

From Silos to Synergy: One State's Journey to Collaborative FTC Leadership

Executive Summary

In 2020, one state received an OJJDP grant to establish coordinated leadership for its Family Treatment Court (FTC) initiative. Prior to the grant, no formal statewide structure existed to support FTCs, and efforts were largely driven by individual courts without cross-system collaboration. Early implementation relied heavily on a single state coordinator, with limited engagement from other system partners.

With support from the Center for Children and Family Futures (CFF), the state shifted from a siloed, court-centered approach to a collaborative model that shared ownership across child welfare, legal, and administrative partners. CFF helped the state build a governance structure that included a core team responsible for advancing the work and an advisory committee to provide broader input and guidance. This transformation led to increased engagement, stronger partnerships, and a sustainable foundation for statewide FTC growth.

The Challenge

At the outset of the initiative, progress felt slow and fragmented. The work depended almost entirely on the state FTC coordinator, who lacked the capacity to move the project forward alone. Meetings included high-level representatives from child welfare, but they were unable to commit the time or attention needed to support implementation. Without shared ownership or a clear structure, the initiative struggled to gain traction.

The turning point came with staff transitions and a renewed effort to engage partners from across systems. As new voices joined the conversation, the state began to recognize the need for a more inclusive and sustainable approach. CFF guided the development of a governance model that distributed leadership and created space for meaningful collaboration. This shift laid the groundwork for the progress that followed.

The Approach / Solution

With support from CFF, the state began shifting from a court-centered model to a collaborative governance structure that invited broader system participation. CFF facilitated initiative mapping sessions that helped identify key partners and gaps in representation. Through a combination of intentional recruitment and organic engagement, the state formed an advisory committee composed of child welfare, legal, and administrative stakeholders.

CFF modeled the structure and function of both the advisory committee and a smaller core team tasked with driving the work forward. As the core team matured, CFF transitioned from leading meetings to serving as a supportive presence, allowing the team to take ownership of facilitation, site visits, and strategic planning. Each core team member represented a different system and assumed responsibility for leading specific areas of work, including subcommittees focused on legal FAQs, best practices, and training and education.

The team also prioritized in-person collaboration. The first statewide FTC symposium was limited to coordinators and felt isolating. In contrast, the second symposium embraced a team-based approach, with discipline-specific breakout sessions led by core team members. Feedback from the symposium directly informed the advisory committee's first annual retreat, which CFF helped facilitate. The retreat provided extended time for partners to identify challenges, develop action plans, and launch subcommittees. The success of this gathering motivated the state to continue hosting the retreat annually.

Outcomes / Results

Since forming the core team and advisory committee, the state has made substantial progress in building a sustainable, collaborative infrastructure for FTCs. Leadership responsibilities are now shared across systems, and meetings are more focused, inclusive, and action-oriented. The state has hosted multiple team-based events, launched new subcommittees, and created a standing agenda item to address gaps in representation—particularly in treatment.

The initiative has gained momentum, with local sites reporting stronger engagement and clearer guidance from the state. The governance model has become a blueprint for other jurisdictions seeking to strengthen cross-system collaboration in FTCs.

Lessons Learned / Sustainability

The shift to a shared governance model revealed the power of cross-system collaboration. Each core team member represents a different discipline and takes the lead on specific responsibilities, including facilitating subcommittees and coordinating statewide efforts. This structure has created a sense of shared ownership that keeps the work moving forward and ensures that no single person carries the full burden.

The advisory committee retreat became a cornerstone of sustainability. By carving out dedicated time for in-person collaboration, the team was able to identify challenges, develop action plans, and launch subcommittees focused on legal FAQs, best practices, and training. The success of the retreat—and the momentum it generated—led the state to commit to hosting it annually. CFF's early modeling and support laid the foundation, but the state now leads with confidence and clarity.

Call to Action

No single system or agency can do this work alone. If your state is ready to move from siloed efforts to true collaboration, CFF can help. Connect with us to explore technical assistance, governance support, and peer learning opportunities that build shared ownership and sustainable Family Treatment Court practices.