their adult populations. As such, the projects' relative success in recruiting potential resource families may be tied more to the design, diversity, or intensity of their outreach and marketing activities than to the size or density of their target markets. Because children who were eventually placed and/or adopted in the RAR projects' targeted rural communities often did not come from these communities originally, a similar analysis that estimates the proportion of the target communities' foster care populations that were placed and/or adopted is not feasible.

Training

Although all of the RAR grantees reported that they provided adoption/foster care training and support, actual data on the number of families that received these services were available from only six sites. The number of families that participated in trainings ranged from a low of 43 to well over 300 families; at least two projects offered dual certification programs that allowed trainees to become both licensed foster care and adoptive families. As with applications and other intake activities, the same funneling effect can be observed between the inquiry phase and the training phase. Of the 1,351 families that inquired into SFC's program, for example, only 77 (6 percent) actually completed adoption training. Most training sessions were provided to groups of families, with at least two families participating at any given time. The grantees documented considerable efforts to respond to families' needs for more accessible and convenient training options. For example, in response to families' requests, at least two grantees began offering weekend training sessions to minimize travel and to allow families to complete the training in as few as one or two weekends. Other innovative strategies used by grantees to address the training needs of rural families included the use of distance learning centers, web-based support services, and the development and provision of home-based training materials and services.

Licensures and Home Studies Completed

Data on the number of approved foster care licenses and/or completed home studies were available from eight RAR grantees; in keeping with the broader goal of most projects to enhance permanency resources in rural communities generally, most grantees did not differentiate between foster care licensures and home studies. As with other outcome measures the number of approved licenses/home studies varied widely across grantees from as few as 16 to as many as 176. Moreover, as with other measures the same funneling effect is evident in which the number of approved families is often much smaller than the number of families that participated in training. AE's project was the one exception to this trend, for which for unknown reasons the number of approved homes exceeded the number that participated in training. In most cases the RAR projects partnered with local child welfare or adoption agencies to conduct adoption home studies. Factors that appeared to exert the greatest influence on the completion of home studies included the length of a RAR project's presence in a community and the degree to which a project was initially welcomed and supported; projects with longer tenures and more community support generally succeeded in shepherding more home studies through the approval process.

Several grantees described various factors that impeded the completion of more home studies. VDSS, for example, reported difficulties with coordinating its in-house home study process with the pre-adoption training provided by several external agencies that were not accustomed to working collaboratively. Because pre-adoption training had to be completed before the home study could begin, many home studies were delayed due to problems with scheduling the trainings in a timely manner. As a result, the adoption process was not the smooth and seamless experience the grantee had originally envisioned. Grantees took numerous steps to mitigate some of the barriers to the completion of home studies. For instance, some projects hired adoption "coordinators" who worked with prospective adoptive families throughout and beyond the home study process. One RAR grantee offered weekend group trainings on home studies to families that often felt overwhelmed by the home study process.

Placements

Nine out of the ten grantees reported findings on placements that occurred directly or in part as a result of their recruitment, training, and licensure activities. The data reported by most grantees included both adoptive placements and other proposed permanent arrangements, such as legal guardianship and placements with relatives/kin. As with other measures, the number of placements varied widely by site from as few as 8 to as many as 269 reported by LFC. Because relative/kin placements often occur on an emergency or tentative basis before licensure or home study approval, the "funneling" effect observed with some other variables is not as evident; in fact, in some cases the number of placements exceeded or was very similar to the number of home study/licensure approvals. Several grantees reported that the number of placed children grew during the latter part of the grant period, reflecting the fact that it can take several years to build the momentum needed to move families from the awareness and inquiry phase to the action phase of the permanency continuum.

Most grantees provided limited information on the demographic and case characteristics of placed children in their reports; however, all stressed their efforts to secure permanency for older children, ethnic/racial minorities, and those with emotional, cognitive, or behavioral challenges. In addition, several grantees described their efforts to keep sibling groups intact by recruiting families that would accept the placement of two or more siblings.

Adoptions

Although the original intent of the RAR grants was to increase adoptions of special needs children by families in rural communities, relatively few adoptions were ultimately finalized as a direct result of the projects. Data on adoption finalizations were available from 6 grantees, with fewer than 10 adoptions documented in most cases over the five-year course of the projects. For three grantees (ACBC, CHS, TFC) these adoptions were the eventual outcome of between 7 and 16 percent of all documented placements. PATH and SFC were exceptions both in terms of actual numbers and proportions of adoptions; by the conclusion of its project, PATH had documented 56 finalized adoptions (55 percent of all recorded placements) while SFC had documented 44 adoptions (72 percent of all recorded placements). As suggested earlier in this synthesis, the fact that most RAR grantees reported no adoption data or only modest adoption outcomes must be considered in light of that fact the most projects embraced a wider definition of permanency that included guardianship and stable long-term placements with relatives or kin.

