

Advancing a Family-Centered Approach:

Lessons from the Prevention and Family Recovery (PFR) Initiative

PUTTING IDEAS INTO ACTION - KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION SERIES | AUGUST 2021



LESSON 3: A Formal Governance Structure is Necessary to Prioritize, Oversee, and Sustain the Family Treatment Court

This lesson is one of a set of nine lessons from the Prevention and Family Recovery (PFR) initiative. The other PFR lessons and an overview of the complete Knowledge Application Series can be accessed [here](#).



Advancing the capacity of family treatment court teams to provide a comprehensive family-centered approach that improves child, parent, and family outcomes

LESSON 3:

A Formal Governance Structure is Necessary to Prioritize, Oversee, and Sustain the Family Treatment Court

The first round of grantees learned that an established collaborative governance infrastructure—with executive-level representation from all key partners—is essential as family treatment courts (FTCs) expand their services and partnerships and strive to create larger cross-systems change. A formal governance structure, based on agreed-upon processes, protocols, roles, and responsibilities, keeps the collaborative operating efficiently and effectively and enables leadership to achieve true systems change.¹ This type of structure promotes:

- Mutual accountability
- Consensus decision-making about program and policy improvements
- Increased cross-systems information sharing and communication
- Critical discussions about the FTC's outcomes and effectiveness
- Resolution of systems barriers facing families affected by substance use disorders
- Integration of proven FTC best practices into the larger court and child welfare systems

Similar to the first round of grantees, the second group of FTC teams worked to strengthen this core collaborative practice area throughout the three-year grant period. In some cases, grantees needed to restore or develop their governance structure. In other instances, grantees had to rethink the structures they had

in place. At times, they needed to clarify the purpose and role of each level of governance, engage the right stakeholders, and discuss data more frequently to drive decision-making and program improvements. The level of progress varied among the round 2 grantees. The FTC teams plan to continue to strengthen their governance structures beyond the PFR grant.

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Cross-systems collaboration (see [Lesson 1](#)), effective governance, and broad-based leadership are closely intertwined (as discussed in the 2017 PFR [Brief 3](#)). All three components take time to develop, but the overall investment is needed. Without developing each component, FTC teams will struggle to fully achieve and sustain systems improvements to strengthen outcomes for families.

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Several important lessons emerged from the experiences of the second round of grantees:

- It takes substantial **time, effort, and persistence** to establish a solid, effective governance structure. At the end of year three, some grantees were still refining their structures and membership. The upfront investment can save significant time and energy in downstream implementation.

¹ See the 2017 [PFR Briefs 2 and 3](#) for more information on the critical components of an effective governance structure and related information.

LESSON 3

A FORMAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE IS NECESSARY TO PRIORITIZE, OVERSEE, AND SUSTAIN THE FAMILY TREATMENT COURT

- ▶ Expanding the use of **small multidisciplinary subcommittees** or workgroups is an effective strategy for promoting sustained discussions to tackle priority issues. For the grantees, these issues included quality parenting time, responses to behavioral issues, and equity and inclusion, among others.
- ▶ The recommended **three-tiered collaborative governance** structure (i.e., core operational team, steering committee, and oversight body) may not be the most appropriate approach for every jurisdiction, especially for tribal or smaller rural communities. Some jurisdictions may have a related county-level committee already in place that FTC teams can draw upon or integrate into the oversight role. To this end, an important first step is community mapping of existing committees. This process can identify entities that share the FTC's vision and focus on systems-level issues concerning all families affected by parental substance use disorders and child welfare involvement.

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The Milwaukee County FTC deliberated for almost three years on the best option to establish an executive oversight committee. Ultimately, the FTC decided to integrate this oversight body into a new, related cross-systems Youth Justice Committee spearheaded by the Children's Court. The presiding judge for the Children's Court, who is also the current FTC judge, co-chairs the committee with the Milwaukee County district attorney. The new committee includes executive-level partners from the child welfare system, substance use disorder treatment, legal services (attorneys and other court staff), behavioral health, public schools, law enforcement, and the FTC. The site has plans to include a parent representative to ensure families' voices are heard. The FTC will be a standing agenda item for the quarterly meeting.

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In Jefferson County, the FTC judge led the way in establishing a broad-based, executive-level joint advisory committee that serves as the county's oversight body for all matters related to families in the broader child welfare, court, and treatment systems. The committee's overriding goal is to improve outcomes for all families. Stakeholders discuss child welfare data and outcomes and larger-scale policy issues affecting families (e.g., Medicaid and recent legislation such as the Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018). The committee views the FTC as one catalyst for broader systems change.

