

Exceptions to Termination of Parental Rights Timelines for Children in Foster Care

ASPE Generic Information Collection Request

OMB No. 0990-0421

Supporting Statement – Section B

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Program Official/Project Officer

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Section B – Data Collection Procedures

1. Respondent Universe and Sampling Methods

Two types of qualitative data collection will be conducted with respondents:

- A. Virtual site visits with professionals involved in termination of parental rights (TPR) decisions.** ASPE’s contractor, Mathematica, will conduct four virtual site visits. Each site visit will involve up to four or five small group or individual telephone interviews. The professionals could include: (1) child welfare administrators or caseworkers; (2) judges, court personnel, or attorneys; and (3) other professionals or stakeholders who may be involved in the TPR process.
- B. Small group telephone interviews with parents and former foster youth.** Mathematica will also conduct three small group interviews via telephone or webinar with individuals who have experienced the TPR process as a parent or a child. Participants may include: (1) biological parents whose children experienced TPR, (2) foster or adoptive parents with TPR experience, and (3) young adults who are former foster youth.

Site Selection

We used several sources of information to select sites for the virtual site visits, including findings from ASPE’s intramural analysis of TPR, which is based on data from the Administration for Children and Families’ administrative data on foster care, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, or AFCARS, as well as findings on timely TPR from federal child welfare monitoring visits (the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and Program Improvement Plans (PIP)). Specifically, the CFSR information helped us to identify sites that may be achieving the TPR timeliness standards and those that may not. For those that are not, we reviewed what corrective strategies they have specified in their PIP. Also, the AFCARS data provided information about what states have higher or lower percentages of cases with TPRs, the timeliness of TPRs, and the use of relative placements when in foster care after the ASFA timeline. In addition to these sources of information, we asked key informants to recommend sites that we should visit, such as those that may be using innovative strategies to achieve timely TPRs or those with practices which may cause delays in the TPR process.

We selected six sites for virtual visits, four primary sites and two back-up sites. To understand the range of perspectives and practices with regard to TPR processes, among the primary sites, we selected two sites that appear to have timely TPR practices according to the range of information sources we looked at, and two sites that look to have slower TPR processes or fewer cases that experience TPR.

The information from AFCARS and the CFSR/PIPs are at the state level, but we will ideally aim to identify sites at a more local level, such as a county or local jurisdiction. To do so, we will ask state-level participants in our initial interviews to recommend local sites or we will identify the largest locality within a given state.

Table 1 shows the six recommend study sites, four of which were suggested as the primary sites and two of which were suggested as back-up sites.

Table 1. Site selection summary

State	Percent of cases with TPR ^a	Percent of TPR cases with TPR before 17 months ^a	Rationale for selection	Primary or back-up site
Sites with timely TPRs				
Texas	36.9%	89.5%	High rates of TPR; high percentage of cases with TPR occurring before ASFA timeline; early TPR filing practices; key informant recommendation	Primary
Utah	29.4%	87.8%	Met CFSR standard for TPR; relatively high rates of TPR; high percentage of cases with TPR occurring before ASFA timeline; key informant recommendation	Primary
West Virginia	30.1%	85.0%	Met CFSR standard for TPR; relatively high rates of TPR; high percentage of cases with TPR occurring before ASFA timeline; low rates of relative placement	Back-up
Sites with less timely TPRs				
Illinois	29.1%	15.6%	Relatively high rates of TPR; low percentage of cases with TPR occurring by ASFA timeline; long length of stay in foster care; relatively high use of relative foster care placements; key informant recommendation	Primary
Wisconsin	17.7%	31.7%	Relatively low percentage of cases with TPR occurring by ASFA timeline; relatively high use of relative foster care placements; state is currently considering new policy to shorten TPR timelines; key informant recommendation, including that a local site should be Wapaca County for focusing on preservation of family relationships	Primary
Rhode Island	21.2%	22.2%	Moderate percentage of cases with TPR occurring by ASFA timeline; relatively high use of relative foster care placements; engaged in court improvement project for TPR	Back-up

^a Data are from ASPE's analysis of AFCARS.

Recruiting professionals for virtual site visit interviews

Recruiting professionals for the virtual site visit interviews will begin with Internet research to identify the key agencies and departments that are involved in the TPR process, specifically the state or county's child welfare agency and family courts. We will also consider individuals recommended to us through the key informant interviews. As we identify and speak with site visit participants, we will also use snowball sampling, i.e., asking them to recommend other professionals whom we may recruit for the study.

Mathematica staff will first reach out via email to the adoption manager of the state child welfare agency to inform them of the study and ask for their participation or whether one of their colleagues would be willing to participate in an interview regarding local TPR policies, practices, and perspectives. We will aim to recruit 3 of each type of respondent per site, for a total of 60 respondents across all 4 sites.

The interview that includes the state adoption manager will occur first. During that interview we will ask them to recommend a local jurisdiction so that we can learn about TPR perceptions and practices at the local level. We will also ask for recommendations of individuals at local child welfare agencies, courts, and other organizations who may be stakeholders at the local site. Once we identify a local jurisdiction, we will reach out via a recruitment email to the local child welfare agencies, courts, or other organizations. If state adoption manager does not recommend anyone, we will consult with Administration for Children and Families regional office child welfare program specialists and may also search the Internet to identify the directors of these local organizations and send them a recruitment email asking whether they or another staff member would be willing to participate in an interview regarding local TPR policies and practices.