Post-Adoption Supports

Nearly every grantee reported providing some level of service and support following the placement and/or adoption of a child; only three grantees (AE, CHS, SFC) reported findings on the number of families to whom post-adoption services were provided. Post-adoption services included trainings on topics such as attachment issues, fetal alcohol syndrome, and marriage and relationship enrichment strategies. At some sites, post-adoption services included ongoing one-on-one support to adoptive families. For example, CHS project staff conducted regular home visits to families during the first year after adoption finalization. Several other projects facilitated monthly support and education groups, held family retreats (e.g., SFC), and matched new adoptive parents with mentor families that had previous adoption experience.

Changes in Adoption Awareness and Knowledge

In general, grantees that surveyed or interviewed community stakeholders or project participants found that respondents' awareness and knowledge of adoption increased somewhat over the life of the projects. NOAS, for example, fielded a written mail survey in its target rural communities that indicated a modest increase in knowledge of the characteristics of Ohio children waiting for adoption, i.e., older, more likely to be African American, and with a variety of special developmental needs. In its final report, AE noted a rough correlation between its adoption awareness activities (including information tables hosted over 64 days at various community events and adoption kiosks stationed in local malls for a total of 1,165 days) and an increase in telephone inquiries about adoption. Through a series of telephone interviews conducted as part of PATH's evaluation, state and local adoption/foster care agency workers in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and South Dakota identified greater awareness of the need for adoptive homes, as well as increased interest among families in starting the adoption process, as key influences of the RAR projects in their respective States.

Dissemination of Evaluation Findings

As a group the RAR grantees were notably proactive in their efforts to share findings, challenges, and lessons learned from their projects with the broader adoption and child welfare field. In 2009, eight RAR grantees co-authored an article submitted to the *Journal of Public Child Welfare* entitled "Recruitment of Rural Adoptive and Foster Parents: A Case Study of National Projects Engaging Families in Child Welfare Services." Three RAR grantees—AE, NOAS, and PATH—were particularly active in disseminating information from their projects to wider audiences through a variety of formats, including conference presentations, panel discussions, workshops, and articles submitted or accepted for publication in numerous magazines and professional journals. Highlights of these dissemination efforts are summarized in Exhibit K on the following page.

Exhibit K –Summary of Selected RAR Information Dissemination Activities

Grantee	Publications	Presentations
AE	A New Rural Advantage - The Rural Adoption Cooperative Takes Action in America's Less Populated Areas. *Fostering Families Today* (May/June 2006) The Realities of Rural Adoptive Parenting. *Fostering Families Today* (Nov/Dec 2007) (In addition, *Fostering Families Today Magazine* frequently featured photos of waiting children in AE's target communities)	Adoption In Rural America: Successes and Challenges (2008). Workshop presented at the Child Welfare League of America, Regional Meeting of the Mountain-Plains and Midwest Regions The Realities of Rural Adoptive Parenting (2008). Workshop presented at the Colorado Summit on Children, Youth and Families, Keystone, CO The Different Cultures of Rural Adoption and how they Affect Recruitment (2007). Workshop presented at the Child Welfare League of America National Conference, Washington, DC Rural Marketing Techniques (2007). Workshop presented at the Child Welfare League of America National Conference, Washington, DC Rural Adoptive Families - Resources for Our Waiting Children (2005). Workshop presented at the Child Welfare League of America National Conference, Washington, DC
NOAS		Recruiting Rural Foster-Adoption Families: Insights from Recent National Demonstration Projects (2009). Panel discussion at the 34th Annual National Institute on Social Work and Human Services in Rural Areas, Duluth, MN Presentations at multiple conferences and meetings sponsored by various state and national child welfare organizations, including the North American Council on Adoptable Children; Child Welfare League of America; Public Children Services Association of Ohio; and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
PATH	In Search of Adoptive Families: REACHing Out to Native Communities. *Fostering Families Today* (Sept/Oct 2008) Article on PATH's American Indian recruitment efforts published in the Sep/Oct 2005 issue of *Social Work Today*	Working with Indian Communities (2008). Workshop presented at the North American Council on Adoptable Children National Conference, Ottawa, Ontario Healing Ceremonies as an Approach to Permanency for American Indian Communities (2007). Forum facilitated at the Child Welfare League of America National Conference, Washington, DC. Collaboration with First Nations Orphan Association (2006). Community forum at National American Indian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, San Diego, CA Rural Adoption (2005). Panel presentation at the Child Welfare League of America National Conference, Washington, DC