- ▶ Each level of governance—especially the top tiers—requires clearly defined and documented **roles, responsibilities, purpose, and goals**. All team partners also need to understand how each level interacts with the others. This understanding is especially important for partner agencies outside the court system and others who are not a part of the core daily operations team.²
- ▶ The **FTC coordinator's role** is integral to ensuring that the FTC maintains a solid foundation and operates effectively. PFR grantees emphasized the need for a dedicated, full-time coordinator who can appropriately delegate tasks and foster shared decision-making and leadership. (See sidebar, *Characteristics of an Effective FTC Coordinator*.)
- ▶ Team members and partners need ample opportunities and encouragement to provide **honest feedback** and raise issues. Collaborative decision-making that involves all affected partners is key for smoothly implementing and sustaining systems improvements over the long term. FTC staff should not be the primary drivers of this process; it is a whole team effort.
- ▶ It is important to obtain and integrate **feedback from families** at every level of governance, from program to practice to policy change.

2 The 2017 PFR [Brief 3](#) briefly outlined the membership, primary functions, and recommended frequency of meetings at each level of governance (core operational team, steering committee, and oversight body). It also provided guidance on standing agenda items for steering committee discussions. Additional resources available from Children and Family Futures include the [Family Treatment Court Planning Guide](#), the [Family Treatment Court Best Practice Standards](#), and a webinar on [FTC Governance Structures and Leadership](#).



CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE FTC COORDINATOR

The first round of grantees emphasized that the FTC coordinator's role was critical for the court to function effectively. (See 2017 PFR [Brief 3](#).) The second round of grantees reinforced this key lesson and added to the knowledge base of the characteristics and traits needed in a coordinator:

- ▶ Is dedicated full-time to the FTC, with no or limited competing and other responsibilities outside the FTC
- ▶ Follows through on key tasks
- ▶ Delegates selected tasks and responsibilities to experienced team members and partners as appropriate
- ▶ Solicits feedback from and fosters shared decision-making among the team
- ▶ Involves and empowers partners to expand their ownership and leadership in the FTC program
- ▶ Drives needed policy and practice improvement discussions rather than functions solely in an administrative or managerial role
- ▶ Communicates effectively with the FTC team and partners
- ▶ Shares and discusses data regularly with team members, partners, and community stakeholders
- ▶ Keeps the team's decisions aligned with the FTC shared mission, vision, and goals

Food for Thought

In the context of FTC governance and sustainability, your FTC team may want to explore:

What would happen to our FTC if the coordinator resigned from their position today?





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LESSON 1:

Increased, renewed, and continued focus on **Cross-Systems Collaboration** is needed to achieve and sustain systems change

LESSON 2:

The effectiveness of parenting and children's services is integrally linked to **Timely and Effective Substance Use Disorder Treatment**

LESSON 3:

A **Formal Governance Structure** is necessary to prioritize, oversee, and sustain the FTC

LESSON 4:

FTC teams need to maintain a consistent and strong focus on **FTC Participant Recruitment, Timely Engagement, and Retention**

LESSON 5:

Developing the **Evidence-Based Program Capacity** of sites is a complex undertaking

LESSON 6:

FTC teams need to **Build Bridges to Connect Families** to services and service providers to each other

LESSON 7:

Integrating a **Truly Family-Centered Approach** requires several paradigm shifts

LESSON 8:

Building Data Capacity to advance a family-centered approach involves moving beyond just numbers

LESSON 9:

Achieving larger systems change requires understanding and adapting to the changing **Contextual Environment**



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For more information about the PFR initiative, visit the [PFR home page](#) or email Children and Family Futures at contact@cffutures.org



Children and Family Futures

Strengthening Partnerships, Improving Family Outcomes

Children and Family Futures (CFF) is a national nonprofit organization based in Lake Forest, California that focuses on the intersections among child welfare, mental health, substance use disorder treatment, and court systems. CFF has over two decades of experience in practice, policy, and evaluation arenas to support tribes, states, regions, and communities in their efforts to improve outcomes for children and families. We believe parents with mental health and substance use disorders should maintain hope of achieving recovery and family stability so they can care for their children. While no single system or agency working by itself can help parents achieve that goal, we recognize that recovery happens within the context of the family and that professionals from a variety of agencies and systems must work together to meet the needs of families.

Children and Family Futures provides a full range of consulting, technical assistance, strategic planning, and evaluation services for substance use disorder treatment, child welfare, courts, and the communities they serve. To learn more about CFF, visit www.cffutures.org.

The mission of Children and Family Futures is to prevent child abuse and neglect while improving safety, permanency, well-being, and recovery outcomes with equity for all children, parents, and families affected by trauma, substance use, and mental disorders.



The mission of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation is to improve the quality of people's lives through grants supporting the performing arts, environmental conservation,

child well-being, and medical research, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke's properties. The mission of the foundation's Child Well-being Program is to promote children's healthy development and protect them from abuse and neglect. To that end, DDCF takes a funding approach that centers on intergenerational work that bolsters culturally, geographically, and locally relevant programs with and for communities to foster the long-term well-being of families. To learn more, visit www.ddcf.org.

THE DUKE ENDOWMENT

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