Recruiting parents and former foster youth for small group interviews

Mathematica will recruit up to five participants for each of three small group telephone interviews with parents or former foster youth, for a total of 15 participants across the three group interviews. These participants will not be site-based, rather they are being recruited to provide their experience from a general and not geographically-based perspective. We will conduct one 90-minute interview with each of the following types of participants:

- Biological parents who experienced TPR
- Foster or adoptive parents who experienced TPR
- Former foster youth (young adults who are at least 18 or older) who experienced TPR

To recruit participants for the small group interviews, Mathematica will reach out to ACF's child welfare technical assistance provider, the Center for States, for their assistance with disseminating a recruitment email to members of its consultant pools (former foster youth and parents). The email will inform them of the study and ask them to participate in the small group telephone interview. The recruitment letter will clarify that their participation is voluntary and outside of the Center for States compensation for the time that they would participate.

Mathematica will provide a \$50 gift card to each parent and former foster youth as an incentive to participate. Evidence shows that remuneration bolsters recruitment and attendance at small group interviews. Working parents are busy people, and low-income parents face additional barriers to participating in an interview. To ensure that our incentive is not coercive, consent scripts indicate and interviewers will be trained to make it very clear that participants who choose to leave the group early or prefer not to respond to certain questions will still receive the \$50 gift card. Mathematica staff will track the cards that are paid out by completing a log when they send the gift card to participants.

2. Procedures for the Collection of Information

Mathematica will collect data on policies, practices, and attitudes that underlie performance on timely TPRs through (1) four virtual site visits, which will consist of four to five telephone interviews with child welfare, court, and other professionals from each site; and (2) three small group interviews with parents and former foster youth.

Two teams of two Mathematica researchers each will collect the data, and they will be trained in the consent and data collection processes. Each team will be composed of one senior researcher to lead the interviews and one junior researcher to assist with scheduling, notetaking, and other supportive roles.

Before each site visit or small group interview, the senior researcher will read a consent script to the participants to inform them about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and any risks that may be involved. As the senior researcher concludes reading the consent script, he or she will ask the participants for their verbal consent to participate in the study and for their permission to record the interviews for transcription purposes. We will have one consent script for the site visit interviews and one consent script for the small group interviews (both may be found in the Attachment).

Virtual site visits

As mentioned, the site visits will be virtual, meaning that we will conduct four to five interviews via telephone with professionals, such as child welfare and court staff, who have experience with and knowledge of the TPR process. Virtual site visits are more efficient than in-person site visits because they allow us to save on travel costs and to better accommodate the participants' schedules. Based on our experience with virtual site visits, we also do not think that they detract from the quality of the data collection. The visits will focus on understanding TPR policies, practice, and perceptions, not on observing interactions among staff or clients (a key focal point of in-person site visits).

Site visit interview participants will include the following types of professionals: (1) child welfare administrators or practitioners; (2) judges, court personnel, or attorneys; and (3) other professionals or stakeholders who may be involved in the TPR process. We will use one interview protocol for the site visit interviews, which can be adapted to both the professional perspective and the knowledge of the different types of respondents. For each site visit, we will conduct four to five telephone interviews, which are expected to run for 60 minutes. We will recruit one to three participants per interview.

Small group interviews

In addition to the virtual site visits, data collection includes conducting three small group interviews via telephone with those who have experienced the TPR process as a parent or a child. We will conduct one small group interview for each of the following types of participants: (1) biological parents with TPR experience, (2) foster or adoptive parents with TPR experience; and (3) adults who are former foster youth who experienced TPR. Each small group interview will run for 90-minutes. We have developed one interview protocol for all small group interviews for use with these respondents, which will be adapted to the perspective and knowledge of the different respondents in the particular session (see Attachment B, Discussion Guides). As mentioned, we are aiming to have 4 to 5 participants for each small group interview, for a total of 12 to 15 participants across all three interviews.

3. Methods to Maximize Response Rates Deal with Nonresponse

We believe this data collection will be of interest to state officials and stakeholders, increasing the likelihood of response. ACF is currently sponsoring an adoption initiative aimed at improving states' adoption performance. TPR issues have come up repeatedly in discussions with states and we believe therefore that the subject matter of this study is likely to be of significant interest, helping us recruit participants. In addition, conducting the interviews by telephone at respondents' convenience also should lower the burden to participate and maximize participation. For all those recruited to participate, we will send confirmation and reminder emails in order to encourage follow through.

With respect to the non-professional respondents, in addition to confirmation and reminder emails, we expect the gift cards used as incentives will encourage response. In addition, by recruiting from among the youth and family consultant pool of the ACF child welfare technical assistance center, we will identify individuals interested in sharing their experiences with the child welfare system and who are accustomed to doing so.

4. Test of Procedures or Methods to be Undertaken

All contractor staff who will be leading and participating in interviews and discussion groups will receive training on the discussion guide protocols to ensure consistent interviews across sites. All senior site visitors have subject matter expertise in child welfare and have extensive experience conducting qualitative interviews. Discussion guide protocols have been developed by the contractor in close coordination with ASPE, and have been reviewed by relevant subject matter experts in ACF.

5. Individuals Consulted on Statistical Aspects and Individuals Collecting and/or Analyzing Data

Contractor staff include child welfare subject matter experts with extensive experience with performing qualitative data collection. These experts are listed in the table below.

Project staff and role

Individual	Affiliation and Position	Role
Elizabeth Weigensberg	Mathematica, Senior Researcher and Child Welfare Lead	Project lead, senior researcher for leading interviews
Matthew Stagner	Mathematica, Senior Fellow	Project Quality Assurance
Allon Kalisher	Mathematica, Senior Child Welfare Lead	Senior researcher for leading interviews
Cassandra McClellan	Mathematica, Program Analyst	Support role for interview scheduling and notetaking
Nuzhat Islam	Mathematica, Project Manager	Support role for interview scheduling and notetaking
Jessica Heeringa	Mathematica, Senior Researcher	Project director of overall task order

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS – Section B

Note: Attachments are included as separate files as instructed.

- Attachment: Discussion guides including consent scripts