Summary and Recommendations

The 10 RAR grantees described in this paper employed varied approaches and experienced a range of successes and challenges in recruiting adoptive and other resource families in rural areas. Most RAR projects involved a combination of general outreach and recruitment activities through the use of print and visual media; targeted recruitment activities using recruitment specialists, collaborations with local civic and service organizations, and special recruitment events; expanded training opportunities for adoptive families and social service agency staff; and post-adoption services such as mentoring programs and support groups for adoptive families. Although officially charged with increasing the number of adoptive families and adopted children in their targeted communities, in practice many grantees (particularly those working in AI communities) engaged in recruitment, training, and retention activities that encompassed a broader range of permanency alternatives, including legal guardianship and relative/kinship care. In this sense the RAR projects may be more properly conceived of as promoting the recruitment and training of resource families in general rather than adoptive families exclusively.

Grantees' assessments of their outreach and recruitment efforts suggest that no one approach was uniformly effective across all projects, although several projects found print and electronic media (e.g., feature articles in local newspapers about a project or specific children awaiting adoption, or a feature report on a local TV news station) to be most effective in reaching and motivating target audiences. Other traditional marketing tools such as the direct mailing or distribution of flyers and brochures were observed to be less effective overall. The grantees addressed numerous barriers to the implementation of their recruitment, training, and post-permanency activities, including resistance to collaboration among local child welfare/adoption agencies, their status as outsiders in rural communities, logistical impediments that arose from the vast and diffuse geography of rural America, and perceptions (whether real or perceived) of the difficulties involved in assuming financial and legal responsibility for largely urban special-needs children.

The implementation challenges confronting the RAR grantees may account in part for the relatively modest success of the projects in augmenting the supply of adoptive/resource families and increasing adoptions in rural communities. Although some grantees reported thousands of inquiries about becoming resource parents, a significant "funneling" effect occurred such that proportionally few home studies or foster care licenses were approved, while eventual matches and placements varied widely from under 10 to over 250. Despite the original intent of the RAR grants, relatively few adoptions occurred as a result of project activities, with fewer than 10 finalized adoptions documented in most cases. The comparative success of SFC and PATH in finalizing adoptions is worthy of note; in particular, SFC's use of an "opinion leader" model that leveraged the influence of the Catholic Church in Hispanic/Latino communities may be particularly effective in certain cultural contexts. On the other hand, PATH's success is likely attributable to a wide range of organizational and contextual factors, most notably to PATH's commitment and adherence to culturally appropriate recruitment strategies as well as its effective collaboration with supportive partners. The fact that most RAR grantees reported no adoption data or only modest adoption outcomes must be considered in light of that fact that most projects embraced a wider definition of permanency that included legal guardianship and long-term placements with relatives or kin.

The barriers and successes experienced by the RAR grantees in implementing their adoption recruitment and training programs have policy and practice implications for adoption/foster care agencies seeking to undertake similar initiatives in rural communities, particularly those involving the placement and adoption of special-needs children. Some major lessons learned and associated recommendations for Federal funding agencies and for the child welfare field in general are discussed below.

Rely on local agencies to spearhead adoption efforts

Most RAR grantees documented substantial challenges with fostering collaborative relationships with local foster care/adoption agencies, whose cooperation was often critical to the success of the grantees' outreach, recruitment, training, and placement efforts. In many cases these difficulties arose from mistrust of large urban-based organizations among local agency staff as well as within the community at large. Given the indispensable role of local child welfare organizations based in rural communities in ensuring the achievement of positive permanency outcomes, these rural entities might be encouraged to serve as the lead agencies in spearheading future rural adoption recruitment efforts. In small, tightly-knit populations like those served by the RAR grantees, these rural agencies would have a distinct advantage due to their longstanding presence in the community and their existing relationships with families, civic organizations, and other service providers. Alternatively, future initiatives could be based from the beginning on formal partnerships between rural organizations and urban agencies that could strengthen rural adoption recruitment and programming activities through their greater personnel and material resources.

Leverage technology to overcome logistical barriers

The vast and sometimes sparsely populated areas served by many RAR grantees presented both challenges and opportunities to enhance adoption outreach, recruitment, and training efforts through technological innovations. Some projects described their planned or actual utilization of the Internet and video conferencing to enhance their parent-child matching efforts. The use of these and similar technologies could be expanded to further enhance the search for suitable relative and non-relative permanency resources, as well as to provide pre-adoption training (e.g., Web-based training curricula and Webinars) and post-permanency support services (e.g., videoconferences between adoption mentors and new adoptive families). These efforts, however, would be predicated on the presence of adequate technological infrastructure in targeted rural communities, especially Internet access for prospective resource families.

Adapt the definition of "rural" to fit the geographic and regional characteristics of target communities

It became evident within the first year of RAR project implementation that a uniform definition of "rural" would not give grantees the flexibility they needed to adapt their programs to a variety of regional geographic realities. Although the concept of "rural" may seem self evident, in truth it encompasses many different configurations of small towns ranging in size from a few hundred to many thousands of residents; sparsely populated open country; and even semi-rural "exurbs" on the fringes of larger urban communities. Organizations engaged in future rural adoption

initiatives will need similar latitude to define parameters for rural communities that are reasonable but still afford adequate flexibility to ensure the maximum diffusion of outreach, recruitment, and training efforts.

Formally expand outreach and recruitment efforts to include other permanency options

Although widely considered to be the most desirable permanency outcome for children in foster care, a major increase in adoption rates may simply be untenable in certain rural communities for both pragmatic and cultural reasons. Many rural families have modest incomes and may be hesitant to accept the additional financial burdens of caring for an adopted child, while the experience of projects working in AI communities illustrates the limits of the acceptance of legal adoption in certain cultural contexts. Given these inevitable restrictions on the growth of adoption in rural areas, future projects may wish to formally expand their activities to embrace a broader range of positive permanency outcomes, including legal guardianship and long-term kinship/relative care. These alternatives may be more financially tenable for lower-income rural families (especially in light of the expansion of guardianship subsidies under the Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008) and more culturally acceptable in certain communities while providing safe, stable, and nurturing homes for children in out-of-home placement.

Ensure that adequate community resources are in place to support adoptions in rural communities

Financial considerations aside, many adoptive families need access to a range of medical, developmental, mental health, and educational resources to ensure that the adoption of special-needs children remain viable in the long run. As the experiences of many RAR grantees suggest, these resources are often in short supply in rural communities. Future projects may wish to target their outreach and recruitment efforts in rural areas that have a relatively greater abundance of these types of services, or develop strategies to expand access to these resources through partnerships with urban-based social service providers.

Expand and enhance adoption recruitment and training programs in urban communities

As documented by the RAR grantees, older minority children from urban environments, many of whom have special developmental and behavioral needs, make up the majority of children in need of adoptive homes. At the same time, the projects encountered numerous daunting barriers to increasing the supply of adoptive homes in rural communities, including deeply-seated negative beliefs about the adoptability of special-needs children and, as noted above, the paucity of resources to ensure the success of adoptive placements. Without discounting the valuable role that rural communities can play in offering stable and permanent homes for children in out-of-home placement, consideration should be given to the investment of greater resources to build adoption recruitment and training programs in urban areas that have more resources, greater numbers of potential adoptive families, and in which negative attitudes towards special-needs children may be less pronounced.

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Listed below is the final, agreed upon list of shared data elements to be collected by grants funded under the "Projects to Improve Recruitment of Adoptive Families in Rural Communities" (Priority Area 2003A.2). In addition to the list of shared data elements, at the end of this paper is a second list of possible data elements that individual sites might also consider, as appropriate, for your projects. We include the second list for informational purposes only.

I.   Shared Data Elements

To assess the impact of <u>Recruitment</u> activities, projects agreed to collect:

1) **The total number of Inquires** made to the agency (or agencies) through telephone calls, response cards, web-based inquiries and other means of contact generated as a result of this initiative. In defining "inquiry," the group clarified that an inquiry must involve an active gesture on the part of families to request additional information about adoption. Projects are encouraged to collect all inquires resulting from the project's recruitment campaign, not just those inquires about adopting a child from the child welfare system.

a) **Information collected at the point of initial inquiry would include:**
- Family's name
- Family's address (or zip code) and
- How they first heard about this recruitment initiative (or how they heard about foster care children needing adoptive homes).

It is acknowledged that not all individuals inquiring about adoption will want to provide the agency with their names or zip codes. However, it will still be important for grantees to try to track how the individual learned about the project.

b) **The shared checklist of recruitment methods includes**:
- TV/Radio
- Print Media (newspapers, magazines)
- Outdoor advertising (billboards, buses, trucks)
- Internet/web based outreach
- Direct mailing
- Outreach through churches/other faith based organizations
- Presentations at community events
- Promotional materials distributed to local business/day care programs
- Agency newsletter
- Referral from another adoptive parent (friend and/or adoption ambassadors)
- Referral from a social services professional
- Other _____

If a site is using unique outreach methods (such as the recruitment kiosks to be developed by the Colorado site) these methods would be added to the site's individual list of recruitment methods and reported separately.

2) **The number of Completed Applications** when a family wants to begin the home study/certification process. It will be at this stage that most demographic data describing the recruited families/individuals will be captured including:

   a) **Family Demographics**

   - Age (of each prospective adoptive parent completing application)
   - Race (of each prospective adoptive parent completing application – see categories listed under child demographics later in this paper)
   - Family income
   - Family composition
     - single/married/divorced/two unmarried adults/civil union/widowed;
     - number of biological children
     - number of adopted children
     - number of other children living in the home
   - Does family currently serve as a foster home? (Y/N)

   To assess an agency's performance in <u>retaining</u> families, sites will collect:

3) **The number of families that begin training** and

4) **The number that complete training.**

   We encourage projects to count the number of **families (not individuals)** that participate in and complete training so that it will be easier to document the rate of client (i.e. family) attrition at each stage of the recruitment process. Several projects plan to determine why families do not complete the adoption process through interviewing (or looking at case notes of) families that do not complete the certification process. The first category includes reasons people give for not completing the adoption process. Alternatively, the adoption agency may determine that the family should not become an approved adoptive home.

   a) **Reasons families give for not completing the adoption process (check all that apply)**
   - Employment
   - Became pregnant
   - Moved out of area
   - Illness
   - Determined that adopting a foster child is not a good match for family
   - While adoption from the foster care system is still an option, the family needs time to re-evaluate the decision (application is on hold)

- Decided to pursue another type of adoption (international or private)
- Adoption services are not convenient/accessible
- Other _____

   b) Agency determined family was not an appropriate adoptive placement

5) **The number of families that complete licensing/become approved adoptive homes.** Grantees should only count the families recruited from the targeted rural communities who have been certified/approved as an adoptive home.

6) **Number of children placed in adoptive homes.** It was agreed that the children to be counted under this element will be those with the agency-approved goal of adoption. At the time of the adoptive placement, projects will be encouraged to collect demographic information about the children placed by this initiative. As discussed by the group, demographic and descriptive data would include:

   a. **Child Demographics**
      - Date of birth
      - Date of initial placement in foster care
      - Date of adoptive placement
      - Is child being placed with siblings (Y/N/NA)
      - If yes, number of siblings
      - Child's Race (check all that apply)
         i. American Indian or Alaska Native;
         ii. Asian;
         iii. Black or African American;
         iv. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander;
         v. White;
         vi. Multi- Race or,
         vii. Unable to determine.

      - Is child of Hispanic or Latin ethnicity:
         i. yes
         ii. no
         iii. Unable to determine

      - Child's Disabilities – clinically diagnosed (Check all that apply)
         i. mental retardation (Y/N)
         ii. visually or hearing impaired (Y/N)
         iii. physically disabled (Y/N)
         iv. emotionally disturbed (Y/N)
         v. Other medically diagnosed conditions requiring special care (Y/N).

7. **Number of adoption finalizations (by court).**

   Information should be collected by family/case <u>and</u> by number of child(ren) adopted.
   To assess <u>adoption stability</u> – pre- and post-finalization:

8. **Number of adoption disruptions** (prior to finalization)

   The remaining data elements should be collected **by child** because disruptions and/or
   dissolution may happen to one child in a sibling group.
   - Date of disruption
   - Length of time before disruption

9. **Number of adoption dissolutions** (after finalization).
   - Date of dissolution
   - Length of time before dissolution

II. Optional Data Elements

- **The number of applications mailed out as a result of the recruitment campaign**;

- **Time between key events** (e.g. time between the inquiry call and completion of training,
  or from inquiry to having a child placed in the home);

- **Placement rate of urban children in rural homes** (urban children being defined by the
  location of the *agency* responsible for the foster child)**;**

- **Changes in family and child well-being over time** (using standardized scales or multi-
  point surveys);

- **Number of Adoption "Displacements" (**temporary placements in foster care, with
  relatives, or in residential treatment facilities after the adoption placement in order to
  preserve the adoptive placement);

- **The Receipt of Post Placement Services** including:
  - Information and referral
  - Individual counseling
  - Family counseling
  - Support groups
  - Parent training
  - Respite care
  - Family Preservation services
  - Crisis intervention services
  - Other _____